

AN EXAMINATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY DYNAMICS IN LATINX/A/O-BASED CO-EDUCATIONAL FRATERNITIES

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Centering the stories of Queer People of Color, this critical narrative inquiry project examined the dynamics around gender and sexuality in Latinx/a/o-based fraternities. In particular, the narratives of two Queer Women of Color and a queer non-binary individual revealed how these participants decided to join their organization and what their experiences were like once they were affiliated. Through two semi-structured interviews and a reflection journaling project, participants shared how they often encountered moments of exclusion despite occasionally feeling a sense of inclusion in their chapters/organizations. Implications for research and practice are then offered.

Latinx/a/o¹ student organizations serve an important role for Latinx/a/o students as they transition to college and navigate postsecondary environments, providing familial ties of support (Luedke, 2019). This sense of *familia* also manifests in the siblinghood centered in Latinx/a/o-based sororities and fraternities (Estrada et al., 2017; Garcia, 2020). Findings from studies on Latinx/a/o-based sororities and fraternities highlighted the role of these organizations in facilitating students' transitions and experiences within institutions as they often face racial microaggressions and racism on college campuses (Arellano, 2020; Garcia, 2019a; Orta et al., 2019.)

Although Latinx/a/o sororities and fraternities provide vital assistance to Students of Color, scholarship generally focuses on these in a monolithic way, highlighting the ways these organizations affirm students racial/ethnic identities. Yet, it is important to note that not all Latinx/a/o students may feel as though they fit into Latinx/a/o-based organizations (Banda & Flowers, 2017). Furthermore, fraternal culture can be hostile to individuals that are queer and gender nonconforming (Duran & Garcia, 2020; Garcia & Duran, 2020; Case et al., 2005; DeSantis & Coleman, 2008). Therefore, individuals cannot assume that queer Latinx/

a/o students' sexualities would be affirmed in Latinx/a/o-based sororities and fraternities.

As an alternative to single sex/gender sororities and fraternities, co-educational fraternities emerged in the 1960s and continue to be part of FSL communities (Torbenenson, 2009). However, little scholarship focuses on co-ed fraternal organizations and even less on those that are both co-ed and culturally-based. As single sex/gender organizations become more gender inclusive and as co-ed fraternal organizations look to the future, it is important to examine students' interest in and experience within these organizations. This study answers this call by examining how queer Latinx/a/o college students make sense of issues of sexuality and gender in co-educational Latinx/a/o-based fraternities. The two guiding research questions for the study were:

1. What motivates queer Latinx/a/o college students to join co-educational culturally-based organizations?
2. How do queer Latinx/a/o college students navigate issues of sexuality and gender in co-educational culturally-based organizations?

¹We recognize the use of the terms Latinx, Hispanic, and others are contested and each hold particular meanings (see Salinas, 2020). We chose to use Latinx/a/o to represent the diversity of gender identities in this population.

Framework

We relied on multiple concepts to make sense of our participants' lived experiences. First, we recognized their intersecting identities as Queer People of Color and the corresponding systems of oppression using queer crit. Queer crit centralizes intersectionality, bringing the crossroads of racism and heterosexism to the forefront (Misawa, 2012). Queer crit entails six components:

- 1) the centrality of the intersection of race and racism with sexual orientation and homophobia; 2) the challenge to mainstream ideologies; 3) confrontations with ahistoricism; 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; 5) multidisciplinary aspects; and 6) the social justice perspective. (Misawa, 2012, p. 242)

Rather than focusing on individuals' navigation of racism, homophobia, and heterosexism in siloes, queer crit recognizes the unique experiences of individuals that possess multiple minoritized identities.

In addition to queer crit, we also recognized gender as a social construct that is performative. Butler (1998) detailed:

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (p. 519)

Gender and sexuality are often conflated terms, yet these are distinct identities (Nicolazzo, 2017). Thus, in addition to racism, homophobia, and heterosexism, we also recognize hostilities that emerge as a result of the socially constructed

nature of gender (Butler, 1998). Individuals' genders and sexualities may be erased by normative expectations (Nicolazzo, 2017). This is often exacerbated in fraternity and sorority life (FSL) communities, which are predominantly single sex/gendered organizations (Nicolazzo & Karikari, 2018). As a result, we were interested in exploring these dynamics within co-educational fraternities.

Contextualizing the Influence of Latinx/a/o-Based FSL Organizations

To examine the dynamics around gender and sexuality in Latinx/a/o-based co-educational fraternities, we first provide a historical overview of culturally-based FSL organizations, in addition to the values that Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations hold. Such context is necessary to understand the contemporary forms of culturally-based FSL organizations, and specifically those with an interest in Latinx/a/o communities. Following this tracing, we synthesize literature on experiences that students, and specifically those with multiple minoritized identities, have within Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations.

