

PERCEPTIONS OF RACE AND FIT IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS OF TRADITIONALLY, PREDOMINANTLY WHITE FRATERNITIES

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This study was constructed as a qualitative case study to explore racialized definitions of fit and how those perpetuate White supremacy within fraternity systems through a critical examination of participants' lived experiences on race. Lived experiences from seven participants were presented to identify two major themes for analysis: (a) the minimization of race and racism and (b) normalizing Whiteness. This study used a social identity theoretical framework to deconstruct the ways in which Whiteness is perpetuated in hegemonic White spaces.

Fraternities hold high social capital on college campuses, as represented by the almost 100,000 male students who join a national/international fraternity annually (North American Interfraternity Conference, 2018b). One unique quality of social fraternities as compared to other types of student organizations is that they have the ability to self-select students for membership, providing students with sole ownership of who is granted membership into the organization. However, fraternities were often scrutinized for racist attitudes and behaviors (Patton, 2008; Hughey, 2010). As a result, the fraternity/sorority communities were the most racially isolating environments for White students.

The culture around race and campus climate issues are more important than ever. According to the *National Center for Education Statistics*, the percentages of the number of Hispanic, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American students enrolled in college have increased (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Since 1976, the number of White students enrolled in colleges and universities went from 84 to 58 percent. Yet traditionally, predominantly White fraternities have remained largely White (Hughey, 2010).

In a study by Park (2014), 97.1 percent of White fraternity and sorority members indicated that their organizations were majority White. Even on racially diverse campuses, traditionally,

predominantly White fraternities and sororities have remained largely homogeneous (Park, 2008). While most fraternities abolished racial discrimination clauses from their membership selection criteria in the late 1960s, changes in recruitment practices failed to occur (Kendall, 2008).

To fully understand why fraternities remain largely homogenous, it is important to understand the production of hegemonic Whiteness. A newer ideology of an inclusive form of hegemonic White masculinity has emerged in the literature, a model based on racial equity among other factors (Anderson, 2007). The new age fraternity man described by Anderson (2007) sought men from diverse backgrounds in their fraternity membership selection processes. However, the increased racial diversity of fraternity environments does not necessarily ensure a lack of discrimination. Higher levels of racial bias and hate crimes are reported on campuses that are predominantly White and with large fraternity and sorority populations (Van Dyke & Tester, 2014). As more and more students of color gain access to White enclaves, such as traditionally, predominantly White fraternities, it is important to understand the ways in which Whiteness reifies and influences the recruitment experience for White men in largely homogenous spaces.

Recent studies on the racial attitudes of

White fraternity men suggested that there was a particular fit understood within each fraternity when recruiting for new members. This study is focused on examining the impact that Whiteness has on notions of fit within fraternity recruitment as it pertains to race and racial attitudes. This study adds to the literature on Whiteness and campus racial environments.

Race and Recruitment

Participation in a fraternity or sorority has been negatively related to students' openness to diversity, and rates of interaction and friendship with someone of a different race (Park & Kim, 2013; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996). In particular, White fraternity and sorority members have significantly fewer interracial friendships than their unaffiliated White peers (Stearns, Buchmann, & Bonneau, 2009). In slightly different terms, Park (2014) found that participation in a fraternity or sorority was a negative predictor for having at least one close friend of a different race or ethnicity. As Astin (1993) pointed out, "the student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (p. 398).

Recent studies on fraternity and sorority members' levels of intercultural competence conflicted with the notion that membership in a fraternity or sorority led to negative deficits in this area. Separate studies by Martin, Hevel, Asel, and Pascarella (2011) and Rubin, Ainsworth, Cho, Turk, and Winn (1999) indicated that fraternity and sorority membership was not associated with measures of intercultural competence. In other words, fraternity and sorority members were neither advantaged nor disadvantaged when compared to their peers. A more recent study by Martin, Parker, Pascarella, and Blechschmidt (2015) agreed that fraternity and sorority membership had no significant impact on levels of intercultural competence. Further studies, specifically those utilizing

qualitative measures, are needed to better understand the impact diversity has on group socialization for fraternity and sorority members and the myriad ways in which students interpret racial consciousness in deciding who gains access into a racially homogenous peer group.

