A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONFORMITY IN SORORITIES AND FRATERNITIES: ANALYSES ON "FITTING IN"

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Critics perceive sororities and fraternities as spaces that breed negative decision-making and lead to harmful behaviors (e.g., hazing). A desire to "fit in" may contribute to these subcultures. Yet, little is known about what shapes organizational conformity. We present the findings from two studies, each exploring the demographic and context-based characteristics that inform organizational conformity in sororities and fraternities. Guided by theories on ecological systems and developmental meaning making, we identified settings that predict organizational conformity across sororities and fraternities (e.g., inclusive chapter climates), as well as those unique to each. We offer implications for research and practice.

Keywords: sororities, fraternities, conformity, hierarchical linear modeling, meaning-making

As a collegiate subculture, sorority and fraternity life (SFL) has been the topic of debates by stakeholders in and outside of higher education. A person does not have to look far to see SFL represented in various domains of U.S. society (e.g., in media through movie representations, politics in the form of elected officials' affiliation to organizations) that showcase diverging perspectives on what it means to be in a sorority or fraternity. At their worst, individuals worry that said representations portray SFL as regularly accompanied by discourses of members engaging in high-risk drinking (Asel et al., 2015), hazing (Tingley et al., 2018), or sexual assault and gender-based violence (Barnes et al., 2021) that they may, in turn, try to replicate through their own experiences. And yet, those who have advocated for these organizations underscore the benefits of SFL membership, including how they foster siblinghood (Cohen et al., 2017; McCreary & Schutts, 2015) and advance philanthropic values (Asel et al., 2015). What is reasonably at the core of both sets of outcomes (i.e., positive or negative) is how much a person feels compelled to conform to the behaviors and attitudes of those around them.

Undergirding the critiques and accolades of SFL is the belief that members of a chapter—and other nested contexts (e.g., organizational culture, SFL portrayals in media)—have a strong bearing on how people experience their membership and affiliation. This question of how members conform to those in their SFL organization brings to the forefront the concerns of student affairs educators who are attentive

to matters of student development. Namely, those who rely upon psychosocial theories of development are intrigued by how individuals differentiate themselves from the influences of their environment (Patton et al., 2016), as these educators want to assist students to make decisions guided by their internal value system. However, what contributes to the phenomenon of conforming to one's fellow SFL members is a topic that scholars have not explored thoroughly, though discussions of how individuals' attitudes are shaped by their fellow SFL members have long remained permanent (Biddix et al., 2014). Because it can contribute to both beneficial and harmful student outcomes, it is imperative to analyze what influences SFL members' organizational conformity.

In this paper, we highlight two studies that explored the relationship between demographic and contextual influences and organizational conformity within SFL membership. Because research has been limited in its interrogation of how gender differentiates SFL experiences, we designed one project focusing on sororities (Study 1) and the other addressing fraternities (Study 2) in historically white organizations. Across both studies, our research question was: How do students' backgrounds and SFL environments predict members' likelihood to adopt attitudes of organizational conformity?

Conceptual Framework

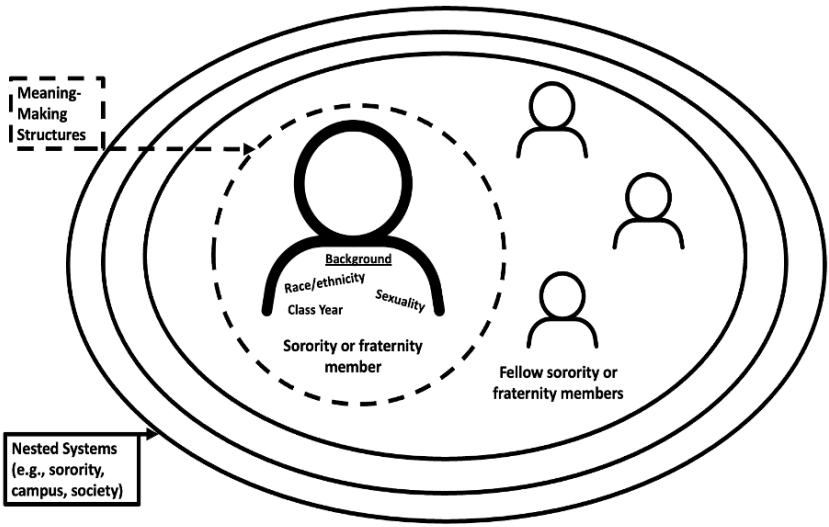
We designed a conceptual framework that drew upon ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995) and literature on meaning making formation to comprehend how a person is differentiated from or integrated within their environments (see Baxter Magolda, 2009; Kegan, 1994). Kegan's (1994) work on meaning making explicated how people developed an internal belief system, rather than simply defaulting to the behaviors and attitudes of surrounding people. Those more developed along 'orders of consciousness' were able to differentiate their perspectives from those around them. In her work on self-authorship, Baxter Magolda (2009) translated Kegan's concept of meaning making, applying it to college students. Those with more complex meaning-making structures filter out external messages by relying on an internal voice. Baxter Magolda asserted that the aim of college was to move college students toward this internal viewpoint system (termed 'self-authorship'), in which they no longer unequivocally adopt the opinions and perspectives of peers or authority systems. Consequently, educators attempt to challenge students' (and in this case, SFL members') meaning making to transition them to self-authoring.

