

# UNIVERSALLY ESPOUSED FRATERNAL VALUES ON COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES: COMMONPLACE OR COINCIDENCE?

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*The purpose of the present study was to examine the espoused values of 75 predominately White national fraternities. This article reports values types espoused by college fraternities, as well as their classification along a well-defined and recognized continuum of universal values. Universal classification types included self-enhancement, openness to change, self-transcendence, and conservation.*

Fraternities on college and university campuses espouse a variety of values that are openly communicated to their membership and larger publics. The degree to which these values are in line with a well-defined and universally recognized system of values is unknown. Values have been described as universal because they are grounded in the needs of individuals with regard to biological, social, survival, and welfare needs (Schwartz, 2012). Values have also been examined cross-culturally with each of the four values types examined in the present study, universally present in all, from hundreds of samples from 82 countries (Bilsky, Janick, & Schwartz, 2011; Bond et al., 2004; Davidov, Schmidt, & Schwartz, 2008; Schwartz, 2012).

The purpose of the present study was to learn what types of espoused values fraternities possess and to best determine how these values can be classified along a continuum of universal values that transcends cultural and geographic boundaries. To conduct the present study, we closely examined the literature on fraternal values, college student values, and values theory. We then developed and tested a classification system to best categorize fraternal values along a continuum based on four major themes that included: self-enhancement, openness to change, self-transcendence, and conservation. These four values were selected as they are commonly found in the literature on universally accepted values and have been found common across at least 82 countries to date (Schwartz, 2012). These appear as the most widely cited in the values literature.

Though they are not specific to fraternities and sororities, they served as a good measure for examining the degree to which these fraternal values aligned with those that are universally accepted.

## Fraternal Values

The degree to which values held by members of social fraternities are alike or different from their non-fraternal student counterparts or non-student counterparts is not fully known. Previous research has found that the values held by fraternity members are positively associated with greater levels of interpersonal relationships and volunteerism and civic engagement; increased interest in making donations to causes; greater engagement in co-curricular activities as a student; and general higher educational achievement (e.g., see, Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2009; Hayek, Carini, O'Day, & Kuh, 2002; Matney et al., 2016; Whipple & Sullivan, 1998). Examples for espoused fraternal values (all of which were included in our study) include: friendship, knowledge, service, morality, and excellence (Phi Gamma Delta, 2016); learning, ethical leadership, exemplary character, and brotherhood (Phi Kappa Tau, 2016); and learning, friendship, and justice (Sigma Chi, 2016).

Researchers have also found that strides need to be made in several other lesser-enacted values relating to “addressing alcohol abuse; promoting academic achievement; and, fostering interactions with diverse peers” (Asel

et al., 2009, p. 8). Previous research has also found that values of fraternity members may not be in keeping with the intellectual values of college, attitude, or value formation of college students (Baier & Whipple, 1990). Fraternities have been described as providing incentives “to protect oneself and the family (fraternity) from new ideas and people with different likes, dislikes, ethnicities, economic status or cultural backgrounds” (p. 52).

The congruence between espoused fraternal values and those that are enacted has received little attention in the literature. One study examined enacted values for both fraternity and sorority organizations (Matthews et al., 2009). Fraternity and sorority members espoused values related to civic engagement, commitment to organization, fostering community, integrity, and pursuit of knowledge were examined. These same members were observed in public spaces on campus enacting values related to academic excellence, alcohol abuse, commitment to organization, connectedness, homogeneity, and pride in alma mater (Matthews et al., 2009). This raises the question as to how much espoused values are enacted by members of fraternal groups and the gap between.

Espoused and enacted values can also be affected by the overall culture of a college or university campus, beyond one’s affiliation with a fraternal organization. Pike (2000) stated, “whether membership in a fraternity or sorority hinders student development by deemphasizing academic experiences/achievement and emphasizing behaviors that are not conducive to learning, may depend on the institutional culture within which fraternities and sororities exist” (p. 137). For members of college fraternities, this can mean they operate under multiple values systems on a personal and organizational level at the same time.

### **College Student Values**

Any study of college student values

(fraternity/sorority associated or not) should provide context for these concepts holistically and not completely separate those examined for fraternity/sorority students. The degree to which values held by college students are alike or different from their non-student counterparts is not fully known. This is particularly true for those students who are of *traditional* college age (often between the ages of 18–24) (Justice & Dornan, 2001; Passmore, 2015; Renn & Reason, 2013). What has been studied more specifically are the effects of held values by college students on their behaviors while in college. The overall visible enacted values of a collegiate environment may significantly affect the values of college students. This is particularly true with regard to an individual’s values system and their “attitudes towards multiculturalism, diversity and drinking behavior” (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2006, p. 8). The degree to which the college environment affects a student’s experience may rely heavily on their ability to keep and maintain open sets of beliefs and values relative to their experiences in diverse settings. Keeping an open set of beliefs and values may be critical to their experiences in a diverse college setting (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2006).