Past studies on race and racial attitudes in traditionally, predominantly White fraternity and sorority communities on southern campuses indicated that fraternity and sorority members were significantly less accepting of students of color than non-members (Muir, 1991). White fraternity and sorority members were more likely to hold stereotypes of Black students than non-members, but fraternity members were significantly more likely to possess negative attitudes than their sorority counterparts (Muir, 1991). Muir's (1991) research suggested that racial attitudes could be gendered. Syrett (2009) outlined how gender, social class, and race are interconnected through performance of masculinity and how privileged White fraternity men maintained an insulated environment through informal discrimination of people of color. Formal membership restrictions limiting membership of traditionally, predominantly White fraternities to White, Christian males were enacted in the early 1900s (Syrett, 2009). Notes from fraternity convention meetings in the 50s and 60s exposed that while formal discrimination clauses were removed because of an acknowledgement of the optics of such clauses, gentleman's agreements were made internally to continue discrimination of people of color during fraternity recruitment processes (Barone, 2014).

Schmitz and Forbes (1994) interviewed sorority members who blamed Black students for any racial segregation existing in fraternities and sororities. Asian American women participating in a study by Park (2008) described the recruitment process as one relying more on fit, denying any association with race as a factor. White participants in Park's (2008) qualitative study described sorority recruitment processes

as race-neutral, but there is limited research on the salience of race in fraternity recruitment practices.

A recent study interviewed 20 senior, White fraternity members on White racial attitudes (Morgan, Zimmerman, Terrell, & Marcotte, 2015). Four themes emerged from their views on race including the minimization of race, the creation of one dimensional views of students of color, a reliance on traditions and history to negotiate and justify the future, and the perception that their fraternities were diverse in comparison to other predominantly White chapters. Within the theme of history, racialized definitions of fit emerged as a potential category for future research. Participants commented on the notion that there was a particular type of person suitable for each chapter. Members exhibited signs of socialization on racial fit through chapter traditions and ideals taught by other members (Morgan et al., 2015). The focus of this study was the perception of fit as it pertains to race for members in traditionally, predominantly White fraternities.

For this study, the concept of “fit” was analyzed as an extension of social belonging, a basic human desire to be socially connected (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Walton and Cohen (2007) used sense of fit as a measure of one’s feelings of social connectedness and sense of belonging. Participants for this study were asked to define their own definition of fit as it relates to their fraternity membership criteria.

Whiteness

For this study, Whiteness is defined as a privileged social identity (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Reason & Evans, 2007). Whiteness does not refer to White people, but rather an ideology of racial oppression and a way of protecting White supremacy (Cabrera, 2012).

Whiteness can be better understood by exploring a phenomenon that scholars have coined color-blind racism. Bonilla-Silva (2006)

defined color-blind racism as a dominant racial ideology in which race is espoused as no longer significant in United States culture. A color-blind ideology is problematic in that it actually reinforces racist thinking (Wise, 2010).

Bonilla-Silva (2001) explained four dominant frames in which the ideology of color-blind racism is used by White respondents in a study on White racial attitudes. The four dominant frames of color-blind racism are abstract liberalism, or the push for equal opportunity; the “biologization of culture,” or the explanation that people of color have different cultures and values that can explain inequities of race; a naturalization of the effects of White supremacy, or the idea that segregation based on race was described as being natural; and the fourth dominant frame is a minimization of racism. The minimization of racism in particular is a finding consistent with other literature (Cabrera, 2014) that Whites often believed discrimination was no longer present in American culture and most racial issues are the cause of inequities in the individuals themselves (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Meritocracy was used in color-blind ideology to explain disparities among races as the result of deficiency or inferiority, but not racism (Wise, 2010).

White behaviors were often contradictory to their stated beliefs (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Bonilla-Silva (2001) found that White men and women answered survey questions in ways that suggested tolerance or even support for diversity, but their actions often suggested a different story. White men and women interacted infrequently with people of other races, moved from neighborhoods populated with people of color, and opposed school integration efforts (Bonilla-Silva, 2001).

Homogenous White environments have the tendency to normalize Whiteness in a variety of ways. Whiteness and the White experience are normalized for many White students on college and university campuses when they are insulated from students of color on a daily basis (Cabrera,

2012). White becomes the standard for which others are compared when White students are removed from the racial experiences of students of color. This can be particularly prevalent in times of racial strife. Astin (1993) noted “the existence of pervasive racial conflict on the campus tends to balkanize the student body, such that students seek out social organizations whose membership is partly racially based” (p. 179).

Theoretical Framework

This study incorporated a social identity perspective to further analyze individual behavior within the larger group process to identify group socialization patterns. Tajfel and Turner (1979) introduced social identity theory as a way to analyze how individual identity is influenced by intergroup contexts as a way to define one’s own standing in society. Individuals placed themselves and others into social categories to explain the world around them. In turn, the process impacted those in the group and the larger structures in which the group operates. Self-categorization theory evolved from social identity theory to explain cognitive processes of social identity development (Abrams & Hogg, 1999).