Historicizing the Role and Values of Latinx/a/o-Based FSL Organizations

It is imperative to first situate Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations in the larger history of culturally-based sorority and fraternity organizations. Namely, today's culturally-based organizations, and specifically Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs), first emerged at the beginning of the 1900s during a period where fraternities around the country actively discriminated along the categories of race and religion, meaning those who were not White Protestant men were excluded (Torbenson, 2009, 2012). The reason provided involved the belief that brotherhood could only be established with those who were alike (e.g., along racial lines). Within predominantly white institutions (PWIs),

culturally-based sororities and fraternities were established to center and uplift Communities of Color as a response to these exclusionary practices (Torbenson, 2009, 2012), in addition to the hostile climates students faced (Gillon et al., 2019; Ross, 2000). Relevant to this project is the “similarity rationale” used by organizations to discriminate against those who identified with other races. Specifically, it challenged us as researchers to consider how culturally-based FSL organizations may reproduce cultures that are homogenous among other identity categories (e.g., gender and sexuality).

Aligning with the origin of race-based FSL organizations emerged in the early 1900s, Latinx/a/o FSL organizations entered the landscape in 1904 with the founding of Sigma Iota (Del Real, 2020). Sigma Iota later merged with Phi Lambda Alpha in 1931 to form Phi Iota Alpha, the earliest Latinx/a/o fraternity still in existence (Guardia, 2015; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009). Students at Kean University then started the first Latina sorority in 1975 (Guardia, 2015; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009), representing the growth of Latinx/a/o organizations. Mirroring larger social movements in the Latinx/a/o community, these organizations were founded to advocate for Latinx/a/o populations, especially within PWIs. Importantly, these Latinx/a/o FSL organizations sought to develop students both alongside academic and social domains (Guardia, 2015; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009).

In contemporary times, Latinx/a/o-based FSL groups continue to value cultural awareness and family. Miranda and Martin de Figueroa (2000) argued that chapters attempt to bolster the awareness around Latinx/a/o communities for their members and for campuses as a whole. In addition, scholars regularly noted the value of family that these groups communicate through their practices (Estrada et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009). For example, in a formative study on Latino fraternal members, Guardia and Evans (2008) found that these fraternities created environments where

brothers could show their love for one another, which in turn contributed to their ethnic identity development. Though scholarship exists about the historical trajectories and values of FSL organizations focused on Latinx/a/o cultures, little is known about Latinx/a/o co-educational fraternities, leading to a need to further explore the nature of these environments.

Student Experiences in Latinx/a/o-Based FSL Organizations

Beyond the scholarship on the organizations themselves, scholars also examined the experiences that students have in Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations. One subset of literature, for instance, touched upon what motivates individuals to join Latinx/a/o-based fraternities and sororities (e.g., Arellano, 2020; Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014; Garcia, 2020, 2019b; Orta et al., 2019). Many affiliate with a Latinx/a/o-based FSL organization because of feeling a sense of isolation on campus, especially at PWIs. Elucidating this point, Orta et al.’s (2019) study on Latina sorority women showed them encountering culture shock at their colleges and universities, which led them to surround themselves with people from a similar racial background. Arrelano’s (2018) research on why Latin@s join FSL discovered similar patterns, stating that becoming a member allowed students to develop connections with people who held similar cultural values and to “scale down” their large campus environments (p. 10). Highlighted in these studies, students articulate that Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations continue to have the impact intended since their founding.

Another topic in the Latinx/a/o-based FSL organization literature concerns the benefits that result from involvement in these groups (Orta, 2019). Specifically, scholars highlighted how affiliation with a Latinx/a/o-based fraternity or sorority contributes to leadership development (Guardia, 2015; Moreno & Banuelos, 2013), a sense of belonging (Garcia, 2020; Moreno & Banuelos, 2013), identity development (Guardia

& Evans, 2008), as well as educational success and persistence (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Moreno & Banuelos, 2013; Orta et al., 2019). Because of their dedication to uplifting Latinx/a/o cultures, these organizations offer leadership roles (Guardia, 2015) and the ability to wrestle with questions of identity (Guardia & Evans, 2008). Additionally, by virtue of these subgroups' ability to provide a sense of belongingness for students (Garcia, 2020), Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations become a vital place where individuals develop support networks that bolster their persistence (Moreno & Banuelos, 2013). However, scholarship oftentimes homogenizes the Latinx/a/o population, stopping short of exploring subgroups within the community.