Students’ interest and level of participation in co-curricular activities (such as fraternity membership) may be connected to their personally held values; or, in many cases, these values may be further developed even if they were not a primary motivator in students’ decisions to join such an organization (Holloway, 2003). What is clear, is that college students arrive on campus with a set of values that may or may not be open (or consistent) with the values of other students on campus (Knox, Zusman, & Cooper, 2001). Peer culture has been identified as an influential mode “of lifestyle, language, values, and behavior,” (Dalton & Crosby, 2010, p. 4). This culture can even be further played out with open or closed systems of values based on membership in particular fraternal organizations.

Since early 2000, the incongruence of enacted values of fraternity members has

received considerable attention. This attention has particularly centered on calls for a return to values based activities in response to excessive and dangerous use of alcohol and other substances (Franklin Square Group, 2003). This return to values congruence has also involved leaders of national umbrella organizations for fraternities, such as the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC), as well as college and university presidents. The degree to which congruence is entirely possible has been debated by some in the literature (e.g., see, McCreary, 2014; Schutts, 2013; Veldkamp & Bureau, 2012).

### Values Theory

Values theory (VT) has been defined as, “the study of the worth or value of ideas, things, people, or anything else. VT aims to understand how, why and to what degree individual people or groups (organizations) value anything” (MBA Brief, 2017, para. 1). Values theory has adopted characteristics of many theorists over time. Each value holds varying degrees of importance based on their contextual relevance and effects. These have been characterized by six main features according to Schwartz (2012):

- Values are beliefs linked inextricably to affect,
- values refer to desirable goals that motivate action,
- values transcend specific actions and situations,
- values serve as standards or criteria,
- values are ordered by importance relative to one another, and
- the *relative* importance of multiple values guides actions. (pp. 3–4)

While the above values characteristics are not presented in any particular order, the concept of values and their adoption has been described on many levels for both individuals and groups. Additionally, these values are said to maintain both individual liberties and respect for the rights of others (Holloway, 2003). Goal types and

motivations behind them have been described as distinguishing characteristics between each of the six main features for values as presented above. Values theory has also defined ten broadly accepted universal values. They are identified as universal for the requirements that they meet for individuals, across cultures, with regard to “biological organisms, requisites of coordinated social interaction, and survival and welfare needs of groups” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 4). The ten broadly accepted universal values are included below, along with related concepts in parentheses, important for more clearly defining each value:

- Self-Direction (independent thought and action: choosing, creating, exploring)
- Stimulation (excitement, novelty, and challenge in life)
- Hedonism (pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself)
- Achievement (personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards)
- Power (social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources)
- Security (safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self)
- Conformity (restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms)
- Tradition (respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one’s culture or religion provides)
- Benevolence (preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the ‘in group’))
- Universalism (understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of *all* people and for nature). (Schwartz, 2012, pp. 5–7)

The universal values identified above as well as the related concepts for each played an important role in the development of our own classification system for the present study. These values

“strongly support the idea that human values form the motivational continuum postulated by the theory” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 12). The values used in this study as outlined by Schwartz are widely used and have been tested in many countries.

## Theoretical Framework

Schwartz’s (2012) *Theoretical Model of Relations Among Ten Motivational Types of Values* served as a theoretical framework for our study. The model provided a method for organizing the ten universal values under four broader themes that served as a values continuum. These four broader themes, the ten values that fall under them, and their relationships with one another are outlined below. Each of the 4 themes includes two to four of the motivational types along with their definitions.

### *Self-Enhancement*

- a. power and achievement: social superiority and esteem;
- b. achievement and hedonism: self-centered satisfaction;

### *Openness to Change*

- c. hedonism and stimulation: a desire for affectively pleasant arousal;
- d. stimulation and self-direction: intrinsic interest in novelty and mastery;
- e. self-direction and universalism: reliance upon one’s own judgment and comfort with the diversity of interests;

### *Self-Transcendence*

- f. universalism and benevolence: enhancement of others and transcendence of selfish interests;
- g. benevolence and tradition: devotion to one’s in-group;
- h. benevolence and conformity: normative behavior that promotes close relationships;

### *Conservation*

- i. conformity and tradition: subordination of self in favor of socially imposed expectations;
- j. tradition and security: preserving existing social arrangements that give certainty to life;
- k. conformity and security: protection of order and harmony in relations;
- l. security and power: avoiding or overcoming threats by controlling relationships and resources. (Schwartz, 2012, pp. 9–10)

This model informed the design of our classification system for fraternal values that will be discussed further within the methods section of this study.