Self-categorization theory further explained the in-group versus out-group categorization process of behavior. Individuals placed themselves and others into prototypes based on attributes (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Positive in-group attitudes created a normative ideology of one’s self and other in-group members, but a unified and stereotyped view of out-group members as a whole. These prototypes represented defining characteristics or stereotypes that are applied to all members of the group (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

Race was a significant measure of social identity by which individuals categorized themselves, therefore race was a significant mechanism for self-categorization (Goar & Sell, 2005). Drawing on Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, Bonilla-Silva (2006) described how White habitus can create

a “racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates Whites’ racial tastes, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters” (p. 104). Whiteness led White identified individuals to view White as normal, correct, valued, and the standard for beauty, intelligence, and worth (DiAngelo, 2012). Prejudiced views of other races developed more from normalized views and admiration of Whiteness as opposed to any hatred or disdain of others (Lyman, & Vidich, 2000). The White habitus that reinforced hegemonic White ideals validated a constant prejudice of people of color (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, & Embrick, 2006). A social identity perspective with specific attention to the impact of Whiteness and White habitus provided the theoretical lens to view this study.

Method

This study was framed as a qualitative case study analysis to explore racialized definitions of fit and how those perpetuate White supremacy within fraternity systems. Qualitative research studies are helpful when existing theories fail to explain a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Case study allows researchers to “retain a holistic and real-world perspective” while aiding in the understanding of complex social phenomena (Yin, 2014, p. 5). Yin (2014) further described a case study as a method that attempts to highlight a certain decision or set of decisions, while helping to explain why the decision was made, how it was implemented, and what happened afterward. Case study is a popular educational research method because of its effectiveness in understanding “individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena” (Yin, 2014, p. 5).

This study examined the lived experiences of recently initiated fraternity members to better understand how fraternity members are socialized on race within fraternity culture. The research question that guided this study was as follows:

How do fraternity men describe the notion of fit within their organization?

This study was conducted with two traditionally, predominantly White fraternities, which were given the pseudonyms of Alpha Beta fraternity and Omega Zeta fraternity. Both Alpha Beta and Omega Zeta belong to the Interfraternity Council (IFC), an umbrella governing council for the International and National men's fraternities of the North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC, 2018a). Eight fraternities were contacted to participate in this study, and leaders from Alpha Beta and Omega Zeta were the only two who accepted the invitation. Alpha Beta fraternity consisted of 82 total members, of which 7.3 percent were students of color (92.7 identified as White). Omega Zeta had 53 total members, with 13.2% identifying as students of color (86.8 percent White). Omega Zeta was the third most diverse IFC fraternity, in terms of percentage of

students of color, of all 22 IFC chapters.

The institutional site for the study was a large, public, non-profit, predominantly White, land-grant institution in the southeast. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (n.d.) further described it as a four-year, primarily residential, more selective, high research, doctoral granting institution with over 19,000 students. Over 3,000 students (23 percent of the student body) participated in a fraternity or sorority.

The participants consisted of newly initiated members in Alpha Beta and Omega Zeta fraternities. The research invitation for this study was sent to all recently initiated new members, initiating between fall 2015 and spring 2016, through a comparison focused sampling strategy. There were seven total participants. Two additional participants from Alpha Beta fraternity responded to the research invitation, but the researcher was never able to schedule

Table 1
Description of Participants

<u>Name*</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Year in school</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Fraternity</u>
Adam	19	First-year	White	Alpha Beta
Anthony	20	Sophomore	White	Alpha Beta
Brett	18	First-year	White	Alpha Beta
Brad	20	Sophomore	White	Alpha Beta
Sam	20	Sophomore	White	Omega Zeta
Steve	19	First-year	White	Omega Zeta
Scott	24	Graduate Student	White	Omega Zeta

* Name is a pseudonym for the participants' actual name

an interview time. Both participants agreed to participate initially, but after several interviews were conducted with other ABC participants they began to avoid communication and cancel meetings.

There were four participants from Alpha Beta fraternity and three participants from Omega Zeta fraternity. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Participants did not choose their pseudonym and the participants are unaware of

the name I assigned to them. The participants were as follows:

Data Collection

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with individual participants and follow up focus group interviews for all participants from each chapter. The initial individual interviews were conducted in a private conference room on campus. All interviews took

place between 30 and 60 minutes, and were recorded with a digital recording device.