Though limited, researchers questioned how the experiences of being a part of Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations differs when taking into account people's multiple minoritized identities like sexuality (e.g., Del Real, 2020; Duran & Garcia, 2020; Garcia & Duran, 2020). For instance, participants involved in Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations in Garcia and Duran's (2020) research on Queer Men of Color discussed paradoxical climates they experienced in these spaces. Although they encountered instances of support for their sexuality, they also described how members regulated sexuality by voting against potential members perceived to be queer and by creating climates that encouraged men to keep their sexualities secret. Similar to perspectives highlighted in Garcia and Duran's (2020) scholarship, Del Real (2010) showcased how gay/queer men in Sigma Lambda Beta (a Latinx/a/o-based fraternity) encountered barriers in developing brotherhood with heterosexual and cisgender counterparts. These men responded to these challenges by creating a "queer familia" within the organization, connecting to others who identified as sexual minorities. Important to note is that these studies focused exclusively on the experiences of men within Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations, leading to a question of how

those who identify as women or as non-binary view their places within these groups. For this reason, this particular study centered individuals with these identities.

Methodology

A key component of queer crit is "the centrality of experiential knowledge" (Misawa, 2012, p. 242). We centered our participants' lived experiences by using a qualitative, critical narrative inquiry approach. Narratives are

a distinct form of discourse: as meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one's own or others' actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of action and events over time. (Chase, 2011, p. 421)

Narratives act as a means through which individuals engage in meaning making of their experiences while critical questions aim "to uncover assumptions, analyze issues of power that are visible and invisible, and examine omissions" (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017, p. 6). To use a critical lens means to recognize that there are ways that power, privilege, and oppression operate in participants' experiences that they may not be aware of or have the language to operationalize.

Data from this study came from a research project focused on the experiences of gender and sexual minorities in culturally-based FSL organizations and included participant interviews, demographic forms, and journal reflections. All participants were members of the same co-educational Latinx/a/o based fraternity situated within a large public research university in the Midwest with a Latinx/a/o population of about 4.5%. Over 10% of the student body at the university is part of the FSL community, which is divided into four councils: Multicultural Greek Council (MGC), National Pan-Hellenic Council, Panhellenic Council, and Interfraternity Council.

There was another Latina-based sorority and a Latino-based fraternity within the MGC; however, participants were members of the only co-educational MGC chapter.

Participants completed a demographic survey when entering the study. Highlights of their identities are listed in Table 1. It is important to note that these individuals were not the only queer identifying members of the chapter, however they were the only members that participated in this work. Participants completed two semi-structured individual interviews, each

lasting approximately 90 minutes in length. After the first interview, individuals completed a reflective journal. The journal consisted of four questions that prompted participants to reflect on ways their identities as Queer People of Color have been affirmed or erased in their fraternity as well as ways actors (e.g., advisors and national organizations) discussed queerness or gender norms. Participants’ journal entries were not used as raw data during analysis, instead they were used to construct the protocol and guide discussion for the second interview.

Table 1
Participants’ Profiles (Self-Reported on a Demographic Form)

Name ^a	Pronouns	Sexuality	First Generation?	Semester in College
Ava-Marie	She/her	Bisexual	Yes	Second
Liz	She/her	Bisexual	No	Seventh or More
Luna	They/them	Lesbian	No	Fourth

^a Pseudonyms used for research participants and their organizations

Analysis

We engaged in data analysis from the start of data collection. We took notes and reflected on the participants’ experiences while conducting interviews (Bhattacharya, 2017). After we received reflective journals from participants, we reviewed the documents for areas to explore during the second interview. Once both interviews were completed, we reviewed interview transcripts and constructed thematic narratives for each participant that attended to experiences discussed in their interviews and journals (Bhattacharya, 2017). These key experiences included encounters around gender and sexuality before college, the process of joining their fraternity, and ways gender and sexuality appeared in their fraternal experience. We coded the narratives separately and were attentive to how each person made sense of their experiences as well as similarities and differences among the participants (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). We refined codes into categories (Bhattacharya, 2017) and

then came together to discuss our analysis and to reconcile our interpretations. We then compared and contrasted our codes to refine themes that captured our participants’ experiences.

Trustworthiness

We took multiple measures to ensure the trustworthiness of this research. We collected multiple forms of data, providing the opportunity for participants to reflect away from the interview setting using reflective prompts, which provided rich data. After we constructed participant narratives, we sent these documents to them for member checking. Two participants responded with revisions, clarifying language, and providing additional details while the third did not respond to the opportunity. Finally, we engaged critical reflexivity, which “require the researcher to be acutely aware of, and interact with, the social locations that shape perceptions of the world, the self, and all elements of the study” (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017, p. 99). We articulated our positionality at the start of

this study and constantly considered ways our positionalities influenced the study design. We were careful to question bias that appeared in our protocols and worked together to craft critically focused questions (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). We also debriefed our interpretations of the participants' experiences with one another, voicing occasions when we recognized our positionality influencing our understanding.