We assert organizational conformity is linked to meaning making (i.e., those with less complex meaning making are more likely to conform to their fellow SFL members), and, importantly, the nested contexts that students find themselves in play a major role, as they represent the

environments that SFL members need to differentiate themselves from. For this reason, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory was useful as well.

Bronfenbrenner believed that development occurred within nested contexts, which he termed micro (those most immediate), meso (the intersections of microsystems), exo (contexts that people do not directly interact with but influence their experiences), macro (broader sociocultural norms), and chronosystems (development over time). We accounted for various microsystems that students found themselves in (e.g., sorority chapters, campus involvement) that inevitably formed their mesosystems. Core to our investigation is that SFL professionals have the ability to shape the conditions within microsystems. For a representation of our framework, see Figure 1.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework Integrating Ecological Systems Theory and Developmental Meaning Making for SFL Members



Review of Literature

To address our research questions, we surveyed two related bodies of literature: (a) scholarship that articulated the contributions to and benefits of "fitting into" SFL organizations and (b) examinations of SFL's homophilic legacies and openness to diversity (ODC).

Benefits of "Fitting Into" SFL Organizations

Several benefits of SFL affiliation exist (e.g., Biddix et al., 2014). For instance, individuals have shown how SFL groups invoke familial

connection, referred to as brotherhood, sisterhood, and siblinghood (Cohen et al., 2017; McCreary & Schutts, 2015). Studies like Walker and Havice's (2016) showcased how practitioners perceived that sorority membership and its accompanying values positively influenced individuals' career aspirations. Moreover, feeling connected to one's SFL organizations increases the likelihood of belongingness at the institution (e.g., Wessel & Salisbury, 2017). Namely, Wessel and Salisbury (2017) found that sorority women living in residence halls felt more connected to their institution.

However, the benefits of fitting in have the potential to reinforce hegemonic systems. An example of this comes through in Ispa-Landa and Oliver's (2020) research, showcasing how members of top-ranked sororities (usually those who aligned more with traditional femininities) were more likely to yield social power on campus. Such findings reinforce beliefs that affiliation with historically white sororities reinscribe heteronormative ideals of being appropriate wives and mothers (Freeman, 2018). Conversely, fraternities use imagery of the 'fraternity man' to present themselves as cool and give themselves power, especially over women (Harris & Schmalz, 2016).

(Interrupting) Homophilic Contexts in Historically White Sororities and Fraternities

We surveyed literature examining how SFL organizations function in homophilic ways, which includes language of 'fitting in,' socialization, and/or conformity. For example, researchers have written about how historically white sororities and fraternities maintain whiteness, excluding those who do not acquiesce to these norms (Joyce, 2018; Sasso et al., 2024; Zimmerman et al., 2018). This is apparent when members use the language of "not fitting in" as code for not fulfilling expectations (Joyce, 2018). Similar attitudes exist for those who do not fit gendered expectations of masculinities (McCready, Goodman, & Duran, 2023) and femininities (Allison et al., 2024). These attitudes turn into material consequences when SFL members choose not to accept individuals during recruitment processes or choose to punish members when they go against the grain. Thus, it is unsurprising that studies have demonstrated that being affiliated with SFL organizations can predict negative racial attitudes, especially for white men (Samson, 2022).