## Method

Based on a review of the literature on fraternal values, college student values, values theory, and Schwartz’s (2012) *Theoretical Model of Relations Among Ten Motivational Types of Value*, we developed the following research question to guide our study: What are the espoused values of national collegiate fraternities and how are they classified along a well-defined and recognized continuum of universal values? Document analysis (a form of content analysis methodology) was used for the review and classification of values found for those fraternities examined on websites for each organization administered by their national offices (Frankel & Wallen, 2003). Content analysis has been described as an empirically grounded method that allows for inference, reduction of data, sampling, and unitization processes (Saichae & Morphew, 2014). Espoused values were most often located under a tab prominently labeled values on each website, and “because institutional websites are vehicles of communication that employ textual and visual components, content analysis is well-suited to attend to these artifacts,” (p. 506). Fraternities included the 69 organizations that are current

members of the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC), as well as six additional national fraternities who are not affiliated with the NIC. Those that were included in the present study who do not hold membership in NIC included: Alpha Phi Delta, Kappa Sigma, Lambda Chi Alpha, Phi Delta Theta, Sigma Lambda Beta, Sigma Phi Delta, and Tau Kappa Epsilon. NIC fraternities were included as this organization serves as a national trade association for fraternities and represents the largest group of organizations in postsecondary education. The additional fraternities were similar to those who hold membership in NIC and several had been members previously. Membership in NIC is not a requirement for fraternal organizations. We examined the websites for each fraternity to obtain their espoused values.

A total of 351 values were reported for the fraternities examined in this study. These values do not represent unique values, but rather a total of the number of values found for each fraternity. In many cases, values were similar across fraternities examined in our study, with many using the exact or similar language to convey them. This represented an average of 4.68 per organization, with 25 fraternities having the lowest reported with three values and three fraternities having the highest reported with ten values. The mode for number of values reported by organizations was three.

We first developed a values classification system and database for each of the reported values for fraternal organizations examined in the study (Tull, 2011). The database included all 75 fraternities in the study organized alphabetically (by use of the Greek alphabet). We then reviewed the fraternal values database on two occasions to test for internal validity, each time classifying each value under one of the values themes presented in the theoretical framework that guided the study. We used the ten values and their relationships with one another (outlined above) to aid in our categorization of values into one of the four themes. Values were assigned to

only one of the four themes. These values themes included: self-enhancement, openness to change, self-transcendence, and conservation.

Representative espoused values that were classified for our study under self-transcendence included: citizenship, community service, responsibility, and engagement. Representative espoused values that were classified for our study under self-enhancement included: scholarship, academic achievement, leadership, character, and personal development. Representative espoused values that were classified for our study related to conservation included: brotherhood, loyalty, tradition, commitment, and fidelity. Representative espoused values that were classified for our study under openness to change included: self-support, integrity, wisdom, perseverance, and authenticity.

To test the fraternal values classification system for reliability we coded half of the values in the database on two separate occasions. This involved our initial coding and a follow up coding that occurred one month later. We recoded 94% of the fraternal values under the same values themes after the follow up coding. For the recoding process, every other odd numbered (from our alphabetical list) fraternity in the database was selected. This process was conducted to test the reproductively and stability of the values classification system that we developed. We then used a statistical method (Cohen's Kappa) to analyze interrater reliability among the fraternal values that we classified earlier. After running the Cohen's Kappa, we obtained a coefficient of .93. The coefficient was achieved by analyzing coding in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 19.0), which was done after three independent reviews of a systematic sample of 33 fraternal values, drawn from the total sample of 351 fraternal values. We developed the systematic sample by selecting every seventh fraternity from the list developed alphabetically from the fraternal values system database. We coded the values for these organizations for our analysis. The

reliability coefficient we obtained for our study signified reasonable confidence in the fraternal values system that we created (Frankel & Wallen, 2003).