One focus group interview was conducted for each of the four participants from Alpha Beta fraternity, and a separate focus group interview was held for the participants of Omega Zeta fraternity. Focus group interviews provided an opportunity to check against the baseline data I received from participants in the individual interviews. Several of the participants changed their stated opinions on race when they were surrounded by other members of their fraternity.

Data Analysis

Data was transcribed verbatim, reviewed, and coded manually, following Creswell's (2014) six steps for qualitative data. Creswell (2014) defined coding as "the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks... and writing a word representing a category in the margins." (p. 197). An emergent coding technique was used to identify key themes within the participants' statements. During the coding process, notes were made on printed hard copies of the interview transcripts to begin organizing potential themes, consistently comparing the data and my own observations to allow for key themes to emerge.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined four criteria for judging the rigor of qualitative research: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Credibility involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are believable or credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A method used for this study to address credibility was to triangulate sources in both focus groups and individual interviews to see if conversations shifted or if the data were consistent. This data was triangulated with field notes from observations and the documents collected during data collection.

Credibility was also achieved through a process of member checking, a practice of preserving

the participants' explanation of their actual experiences (Creswell, 2007). I emailed each participant a transcribed copy of the interview for their review following each interview. They were asked to review in full detail for accuracy and respond back to me with any comments or suggestions.

Limitations

The qualitative nature of the data and the specific setting and region of the institutional site limits the generalizability of this study. The study was conducted at a large, public university in the southeast region of the United States where several racial incidents occurred at the time of the study. The racial climate on campus limits the findings of this study to this particular environment at this particular time. The small sample size and limited scope of the research further limits the generalizability of these findings.

Whites' racial attitudes are underestimated based on a desire to appear non-racist (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). Many White men and women in the United States claim to live in a post-racial society, an environment and context in which race is no longer significant (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Through what Bonilla-Silva (2006) described as color-blind racism, White individuals often criticize and express resentment toward people of color through covert and institutionalized systems rather than name calling or overt ways of the past. These semantic moves as Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) called them, enable individuals to say something like, "I am not racist, but..." followed with a negative statement about people of color. Interpreting what Bonilla-Silva (2006) referred to as the *rhetorical maze* of color-blind filled semantic moves, was a challenge in analyzing the data.

Positionality

It is important to discuss my identity as a White male as salient to this project and my

interactions with the participants. I suspect the participants were more comfortable in speaking to me about race than they might have been speaking to a scholar of color. I identified myself as White prior to each interview, and informed the participants that my objective was to learn more about race and how race is experienced within predominantly White fraternities.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to critically examine the concept of fit during fraternity recruitment practices from male fraternity members in traditionally, predominantly White fraternities. This chapter presents the results of the current study. The results were divided into two major themes: (a) the minimization of race and racism and (b) normalizing Whiteness.

The Minimization of Race and Racism

Participants minimized race and racism in two significant ways. The first was to utilize color-blind tendencies to explain their lack of bias toward students of color during the recruitment process. Participants repeatedly insisted that race was not a salient issue in their experience, and particularly during fraternity recruitment. The second way in which participants downplayed the significance of race was the view that their fraternity is relatively diverse when compared to comparable organizations or the larger institutional or societal demographic numbers. These two methods make up the first major theme, which is the minimization of race and racism. The two subcategories under the minimization of race and racism theme are (a) color-blindness and (b) reframing diversity.

Color-blindness. The subcategory of color-blindness fits into the minimization of race and racism theme because of the way that participants spoke about the perception of race as a non-issue in their fraternity operations. Brett spoke about the sense that race does not matter in his lived experiences in Alpha Beta fraternity, stating, "It's

just not really an issue at all within the fraternity." Anthony pointed out that race has never been salient to him when he said, "Honestly, I can't say that it's ever been an issue in my past experience."

Brett spoke about a lack of attention given to race during the recruitment process, saying, "It's all about whether we like him and whether we think he'll be a good fit in our fraternity. Race isn't really brought up at all." Sam spoke about the pursuit of other values in Omega Zeta fraternity's recruitment of potential new members, but he also indicated that race was not a factor:

We just take whoever we think is best regardless of race, nationality, background, or anything like that. We just take who fits our ideals, who we think would blend into the fraternity well, who would be beneficial to us improving as an entire group, and who would be part of a brotherhood that we're all proud of. I don't think we really look at who we recruit based on nationality or anything like that.

When asked if he wished Alpha Beta fraternity would be more racially diverse than it currently was, Brad expressed no desire to change. He said, "Honestly, it doesn't really matter to me. I like everybody who's in it. I don't really have a problem."