Research Positionality

[Author One] identifies as a cisgender, heterosexual Latina and white woman. Her interest in this study stemmed from her experiences within FSL as a member of a sorority, a student affairs practitioner, and FSL researcher. She shares experiences with the participants in being Latinx/a/o and a member of an FSL organization, therefore she related to their discussions of forming family-like bonds through FSL membership. However, she recognized that being heterosexual and performing her gender in normative ways meant that her life and FSL experience was very different from participants. She never felt as though she did not belong because she did not meet her organization's expectations around gender and sexuality. Further, she was a member of a historically white sorority that restricted its membership based on sex to females. Because she is cisgender, her membership in the organization was never questioned or threatened, which she recognized is not the case for transgender people.

[Author 2] entered into this project by reflecting upon his simultaneous status as an insider and outsider relevant to the topic. Notably, his interest in this research project stemmed from navigating minoritized communities as someone who is both queer and a Latino man. These experiences caused him to question how groups targeted toward a minoritized community (e.g., an organization founded to uplift Latinx/a/o individuals) create environments mindful of those with other marginalized identities. However, [Author

2] recognizes that his status as someone not affiliated with a Latinx/a/o-based fraternity also positioned him as an outsider to the practices, rituals, and bonds within organizations. When interviewing participants, [Author 2] asked follow-up questions to dive deeply into Latinx/a/o-based fraternal cultures in addition to reading existing scholarship and speaking with current members. While analyzing data, [Author 2] spoke with his co-researcher about situating his view of participants' experiences in larger histories rather than defaulting to harmful stereotypes about FSL organizations.

Findings

The three participants' narratives all revealed notable realities of what being a gender and/or sexual minority means in Latinx/a/o fraternities. In particular, we highlight three overarching themes below: motivations to join their organization, as well as the ways in which gender and sexuality were simultaneously embraced but also targeted within these spaces.

Motivations to Join a Co-Educational Latinx/a/o-Based Fraternity

To begin, participants spoke about their motivations to join their respective Latinx/a/o-based fraternity, including hoping to find empowerment in their identities and shifting perceptions of what FSL looks like.

Identity Shame and Empowerment. When reflecting on motivations to join a co-ed Latinx/a/o-based fraternity, participants discussed ways they felt shame about their identities as Queer People of Color growing up and within their college experiences. As Ava-Marie described, "I have never been proud of being a Mexican or being someone who is queer. I never got to be proud of that." Luna shared similar sentiments and recounted an experience they had before moving to campus with their paired roommate after exchanging social media information:

An hour or so later, I finally got wifi again and I got to check my phone. And she said, "Luna, I saw on Facebook that you identify as bisexual...your values contradict my values, therefore I'm asking you to move out of our room and find a new housing space...I already have friends in this dorm and I'm sure you can find somewhere else to live."

From this initial interaction, Luna thought, "Okay. Well, I guess [this state] is homophobic." Unfortunately, after their move, Luna was next paired with a racist roommate.

These experiences were in stark contrast to how participants felt when they learned about their fraternities. When Luna found their fraternity, they were excited to see that they were kind and welcoming:

They were like the nicest people there. They were the only people that spoke to me, wanted to get to know me more. Like, "You're a transfer student? Wow. Where are you from?" And it just looked like family. There was people kicking around a soccer ball, and there was music playing and they were like... laughing and playing around with each other. And it just felt like, "Oh, I could exist in this space."

All of the participants reflected on the importance of the fraternity as a family. It was not until Liz's junior year that she decided to pursue membership, but she was drawn to the familial aspect of the organization:

I had my support system, but I still was missing that aspect of having that Latinx community or family kind of thing, so that was the biggest thing that got me to decide to join, because I really felt like I needed that support in that way at that time.

More specifically, the fraternity as a co-ed space was appealing because it provided participants the opportunity to connect with siblings. Liz recalled:

When I saw this one, that it was brothers and sister, I only have a little sister, so having those brothers....really attracted me, because it really felt like a family. Guys, girls, whatever, at once, and having to compromise together, go out together, hang out together kind of thing. That's really what sold me, that it was truly that family aspect of it all.

Thus, it was not only the familial aspect of the organization that attracted participants, but also that they would be able to engage with people across genders.

Bucking Preconceived Notions about FSL Involvement. Participants were also drawn to their organizations because they broke against preconceived notions of what it meant to be in a fraternity or sorority. Before college, Ava-Marie did not plan to join an FSL organization. She recalled, "I was like, 'I'm not white.' Why am I going to join one? I just don't know why I thought that someone who is in the LGBTQ community or someone of Color doesn't belong there." When Ava-Marie attended an informational for the fraternity, she "met a ton of people who were also queer and Latinx. It was shocking, in a way that my thoughts of what Greek life was so different from what it actually was."

