

BOOK REVIEW: GARCIA, C. E. & DURAN, A. (2021). MOVING CULTURALLY-BASED SORORITIES AND FRATERNITIES FORWARD. PETER LANG.

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Historically white sororities and fraternities have had a major influence in the growth and development of [sorority and fraternity life (SFL)] offices, as well as the SFL communities on college campuses.... SFL offices have traditionally centered around advising historically white NPC sororities and NIC fraternities. As such, many programs such as recruitment, awards and community events.... have been structured to serve and promote historically white sororities and fraternities (Garcia & Duran, 2021, p. 144).

In 1776, the first fraternity was established on the campus of William and Mary and centered the values and beliefs of white cisgendered men. For years, this foundation has guided the field of sorority and fraternity life, despite the introduction of culturally-based organizations¹ in the early 20th century. This white, heteronormative lens continues to exclude the narratives of marginalized communities, more specifically Communities of Color and the LGBTQ community. Garcia and Duran (2021) sought to disrupt the white heteronormative narrative that the sorority and fraternity life professional community has operated under for years, while also acknowledging the rich histories and contributions of culturally-based organizations. The authors discussed the need to close the existing research gap between scholarship on culturally-based organizations and their historically white counterparts to help professional staff understand the implications of leaving these groups out of the sorority and fraternity life narrative. Specifically,

Garcia and Duran (2021) highlighted the uniqueness of culturally-based organizations and recognized the need to move toward a more inclusive advising model that is welcoming of all organizations and centers diverse and inclusive practices. The contributions in *Moving Culturally-Based Sororities and Fraternities Forward: Innovations in Practice* probe and challenge the SFL profession on current practices, and offer solutions on resources to be better support culturally-based organizations.

Moving Culturally-Based Sororities and Fraternities Forward: Innovations in Practice is divided into three sections. The first section, "Setting the Stage: Overview of Culturally-Based Sororities and Fraternities", introduces the text, and a general overview of culturally-based organizations specifically, their histories, structure, and roles on college campuses.

The second section, "Innovations in Practice: Opportunities and Challenges Facing Organizations", focuses on getting the reader acclimated with a few of the culturally-based organizations and their councils. The second section features vignettes from members, who share their experiences in their organizations and the impact of their organizations on their collegiate experience sand their time post-graduation. While these vignettes don not speak for all who join a culturally-based organization, they do offer personal insights and support the research and arguments made throughout the text. Each vignette is followed by a chapter that focuses on best practices on advising and supporting that specific organization or council. In addition, this section

¹ Duran and Garcia (2021) use culturally-based sororities and fraternities. However, I am choosing to use culturally-based organizations to be more gender inclusive and inclusive of organizations who do not identify as sororities or fraternities but share similar values and are typically advised by staff in sorority and fraternity life.

provides SFL professionals with reflective questions to consider how their offices currently operate and how they can shift to better support culturally-based organizations to provide them with the tools and resources needed to be successful. Lastly, a strength and unique feature of these two sections is that the chapters are written by members of culturally-based organizations that provide a deeper dive into how current SFL practices impact culturally-based organizations on college campuses.

In the third section, "Innovations in Practice: In the Broader Landscape of Culturally-Based Sororities and Fraternities", Garcia and Duran (2021) explored issues and areas of concern for culturally-based organizations. Some of the issues discussed are hazing, intersectionality, and connectivity between culturally-based organizations and other groups advised by SFL offices. The authors argued that the current structure of sorority and fraternity life offices are not designed to support and address the needs of culturally-based organizations. Garcia and Dunn called for a reframing of the SFL profession and for colleges and universities to acknowledge how culturally-based organizations play an important role in the retention of underrepresented students, by creating affirming spaces and fostering a sense of belongingness among students who are members of racially marginalized communities. This opinion is evident in the following statement:

Until recently there were still schools where culturally- based sororities and fraternities were not advised by the SFL office. Culturally- based sororities and fraternities were instead advised by offices of multicultural student affairs. Being advised by two separate offices created both a physical and metaphorical separation between culturally- based and historically white sororities and fraternities. (p. 193)

This quote expresses a common sentiment held by members of culturally-based

organizations. Many believe that universities recognizes their contributions in supporting marginalized students, yet have failed to integrate these groups into the larger fold of their sorority and fraternity communities. This discrepancy conflicts with the tenet that SFL should foster a sense of community for all student members of sororities or fraternities.

Moving Culturally-Based Sororities and Fraternities Forward: Innovations in Practice, made me reflect on my own experience attending a predominantly white institution (PWI) and the weight of imposter syndrome and discomfort I felt while trying to navigate this new and very unfamiliar space. My experience joining a National Pan-Hellenic Council sorority, helped ease the tension I felt navigating a very white privilege space, where my existence as a Black woman was constantly challenged in overt and covert ways. My sorority gave me a place and a voice in a space where I constantly felt voiceless and unseen. Garcia and Duran (2021) reignited conversations surrounding how SFL professionals should support historically marginalized communities. Therefore, they also make a call to SFL professionals to look beyond what has always been done and to think about what could be, what space can SFL create, and the responsibility of SFL to support all sororities and fraternities and not just the ones that feel comfortable and familiar.

Overall, *Moving Culturally-Based Sororities and Fraternities Forward: Innovations in Practice*, serves as a foundational text that can be used as a tool for future research and educational opportunities for SFL advisors on college campuses. However, there is still more work to be done to support and advance culturally-based organizations within the larger SFL community. Specifically, the field needs to explore existing bias within the SFL professional community, equity and inclusion related SFL policies for culturally-based organizations, and cultural competency among SFL

professionals. As a practitioner, it would be interesting to explore how the lumping culturally-based organizations together can create or heighten tension between groups and councils due to the organizations histories and historical interactions discussed very briefly in chapter four, “A Practitioner’s Perspective: Asian Interest Sororities and Fraternities”. For example, a more thorough investigation would help white SFL professionals better understand why having one council for culturally-based organizations does not always achieve the desired goals of support and comradery among culturally-based organizations. In conclusion, Garcia and Duran (2021) provided valuable insights on how to support culturally-based organizations, and hopefully this text will prompt more research and books that directly support the growth and development of culturally-based organizations.

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References

Garcia, C.E., & Duran A. (Ed.s) (2021). *Moving culturally-based sororities and fraternities forward: Innovations in practice*. Peter Lang. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b18296>

Author Biographies

Shelissa Newball (she/her/ella) was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. She attended Wesleyan University in Middletown, CT where she received her Bachelors’ degree in African American studies.

Post-graduation, she attended The University of Connecticut, where she received her Master’s in Higher Education and Student Affairs. Shelissa has experience in Residential Life, Fraternity and Sorority Life, and Student Activities and has worked at various institutions including The Pennsylvania State University, Eastern Connecticut State University, The University of New Haven, and most currently her Alma Mater, Wesleyan University where