The lack of a specific focus on recruiting students of color and the indifference to diversity in general have left both fraternities as largely White. Scott indicated that conversations about race and diversity were limited in a largely homogenous environment. When thinking about the impact of diversity on Omega Zeta fraternity, he stated, "Their idea of diversity is that we don't all look at everything the same. I don't know that they look at it from a standpoint of how it impacts any way we function other than that there are people who are different from themselves in the group."

Reframing diversity. The subcategory of reframing diversity is the perception that

one's organization is diverse compared to the rest of the institution or compared to other organizations. Despite a lack of racial diversity, participants described their members as possessing diverse viewpoints on multiple issues, and applauded diversity in these settings. For several participants, diversity was reframed to allow the organization to fit within those new parameters and refocus the conversation on diversity to other areas.

Several participants mentioned the institution's racial diversity numbers as a justification of the homogenous environments within their fraternity. When asked to describe the racial demographics of Alpha Beta fraternity, Anthony pointed out the relative racial diversity of Alpha Beta fraternity in comparison to the low racial diversity at the institution. He said, "Yeah, I'd say predominantly White, but I think that goes along with the percentages here at (the University) at the current time. I think we're only six percent African American at this point." Brett concurred with Anthony's point about the racial makeup of the school when he claimed, "We kind of fit the demographic of the school and Greek Life as a whole. It's not like we're excluding other races, there's just not that many other races that come out to rush (recruitment) or go to (the University) at all."

In comparison to other fraternities, Anthony pointed out that Alpha Beta's recruitment of students of color exceeded the numbers recruited by other fraternities, with which he compared. "In the past four or five years I've only seen three African American brothers, but that's a lot more than a lot of other fraternities on this campus." He admitted, "I would like to see more African American brothers, but like, compared to others that is significantly more."

Steve admitted that Omega Zeta fraternity was primarily White, but he countered that they possessed a diverse group of White identified individuals. Steve said, "It's a diverse group of White people, so to speak. They're from all over the country and what not, but they're all

White." Anthony also spoke about the diversity in his brothers' backgrounds when he was asked if his views on race were different than other Alpha Beta fraternity members when he said, "My fraternity in particular is very, very diverse from the entire eastern seaboard to the entire country to the west coast. We have guys from everywhere."

Normalizing Whiteness

Whiteness can be normalized in settings like traditionally, predominantly White fraternities through the acceptance of only those students who assimilate into the already established culture, and through the continued reinforcement of norms and values that contribute to the fraternity culture. The two subcategories under the normalizing Whiteness theme explored here are (a) assimilation and (b) tradition and history.

Assimilation. Several participants spoke of the acceptance their fraternity culture breeds for all students, including students of color, if they assimilate into the already established culture of the organization. Anthony spoke about the type of fit that he looks for in a potential Alpha Beta member when he said, "I think a lot of what we look for in a guy is like one if they mesh with the current guys that we have, you know."

Participants discussed the combination of attributes they look for in a new member. Anthony talked about what he looks for in a potential Alpha Beta member while acknowledging the difficulty in determining fit in the short amount of time fraternities have during the recruitment process. Anthony spoke about relying on first impressions and appearance, "When you come out to rush (recruitment) it's all about first impressions unfortunately. We only have those two hours for two days at smokers before we give you a first round invite so it is like all about first impressions, you know." Anthony also admitted that there is a certain level of fit expected. He said, "Part of it, you want to hold yourself to a certain standard, you look nice, look presentable, coming out and you can hold a conversation with

the brothers. We want guys there who can get along with us.”

Brad relied primarily on gut feelings when determining fit for potential new members in Alpha Beta fraternity. He said, “Just someone who’s not really over the top. Just a nice, friendly person who doesn’t seem too weird to me.” Steve admitted the incongruence between selecting new members based on fit when the majority of the established fraternity members are homogenous in identities when he talked about the qualities Omega Zeta fraternity looks for in recruitment, “It’s a social group, it’s a group of friends, so you’re looking at a person and saying do I want to be friends with this person and hang out with them. And so to a certain degree, I guess, you are going to choose people more similar to you because that’s how people work.”

Steve explained that he expects each new member for Omega Zeta to contribute to the fraternity, regardless of identity. Steve stated, “So I’d say yeah, we like diversity, but we’re not specifically striving for it, we’re just striving to have good, you know each member that we look at letting in we look to have each member be a good part of the group.” Scott wondered out loud during the Omega Zeta focus group interview if he would have been an accepted member of the group if he did not contribute as much as he did in his role with the fraternity. Scott claimed, “I proved myself as a valuable member of the group by getting involved and helping people out and doing those things, so I don’t think that that was an issue, but I think if I wasn’t it might have been more of an issue, I don’t know.”