Like Ava-Marie, Liz also had racialized understandings of FSL membership:

At first since you only really hear about mostly white sororities and white fraternities.... I just couldn't see myself in a white sorority, per se. And just what I knew about the movies of being like, I guess, having all these standards of beauty when it comes to women, like makeup or being skinny...

As Liz noted, in addition to race, her preconceived notions around gender expression gave her worries about joining FSL. As a gender non-binary individual, Luna also shared these concerns. Both of these individuals were aware of a Latina sorority that existed on campus,

but neither thought they would fit into the organization because their gender expression was not feminine enough. Luna reflected:

It was very much like I saw sororities as supremely feminine, incredibly focused on the femininity of it all...I see them like as people who are incredibly feminine, wonderful women of distinction, incredible. But I just don't feel like I would ever fit in.

Liz recognized one Latina sorority that was "very Latinx based....And they're all super nice, I really like all the girls that are part of it, but for myself I was like... I think just having sisters just wasn't it for me." Because of its nature as a co-ed organization, Luna and Liz saw their fraternity as more accepting of the ways they embodied their gender.

Moments of Exclusion within Inclusion: Gender

All participants felt affirmed in their racial/ethnic identities within the fraternity and each felt the fraternity empowered women and centered productive masculinities in some ways. However, within this space of inclusion, participants reflected on instances of exclusion for members that identified as gender non-binary such as Luna or whose gender expression did not meet the fraternity's expectations such as Liz. For instance, although participants often used the word "siblings" in reference to the members of the fraternity, as Liz described, sisterhood and brotherhood were still the two dominant categories within the fraternity. When Luna joined the fraternity, they were unsure of how they would fit in as a non-binary person. They questioned, "Am I more of a brother or am I a sister?" Rather than having the option to identify as a sibling, Luna was assigned a role:

It was like, 'You're a sister.'.... So, it was very much like basis of the letter that's on your application, F or M. And I think it's something that our fraternity as a whole, like on a nation-wide scale is trying

to change, but it was something that definitely was jarring...But yeah, there was a specific portion in the pledging process that involves that separation, and that really very much was uncomfortable for me.

By not offering a way for Luna to identify outside of a "brother" or "sister," their identity as gender non-binary was erased, resulting in feelings of discomfort in the new member education process.

Once a member of the fraternity, Liz explained that some chapter members had a difficult time respecting pronouns for individuals that did not identify as men or women:

Sometimes there might not be shown that respect because they don't care enough to like... to use the pronouns or...learn more about it or ask questions or things like that. Sometimes it feels like it's something that's dismissed because I guess they feel like it's not important. That can be really hurtful.

Like Liz, Ava-Marie also noticed that particular members did not make an effort to use proper pronouns for transgender members. However, she further observed that women in the organization were often more intentional with their pronoun usage than men were:

Sisters are really cool with it... with brothers, because we are co-ed, it's kind of an annoyance that it gets brought up a lot.... I guess a lot of the inactive brothers, some of them they'll use the wrong pronouns and when they get called out on it, they're like, 'It's not that big of a deal.' you correct them and they're like, 'Oh, okay.' Rolling their eyes.

Feeling excluded, Luna was encouraged by new members that made more effort to use their correct pronouns than some of the older members:

I noticed that they go out of their way to use they, them, pronouns. It isn't in a bad way where it's cringy where they're like,

‘Oh sorry.’ They stopped for a second. And they take the moment to really think about it and remember and then...they change it. And it was really sweet of them and do that. I don’t know, a lot of other older members just, they say she, they say she, go ahead.

In addition to ways transgender members experienced forms of exclusion within the fraternity, participants also recognized ways the fraternity resisted and embodied binary notions of gender expression.

In terms of resistance, one reason Luna was drawn to the fraternity was that women within the organization did not always embody hyperfeminine characteristics: “The way that gender was presented was also, especially with the sisters, there was a variety. There were sisters that would wear full make-up, but there were sisters that would dress more masculine.” Although their fraternity members pushed against hyperfeminine expectations for women, there were still times these surfaced, which caused individuals that did not perform to these standards to feel as if they did not belong. For instance, Liz embraced a more masculine gender expression, which she found was problematic when the fraternity did a group photo:

My first photo shoot it was like, guys wear a white button up, black pants, tie, and dress shoes. And girls wear black dresses, heels.... Nothing was required or forced, but it’s that feeling of, if you don’t do it you’re going to stand out, or you’re going to be judged, or you’re just going to feel uncomfortable and like an outsider. So you end up following the things, following the rules...because you don’t want to be the sister that stands out or that doesn’t look like a sister, or you know....