Results

In response to the research question developed for this study, frequencies for the 351 espoused values that were classified showed the greatest number under self-transcendence (120 values, 34.1%) associated with universalism, benevolence, tradition and conformity; followed by conservation (110 values, 31.3%) associated with conformity, tradition, security and power; followed by self-enhancement (80 values, 22.7%) associated with power, achievement and hedonism; and openness to change (41 values, 11.6%), associated with hedonism, stimulation, self-direction and universalism. Espoused value means by type included: 1.17 for self-enhancement, 1.98 self-transcendence, 1.79 for conservation, and 1.24 for openness to change.

Frequency data are provided for all fraternities with regard to how we classified them along the continuum of universal values (see Table 1). Of the 75 fraternal organizations examined for this study, 61 (81.33%) had values that were classified under self-transcendence; 60 (80%) had values that were classified under self-enhancement; 59 (78.66%) had values that were classified under conservation; and 33 (44%) had values that were classified under openness to change. Forty-one (54.66%) had no values classified under openness to change; 15 (20%) had no values classified under conservation; 14 (18.66%) had no values classified under self-enhancement; and

13 (17.33%) had no values classified under self-transcendence.

The majority of fraternities examined for this study had espoused values related to self-transcendence, self-enhancement, and conservation. Few fraternities had espoused values related to openness to change. A discussion follows for each of the values themes examined in our study as well as outlined differences between these values with universally held values.

Discussion

Self-Transcendence

Eighty-one percent of all fraternities examined for the present study had values classified under the theme of self-transcendence. For members of college fraternities, these values may be more heavily emphasized as they are related to enhancing others vs. selfish interests, commitment to one's group, and normative actions that promote more insular relationships and bonds between members. The results of our study included the largest number of fraternal values being classified under the values theme of self-transcendence. These values may be commonly espoused and enacted by members of college fraternities and can be central reasons for students seeking membership in these groups (Matthews et al., 2009; McCollum, 2005).

Self-Enhancement

Eighty percent of all fraternities examined for the present study had values classified under the theme of self-enhancement. Though the literal definition of these values (according to Schwartz, 2012) might appear self-centered

Table 1  
Frequencies for Fraternal Organizations Examined in Study Fraternity Values Classification System

Values Themes	Self-Enhancement	Openness to Change	Self-Transcendence	Conservation	Total	Leadership Position(s)
Total Values	80	41	120	110	351	President
Percentage	22.79	11.68	34.18	31.33	100	No formal role

and hedonistic, values under self-enhancement appear to be in line with the general goals of participation in postsecondary education. For members of college fraternities, these values may be less emphasized as fewer individualistic values appear to be more espoused in favor of more group, normative, or social values that prevail. This would be the case with the results of our study, where we classified the largest number of fraternal values under the theme of self-transcendence. These values are more centered on conformity to group values over more self-centered values.

### ***Conservation***

Seventy-nine percent of all fraternities examined for the present study had values classified under the theme of conservation. Like those fraternal values related to self-transcendence, values related to conservation have social aspects. For conservation related values, a focus on social favorability and conformity are important (Schwartz 2012; McCollum, 2005). Protecting group norms and traditions takes precedence over more individualistic values, such as those discussed above under self-transcendence. This has been described as providing security and protection for those who hold these values, particularly for in-group settings, such as college fraternities (Schwartz, 2012).

### ***Openness to Change***

Forty-four percent of all fraternities examined for the present study had values classified under the theme of openness to change. The findings of the present study (particularly related to the theme of openness to change) appear to be confirming of past research related to the insular affect that membership in a college fraternity can have on undergraduates (Dugan, 2008; Matney et al., 2016). This study has found further evidence that appeared consistent when examining openness to change on a universal continuum of values, one that transcends cultures and

geographic boundaries. Fraternity membership has been described as “protect[ing] oneself and the family (fraternity) from new ideas and people with different likes, dislikes, ethnicities, economic status or cultural backgrounds” (Baier & Whipple, 1990, p. 52).

### ***Differences Between Fraternal Values and Universal Values***

In previous cross-cultural studies, benevolence, universalism, and self-direction have been found to be at the top of the values hierarchy (Schwartz, 2012). These values, associated with openness to change, are at the bottom of the values hierarchy in the present study of college fraternal values. On the other hand, power, tradition, and stimulation (values associated with self-enhancement and conservation) have been found at the top of the values hierarchy in the present study, while they have been found at the bottom of the values hierarchy universally (Schwartz). This is of particular concern to us as researchers as “this implies that the aspects of human nature and of social functioning that shape individual value priorities are widely shared across cultures” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 17), although this was not found to be the case in our study of college fraternity members.