Tradition and history. Tradition and history were important talking points for participants within both fraternities. The way things have always been done guided a lot of conversation about the way things are now, and the way they would be in the future.

When discussing recruitment, participants in the Alpha Beta focus group discussed why their organization remains racially homogenous. Adam said, “But I mean it’s just kind of the way

it works out, most of the White kids rush (go through the membership recruitment process).” History was prevalent in the conversations with Alpha Beta fraternity members. Brett explained, “IFC rush (recruitment) is a predominantly White thing, and it’s always going to seem racist when you have a group where 95% of the kids are White, but that’s not, even if you take all the minorities that come through rush, you’re still going to be a 95% White fraternity. And that’s not necessarily, that doesn’t mean you’re racist. It’s just the way it is.” Anthony felt that the past was a major influencer. “I think that’s just the history,” he said. “It’s not even necessarily a thing that anyone does on purpose, but it’s just the way the south evolved through the 60s and 70s. It’s just how Greek life came to be.”

Adam suggested the reason some students of color are unwilling to commit to predominantly and traditionally, predominantly White fraternities is “Just because it’s not something that people do that often.” Brad suggested that it might be more because of recent racially charged incidents that occurred nationally. “Probably they have seen things like the Oklahoma thing (Sigma Alpha Epsilon racist incident at Oklahoma University) on social media and probably intimidated by it, and things like that. I know I wouldn’t be excited to join a fraternity if I saw something like that and I was another color.”

Some of the Alpha Beta participants blamed the institutional culture for the low percentage of students of color within the University’s fraternity and sorority membership. Anthony said, “I think part of it is getting the numbers up for students. If the numbers aren’t there for the student population then they’re definitely not going to be there in the Greek system because I mean the Greek system is how many percent of the students? It’s an unbelievably low number of the students.”

Adam suggested that Alpha Beta’s reputation as a “southern fraternity” could impact the willingness of students of color to consider going through the recruitment process. “We

do sometimes get the reputation as a southern fraternity. We do have a lot of guys from the south, but we're pretty diverse. So they could hear that and not come rush (seek membership from) us or something like that, but that's not how it is." Anthony also thought southern history had something to do with the current racial climate. Anthony stated, "Greek life in the south especially is very traditional. Father – son, mother – daughter, stuff like that. Legacies and all that. I think the tradition just carries on. That's a lot of it. I think it's just about breaking down those traditional values." Brett could not quite put his finger on the reason, but he also pointed to southern culture as an influencing factor in race relations. He explained, "I'm from up north and it's a lot more liberal. I don't know. It's not that I've come across people who are racist down here, there's just not as much diversity. I couldn't tell you why that is, to be honest. It's definitely different, but I'm not sure what the reason is."

Similar to Alpha Beta fraternity's conversation about the south, Omega Zeta fraternity participants discussed the notion of fraternity culture reflecting the society in general. Sam claimed, "I think it's more of a society issue because the fraternities represent the societal view of the region they're from more than anything. So I wouldn't necessarily narrow it to the fraternities. I think they just reflect the society as a whole." Steve agreed. He said, "So I think it's fraternities aren't segregated because they're fraternities, they're segregated because our country is still a bit segregated, you know, with White people generally hanging out with White people and Black people generally hanging out with Black people."

Brett expanded beyond southern culture to talk more about exclusivity within fraternities in general. He claimed, "I don't think the problem is that they're southern, I just think that they're just really exclusive and if they're exclusive in one area, then they probably are in another." Brett further explained the exclusivity factor within what he called "upper tier" fraternities.

He explained that he was not invited to several exclusive fraternities because of where he was from. He said, "Yeah, so as a northerner, I guess, there's only certain fraternities you can rush (seek out membership). I think those ones that are all southern or all from one area, they're also in general the better ones - the higher tier."

As a result of the selectivity of fraternity recruitment, participants discussed how racialized fraternity culture can be. Brett said, "Yeah, I don't know, like they may only take kids from one area of high schools where everyone knows each other. That might be a White area. So they don't get a lot of kids coming out to rush (recruitment)." Steve suggested that racialized culture in fraternities is perpetuated because of legacies. He said, "I think, you know, just to start off, fraternities, culturally, have been a White, southern thing. So it's something that the White southern parents would tell their kids about when they were in it."