Liz recalled there was one occasion when she decided to wear black pants and flats instead of a dress. Although she felt comfortable with the clothing she chose,

I didn’t feel comfortable during it. It was for me that experience, I just felt like an outsider, like I didn’t belong there, like I shouldn’t be in the pictures...You do that and you just don’t fit in with the sisters or with the brothers, so it’s like...You’re just kind of there.

Liz thought these norms were adopted from fears of losing potential members, “I think the main thing in their minds, it’s like we’re going to lose potential members if we don’t present ourselves in this role.” Luna and Liz’s reflections highlight how chapters can be affirming of some identities while excluding and further marginalizing others.

Moments of Exclusion within Inclusion: Sexuality

In their interviews, participants also spoke a great deal about the dynamics that they witnessed and experienced as it relates to issues of sexuality. Salient experiences included their new member processes, events put on by the organization, and intra-fraternal relationships. Similar to their observations concerning gender, these individuals perceived simultaneously felt a move toward inclusion regarding sexuality while at the same time, noticing actions that ran counter to these values.

The participants all discussed their initial interactions with their Latinx/a/o-based organization as shaping their view of how affirming the space would be concerning sexuality – whether this perspective was positive or negative. Ava-Marie, for instance, shared stories about how they saw other members of the fraternity express their sexuality openly, in addition to having her own sexuality validated by current siblings. Though she was initially resistant to the idea of joining an FSL organization, she met siblings at a Taco Tuesday event who talked about their identities (e.g., bisexuality and Afro-Latinx identity). Ava-Marie then followed up this comment by sharing: “My spring semester came and I went to an informational. I met a

ton of people who were also queer, and Latinx. It was shocking, in a way that my thoughts of what Greek life was so different from what it actually was, I guess.” Ava-Marie interpreted these moments as showcasing a positive culture for queer individuals within this Latinx/a/o-based co-educational FSL organization. This feeling was solidified when someone recognized a pin representing the bisexual community that she wore during the event: “And I’m like, ‘Dang.’ There’s people who identify as something other than straight coming to this thing. So, maybe this is a good decision.” By meeting those who disclosed their sexuality, Ava-Marie felt comfortable speaking about their sexuality within the context of her Latinx/a/o fraternal organization.

Luna encountered a similar instance of being able to talk about their sexuality during their initial engagement with their organization, but Luna remarked that this interaction showed them that their sexuality may not always be welcomed. At first, Luna was “very nervous about coming out in general” and they described their coming out during their “pledging process” as “interesting.” When probed to say more about this, Luna mentioned that they and other members had been asked to share about themselves by a current member. They sat next to Alana, a sibling, who divulged that they identified as non-binary and bisexual; this disclosure caused Luna to say, “Well, me too. Bitch, the fuck?” Though initially excited to meet someone like Alana, another sibling named Isabel followed up Alana’s comment with “I don’t like that.” The silence that followed this moment was palpable and caused Luna to worry about their own place in the organization. As they stated, “So, I didn’t know if I trust them or if they trust me...there’s also that level of, ‘I already had someone that was supposed to be in my little family and that big family that already wasn’t accepting of that.’” Luna’s discussion of their little and big family suggests that although they found someone they could trust (i.e., Alana), this

was going to prove to be difficult in the larger co-educational chapter.

These experiences continued once participants joined their organizations. On one hand, participants discussed a growing culture of acceptance around queerness especially with newer members. Specific to their chapter, for example, Liz mentioned that more “members have been coming out...and so it’s more of a topic that is talked about now, and definitely recognized in everything.” Though Luna shared a similar sentiment, Luna also mentioned that they had struggled with older members of all genders to engage them with discussions of sexuality. In particular, Luna offered the example of a program that they planned alongside the LGBTQ multicultural FSL organization on campus. However, Luna’s organization did not support in the planning or execution of the event:

I really worked very hard on it and it was up to my organization to put the word out, have people come by. They didn’t put the word out until the day of, which was a little frustrating. And then no one showed up. So it was just like four or five people from my organization and all of the people from [the LGBTQ multicultural FSL organization], which was really awkward.

In the question and answer period, the few people who did attend from their organization were silent and did not say much. In reflecting upon this program, Luna shared that this dynamic is representative of many Latinx/a/o-based organizations: “I think that’s what ends up happening a lot with multicultural Greek letter organizations. They just want to focus on the one thing, at least from what I’ve seen in Latino things, they want to focus on the one thing like you’re Latino.” These types of interactions around sexuality also manifested when it came to intra-fraternal queer relationships.