### ***The Relationship Between Fraternal Values and Those Found Universally***

The results of the present study demonstrate common connections (although likely not intentional) between values espoused to by college fraternities and those found universally. This is important as college fraternities are significant leadership development opportunities for their members. This is also an important concept that should not be overlooked by those who work directly with fraternity chapters on a campus or national level. This would include chapter advisors, fraternity volunteers, campus based fraternity/sorority life professionals, and staff from fraternity international headquarters. Values development activities should be more

fully integrated between both curricular and co-curricular activities and more fully supplement connections between college and life beyond, both personally and professionally for members. The connection between espoused fraternal values and those universally held by members of most societies are common and should be further developed in college and beyond.

## **Recommendations**

Fraternal organizations each have their own distinct sets of espoused values. These values help them to shape their identity, attract members, and build relationships. These organizations by their founding and development have identified high ideals, goals, aspirations, and values. Although many of these have not been developed through any alignments with universally accepted values, they might be well informed by these in the future. We recommend that fraternities examine the alignment of their values with those that are most universally accepted. This can help fraternities best prepare their members for personal and professional success beyond college. Additionally, we would recommend to any groups that may be establishing themselves or who will in the future, to carefully examine their espoused values against those that are universally accepted.

Further quantitative and qualitative research should be conducted to examine how undergraduate fraternity members are enacting their values. This research would provide greater data on curricular and co-curricular activities that might be better promoted as best practices for members of fraternal organization and for institutions that host them. Further research would be of particular importance for those values deemed important for student success and personal and professional development.

We would recommend strengthening the role of fraternity advisors (on the chapter, institutional, and national levels) in becoming more knowledgeable on fraternal values and

their effects on peer culture and their members as transmitters (Dalton & Crosby, 2010). With strengthened roles and knowledge of fraternal values come important opportunities for promoting environments for student success and professional development of members of fraternities on college and university campuses (Matney et al., 2016).

The results of this study have demonstrated that many fraternities espouse similar or overlapping values. In some cases, fraternities regularly used the same labels (e.g., brotherhood, service, scholarship, etc.). In other cases they referred to similar values traits through the use of different descriptors. Those who work with fraternities, and even those who do not, would observe that values systems are more alike than they are different, in many cases. Advisors who work with fraternities at the international/national, campus, or chapter level should capitalize on these values similarities for greater shared expectations. They can also work collaboratively to draw specific connections both on an intra and inter-group level and with the colleges and universities that host chapters.

Although our study focused exclusively on member fraternities of the North-American Interfraternal Conference, with a few others added, we recommend replicating our study format for closer examination of other fraternities and sororities on college and university campuses. Groups that could be examined in the future include: the National Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Panhellenic Association (a group of 18 international fraternities and sororities); the National PanHellenic Conference (a group of 26 international sororities for women); the National Pan-Hellenic Council (a group of nine historically African American fraternities and sororities); the National Multicultural Greek Council (a group of 11 multicultural fraternities and sororities); and the National Association of Latin Fraternal Organizations (a group of 17 Latino/a fraternities and sororities).



## Limitations

Several limitations for our study deserve mention. Each of these are important for understanding the content and discussion contained within. Each of us, as researchers, are members of college fraternities and both of our organizations were included in the present study. These include Lambda Chi Alpha and Pi Kappa Phi respectively. By conducting a qualitative study (using content analysis) our findings are based on content extracted from web-based sources at a particular time. Though we believe them to be well kept and accurate, their accuracy is based on electronic sources. Additionally, we developed and tested a classification system for organizing college fraternal values according to four values themes found to be universal. We tested our classification system to ensure its reliability. Our classifications found in this study are our own, as others may classify them differently. Lastly, most fraternal organizations examined in our study (who are members of the NIC) have a social focus; however, a few have a focus on particular cultural identities or are more professionally aligned with fields of study in postsecondary education.

## Conclusion

College fraternities espouse many values that help them communicate their customs, philosophies, and principles both internally and externally. Fraternal values have not been the focus of much research in the past. Our goal was to carefully examine what values fraternities espouse, as well as how these might align with those that have been found, through previous research, to be universally accepted. Our study of 75 fraternities and their collective 351 values has provided a greater perspective on what fraternities hold as important as well as how their values align with those that are universal across cultures and geographic boundaries. In some cases, fraternities were found to have values in

each of the values themes (self-enhancement, openness to change, self-transcendence, and conservation) and in others they may have lacked any values in a particular values theme. We recommend that college fraternities seek new or continued balance between espoused values in each of the themes found to be universal in nature. By doing this, college fraternities can provide their members a richer experience while they are undergraduates as well as best prepare them for a lifelong affiliation and engagement with their organizations.

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### Author Biographies

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