Some Omega Zeta fraternity participants turned inward to reflect on the fraternity culture of racism that has developed rather than relying solely on institutional or regional culture. Scott expressed, "I think that there is definitely this thought of I think whether or not we do it intentionally there is definitely praise for being the frat guy, right?" Steve agreed, "I do think it's more of a culture problem of everything than it is a fraternity problem, but I have seen other instances of things where I think a specific fraternity culture develops."

Discussion

Participants discussed race as having no impact on their recruitment of potential new members to the fraternity. Participants re-centered the discussion of recruitment entirely on fit, explaining that they carried "no biases" concerning race. However, their primary concern was that students fit in with the rest of the group, the majority of whom were White, meaning they were looking for new members who looked and

acted as they do. Fit was emphasized as the most desired trait for potential new members, even though participants struggled to define exact characteristics of that fit. Participants of Alpha Beta fraternity explained fit as someone who was “cool,” well “liked,” someone people “like to hang out with,” and a “good guy.” Omega Zeta participants also struggled to define fit although they were slightly more descriptive. Participants of Omega Zeta described fit as someone who “fits our ideals,” contributes to “a brotherhood we’re all proud of,” someone who is able to focus on academics with “decent to strong grades,” and a student who is also able to accumulate “involvement” on campus. Neither definition of fit celebrates difference in any way.

The concept of fit during fraternity recruitment became a mechanism through which White students knowingly or unknowingly reinforced hegemonic Whiteness. The White habitus that the White students in this study constructed removed them from the experiences of students of color and normalized the White experience in unhealthy ways. Rather than seek out racial diversity, the participants stereotyped the out-group and shifted membership practices to qualities of fit as described by in-group members.

Participants explained that racial diversity was not a desired trait within their fraternity, so neither fraternity had any plans to change their current recruitment strategy to recruit more students of color. The lack of racial diversity within each fraternity was rationalized because of the lack of racial diversity at the institution and within the other IFC fraternities.

Both Alpha Beta and Omega Zeta participants mentioned the diversity in their group by reframing the context of diversity and presenting it as relative to the culture within which they operate. Participants mentioned the regional diversity within their fraternity, while also speaking about the advantages of a diverse membership with different ways of thinking about issues. Participants described diversity as

a positive when thinking about White brothers from regional areas outside of the south or White brothers who have a different way of viewing the world, but racial diversity for brothers identifying as a race other than White was not assigned the same value during the recruitment process. Participants reiterated again and again that racial diversity was not a trait they sought during their recruitment of new members.

Fit was racialized in other ways. Participants described exclusive fraternities as recruiting from only select high schools, generally private schools that admit a high proportion of White students. Steve explained that fraternity men look for people like them during recruitment, so it was only natural that White men continued to seek out other White men for membership.

Participants emphasized the importance of sameness in a variety of ways. While not explicitly addressing race, participants explained that they were looking for someone who could “mesh” with current members, a characteristic both fraternities expressed would create one cohesive brotherhood. However, not all participants felt included in the cohesive unit. Scott pointed out that he contributed to Omega Zeta fraternity through leadership roles, attendance at events, and a primary role in service projects, but he was concerned that he would not be accepted if he was not such a positive contributor. Scott also explained that he felt excluded from Omega Zeta fraternity because he is older, gay, and a graduate student. He was confident he would not have been recruited into the fraternity if his fraternity brothers made the decision rather than full-time staff members from Omega Zeta headquarters. Participants spoke about difference as being a positive during recruitment, but the culture within clearly valued assimilating into one united organization.

I consistently used the term student of color when referring to any student who did not identify as White. While both participating fraternities consisted of students of color identifying as Asian or Pan Asian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic or

Latino, and mixed race, participants referred to a Black and White binary when discussing race. This suggests a lack of multicultural competence and awareness of the intersectionality of racial identity, and indicates a need for additional training and education.

During the focus group interviews, participants discussed the perceived political nature of discussing diversity and inclusion, acknowledging that made it more difficult for them to engage in group discussions about race. During the group interviews, some of the members who spoke of acceptance during individual interviews espoused racist views in front of their peers. One example was Brett, who in individual interviews claimed that he was accustomed to being around people of color but was not very knowledgeable about race issues and wanted to learn more. Then, in focus group interviews, he lambasted multicultural education sessions as being “politically correct” and assuming the worst intentions of White people.

The racial culture on campus was seen by many of the participants as hostile and divisive, caused by students of color. They presented students of color as combative and as fabricating racial incidents in the past. Because of this perceived level of combativeness, the participants were hesitant to engage with students of color, and insisted on blaming students of color for the high level of racial tension on campus.