During the time of the study, two participants (Luna and Liz) disclosed that they were in relationships with another member of their

Latinx/a/o-based FSL organization, experiences that revealed to them attitudes that some siblings had about queer relationships. For example, Liz mentioned that her initial fears of coming out to her siblings were allayed with their supportive demeanors:

Waiting for responses was incredibly hard. And when I did get them, like all of them were positive and very supportive, so that won my heart and made me feel even more grateful and happy that I made the decision that I made to be in this fraternity...

However, Liz noted a remarkably different reaction once she started dating a fellow member, stating, “Sometimes being looked at differently, or thinking that we think a different way, or that we act a different way, or that we’re just one unit and that we’re not separate sisters kind of thing.” In particular, Liz described that sisters were less accepting than her brothers. Although her brothers will ask questions about their relationship, Liz mentioned the following about her sisters: “Even when we hang out together and stuff, it’s like, if we mention anything [about the relationship] they’re like, “Ew, gross,” or like things like that kind of thing. They might not be doing it intentionally, but yeah, it kind of hurts a bit when it comes to that.” These reactions felt like a double standard to Liz since she is usually one that people come to about their “boyfriend problems” but when it came to her, “we have to keep it to ourselves.” These dynamics thus showed Liz that the environment within her Latinx/a/o-based co-educational FSL organization was accepting *to a degree*. It was when her siblings were confronted with seeing Liz in a romantic relationship that they outwardly expressed discomfort around queerness.

Discussion

This study mobilizing queer crit (Misawa, 2012) provided a crucial look into Latinx/a/o co-educational fraternities, especially as it

relates to dynamics about gender and sexuality. By centering women and non-binary individuals, this project represents a vital intervention into the current literature about Latinx/a/o student organizations and specifically those within fraternity and sorority life. To begin, findings revealed the motivations that the participants held when seeking to join their chapter, expanding upon the existing literature offering reasons people have to join Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations (e.g., Arellano, 2020; Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014; Garcia, 2020, 2019b; Orta et al., 2019). From their founding, Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations have existed to connect students to Latinx/a/o cultures (Guardia, 2015; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009) and to provide them with a sense of family within these groups (Estrada et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009). In this particular study, Ava-Marie, Liz, and Luna all echoed these reasons to join their co-educational fraternity. Their fraternities represented a refuge from their predominantly white campuses where they experienced racist behavior, in addition to minoritization based on their gender and sexuality. Connected to this, learning about their organization changed their mind about the possibilities of fraternity and sorority life. Though they originally saw fraternities and sororities as predominantly white themselves, they quickly learned that culturally based FSL organizations could contribute to their cultural identities. In addition, this research project is unique in that it centered on co-educational Latinx/a/o-based fraternities. Thus, although other scholarship has named the importance of finding a sense of family within these organizations (Estrada et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009), participants in this study spoke specifically about the value of connecting with people of different genders (e.g., having brothers, sisters, and siblings). Therefore, these stories extend past research by showing a motivation that students may have to join a Latinx/a/o-based co-educational FSL organization.

These individuals eventually came to learn the multifaceted nature of their organizations, especially as it relates to gender and sexuality. Concerning gender, participants discussed how cisgender women in the organization oftentimes were those in leadership roles, showing how much brothers respected their ability to lead and contribute to their chapters. In fact, this pattern solidified the familial sentiment that these individuals felt within their Latinx/a/o-based co-educational FSL organization, a trend that exists in the literature (Estrada et al., 2017; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009). However, from a queer crit perspective, it is evident that there were also some limitations placed around the culture of gender within their chapters. Specifically, identities and expressions that felt outside of the gender binary were regulated. Examples of this included Liz' comments about incorrect pronoun usage for non-binary members or how normative feminine styles of dress were emphasized. Recognizing that gender is a performance (Butler, 1998) that is inherently policed by dominant groups (Nicolazzo, 2017), these insights showcases how the Latinx/a/o-based co-educational FSL organizations in this study may privilege expressions of gender that reinforce a binary (e.g., cisgender, masculine and feminine).

Finally, this study sheds a light on how conversations about sexuality manifest within Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations, building on the past work focused on Queer Men of Color (Authors, in press; Del Real, 2020). In particular, participants pointed to the changing environments within chapters as more queer people felt comfortable sharing their sexuality with siblings. However, at the same time, these chapters and organizations have room to improve upon according to the individuals in this research. For example, Luna's story about the event they put on with an LGBTQ multicultural FSL organization showcased that they did not have support from their chapter around these issues. In their comments reflecting upon this

event, Luna points out a tension that could exist within Latinx/a/o-based organizations. By stating that these organizations have focused on advocating for Latinx/a/o cultures (Guardia, 2015; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009), Luna also mentions that this means they may overlook other issues that are relevant to the Latinx/a/o community. From a queer crit (Misawa, 2012) lens, this experience shows that communities of color may fail to address issues of heterosexism and trans oppression while fighting for racial equity. Furthermore, resembling the research of Authors (in press), certain forms of queerness are palatable within culturally based organizations. In stories like Liz', it was identifying as queer until she entered a queer relationship. Ultimately, these examples display other ways that queers of color are minoritized within Latinx/a/o-based co-educational fraternities that may also convey inclusive attitudes.