Participants explained how reliant they were on first impressions and appearance to make recruitment decisions because of limited time allotted during the recruitment period. Participants expressed that they often relied on gut feelings about a prospective new member, but many admitted having stereotypical or negative views of students of color. The participants described limited interactions with students of color in their daily lives, as well as their high level of discomfort when they did enter into conversations about race. The current fraternity recruitment format at Southeastern

and other universities with a Fall recruitment period leave little time for potential recruits to get to know existing fraternity members beyond first impressions and gut feelings.

Implications for Practice

This study presents the fraternity recruitment process as a racialized socialization process that normalizes structures of Whiteness, as described by Bonilla-Silva’s (2006) explanation of White habitus. Participants in this study claimed to be open to racial diversity one moment, but acknowledged their reluctance to engage with students of color because of increased racial tensions on campus in another. Participants were hesitant to engage in controversial topics on race, thus the current racial climate at the University impacted how some of those participants viewed students of color on campus. This study suggests that campus administrators should engage in dialogue, education sessions, and trainings with traditionally, predominantly White student organizations, particularly at times when race is a prevalent national or campus topic.

The insular nature created by these IFC fraternities left the White participants as unfamiliar with the racial experiences of their peers of color on campus. Because they had little experience with race and because they were largely removed from the experience of students of color, they were skeptical of racism and racist incidents on campus. This lack of awareness led participants to unify and stereotype out-group members.

Fit in traditionally, predominantly White fraternities was described by participants as having connection to history and tradition. Participants discussed how White is the norm in IFC fraternities. Some pointed to the concept of legacies, or students who have family members who were a member of the fraternity or sorority in the past, as a way that history perpetuates itself. Legacies are given preferential treatment during the recruitment process for fraternities.

Hegemonic White culture perpetuates itself through the continued search for members who fit the already established mold through the fraternity's history. Removing any formal preference or advantage for students who have legacy status would not unfairly position history and tradition as preferential factors in the fraternity recruitment process. Fraternities should give thought to the way in which the organization values legacies in a way that does not de-value those who do not have a familial history with the organization.

Most participants described recruitment as relying solely on first impressions. However, creating cross-racial friendships takes considerable time, especially on campuses where this is not the norm. There are a few changes to the recruitment process from a staffing perspective that could change the cultural environment. Fraternity and sorority life professionals should investigate ways to standardize recruitment processes, such as providing all potential new members the same t-shirt to wear during recruitment activities. Providing standardization around dress could eliminate differences based on first impressions made on appearances, as described by Anthony as a routine fraternity recruitment strategy. In addition, a deferred recruitment process could provide potential new members the opportunity to build relationships based on more than appearance, but additional research is needed to determine if deferring the process leads to additional perspective on race or only delays the same membership decisions. Fraternities should consider involving advisors more in the recruitment process as well, as advisors in this study were described as being extremely helpful but very hands off in recruitment decisions. However, advisors and chapter leaders cannot be assumed to be culturally competent. Both advisors and chapter leaders should engage in education and training around cultural competence prior to making recruitment decisions.

The fraternity education process was lacking

in a stated commitment to diversity. The fraternity and new member education processes for both fraternities focused on values of respect, honesty, and integrity, but did not specifically address race or diversity directly. Participants were satisfied with their current level of education and did not see a need to expand cultural awareness education because they had not observed or heard of bias or discrimination in their fraternity. Participants indicated that there were not cultural awareness educational requirements from the school either, but they acknowledged that there were optional sessions that they declined to participate in. Fraternity and sorority life staff should give consideration to required trainings since most White students will opt out of any optional offerings.

National fraternities and sororities should give thought to carefully examining and analyzing espoused organizational values. The participants in this study explained that diversity was not a value of their organization nor a desired component of organizational success. Stated values of diversity would go a long way in dismissing the notion that engagement with diversity is not a goal or outcome of fraternity membership.

Finally, fraternity and sorority practitioners should consider tracking racial demographics for the community and for each chapter, if this is not already being done. An updated list of demographic numbers is an important step toward helping chapters accurately evaluate their racial diversity.

Conclusion

Participants re-centered discussions of diversity during fraternity recruitment to focus on fit. Subscribing fraternity recruitment patterns to a color-blind approach in which students of all races were welcome, as long as an individual was a good fit with the existing fraternity members, removed the focus on the lack of racial diversity in the fraternity and placed

the focus on the qualities and characteristics in the individual.

These findings contribute to the larger discussion on Whiteness and its prevalence in campus culture. It is clear that there is significant work left to disrupt Whiteness in hegemonic White spaces, but traditionally, predominantly White fraternities could be spaces to change the racial division on campus instead of further perpetuating it.

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