Implications

In reflecting upon the experiences shared by the participants, we find it necessary to honor their stories by sharing implications for research and practice that can better improve the climates in Latinx/a/o-based co-educational FSL organizations. From a queer crit lens, Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations can simultaneously attend to issues concerning race and racism, but may fall short in addressing matters of sexism, trans oppression, and heterosexism. These issues are not exclusive to Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations, existing in FSL broadly, but it is imperative to bring to light how these spaces may be positioned to integrate these conversations based on their histories of exclusion (Torbenenson, 2009, 2012).

Pertaining to research, there were limitations of this study that could be addressed with future work. Namely, we focused on the experiences of individuals within a single chapter at one institution. Future work can continue examining the role of culturally-based

co-educational organizations within FSL from the perspectives of different organizations and within different contexts. Additionally, another area of scholarship that is needed involves the operating of national fraternal and umbrella organizations themselves. Much of the literature that exists about culturally based organizations like those that are Latinx/a/o-based focus on experiences within individual chapters. Though participants in these studies frequently discuss their perspectives about their national fraternal and umbrella organizations, professionals would benefit from a more concerted look at these spaces. How is it that national organizations offer directives about centering matters of gender and sexuality? Additionally, beyond individual fraternal organizations, scholars would also benefit from an understanding of umbrella associations and their efforts around these issues. For example, how does the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO) dedicate time and resources toward issues of gender and sexual equity? Additionally, this study only included one person who identified as non-binary within their Latinx/a/o-based co-educational fraternity. Therefore, researchers should continue to highlight the experiences of those who identify as non-binary within spaces that function in gendered manners. Both of these lines of research would push these organizations toward equitable practices that align with their long-espoused values.

When it comes to practice, it is important for FSL life offices on college campuses to dedicate time and resources to culturally based fraternities and sororities as they seek to create better environments as it relates to gender and sexuality. Underscored in the literature about culturally based organizations is the reality that these groups and their members frequently feel underserved by FSL offices that cater to white student populations (Garcia, 2019b). However, doing the work of advancing justice that centers queer of color marginality requires financial and human capital. For instance, FSL offices would

need to maintain effective hiring processes for campus advisors who oversee culturally based organizations. In these hiring processes, search committees should ask questions about how they would support chapters toward attending to overlapping systems of oppression in their practices. Such questions would ensure that advisors are interested and drawn to expanding the vision of racial justice that culturally based organizations, especially those that are Latinx/a/o-based, hold. Beyond the professionals themselves, FSL offices should encourage these conversations within chapters themselves. What this would look like would be trainings for executive board members and for all active members to learn how to incorporate attention to gender and sexual equity within their practices (e.g., how to plan a program focused on the interconnections between racism and heterosexism). Doing this kind of work would inevitably involve collaboration between Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations and other campus stakeholders (e.g., LGBTQ student services, women's centers).

However, it would be ineffective to only consider FSL offices as sites for intervention around gender and sexuality within Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations. Namely, standards around new member processes and other regulations stem from national fraternal organizations themselves, meaning that work must be done on these levels. Therefore, national fraternal organizations represent spaces where these types of conversations must be had. Thus, it would behoove culturally based fraternal organizations to integrate issues of gender and sexual equity into their work, seeing it as interweaved with racial justice and not separate from it. What would it look for these organizations to create committees tasked with leading efforts on addressing issues of heterosexism, trans oppression, sexism, ableism, and more within the group? These committees could thus think intentionally about how to do this from new member processes and beyond.

Changes led by individuals within culturally based fraternal organizations could potentially ripple out to all chapters and members, making it so that people feel their holistic selves valued within Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations.

Conclusion

Leveraging queer crit (Misawa, 2012) as a theoretical framework, this study revealed the differential experiences that participants encountered in their Latinx/a/o-based co-educational fraternity. Drawn to their organizations for numerous reasons, their fraternities began to occupy a complex place in participants' lives. Although their organization fulfilled the role of family, these individuals also encountered minoritization based on their sexual and gender identities. From a queer crit lens, this research underscores that though Latinx/a/o-based FSL organizations provide many benefits for Latinx/a/o students, these organizations also can fall short of eradicating the multiple forms of oppression that some individuals face. Therefore, it is imperative that Latinx/a/o-based co-educational organizations take a critical look at their practices around gender and sexuality in order to uphold their values and create structures that support members from all backgrounds.

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