Quantitative studies have highlighted conflicting findings concerning SFL-affiliated students and their interactions with 'diverse' others: whereas some scholars have found that those in SFL organizations interact less compared to non-affiliated individuals (e.g., Asel et al., 2015), recent research has demonstrated that they may have more discussions with those different from oneself (Pike & Wiese, 2024). Beyond frequency, investigations have underscored contexts and demographics that predict SFL members being open to diversity or

having socially just attitudes. Namely, brotherhood and belonging have been predictive of fraternity members' ODC (McCready, Selznick, & Duran, 2023), whereas low levels of campus involvement result in more conservative social justice orientations within sororities (Duran et al., 2024). Across sororities and fraternities, background characteristics such as political leanings or social identity differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexuality) have also been salient.

Study 1 Design

We relied on secondary data collected by Dyad Strategies, LLC (Dyad) through internet-based surveys distributed to the undergraduate membership of two single historically white, National Panhellenic Conference college women's social sororities during the spring terms of the 2019–2020 academic year (Time 1) and 2020–2021 academic year (Time 2). During Time 1, Sorority A had a membership of 8,725 women and non-binary undergraduate students enrolled at 111 higher education institutions in the United States and Canada, while Sorority B had a membership of 19,224 women undergraduate students at 145 higher education institutions in the United States and Canada. During Time 2, Sorority A had a membership of 8,560 women and non-binary undergraduate students enrolled at 108 higher education institutions in the United States and Canada, while Sorority B had a membership of 18,118 women undergraduate students at 143 higher education institutions in the United States and Canada. Response rates ranged from 44.9% for Sorority B during Time 2 to 72.6% for Sorority A in Time 1. Our final data set included 6,115 cases clustered within 206 U.S. higher education institutions.

Because the sororities represented in the study are historically white organizations, it is perhaps unsurprising that 81.4% of participants identified as white (see Table 1). Of the remaining 18.6% of members, 6.2% identified as Latina/e or Hispanic, 4.7% identified as multiracial or multiethnic, 4.3% identified as Asian, 1.0% identified as African American or Black, 0.8% identified as Indian, 0.8% identified as Middle Eastern or North African, 0.4% identified as Native American or Native Alaskan, and 0.3% identified with other racial or ethnic identities. The mean institutional cluster size was 29.68 (SD = 22.67; median = 24) with a range of 5 to 113 members. The institutions in the sample are dispersed, with 21.8% located in the Midwest, 35.4% in the Northeast, 26.7% in the South, and 16.0% in the West.

Measures

Outcome

The outcome was members' organizational conformity measured through an eight-item, single-factor scale (α = .86) developed by Dyad

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Participant Demographics

Variable	Sorority Participants % (n)*	Fraternity Participants % (n)**
Class year		
Sophomore	39.2 (2,398)	30.5 (895)
Junior	33.6 (2,053)	36.7 (1078)
Senior	25.6 (1,566)	30.2 (886)
Fifth year or greater	1.6 (98)	2.6 (79)
Parent or caregiver education status		
First-generation college student	15.9 (970)	14.9 (437)
Continuing-generation college student	84.1 (5,145)	85.1 (2,501)
Race and ethnicity		
African American or Black	1.0 (62)	2.6 (77)
Asian	4.3 (266)	4.2 (124)
Indian	0.8 (51)	1.4 (40)
Latino/a/e or Hispanic	6.2 (380)	7.9 (233)
Native American or Native Alaskan	0.4 (25)	0.7 (22)
Middle Eastern or North African	0.8 (49)	0.9 (26)
Multiracial or Multiethnic	4.7 (286)	4.3 (126)
White	81.4 (4,975)	77.1 (2,266)
Other racial or ethnic Identity	0.3 (21)	1.0 (24)
Sexual identity		
Asexual	1.1 (66)	-
Bisexual, Omnisexual or Pansexual	9.1 (559)	-
Gay or Lesbian	1.1 (65)	-
Heterosexual	85.3 (5,214)	-
Queer or other	1.0 (60)	-
Questioning	2.5 (151)	-
Spiritual identity		
Majority worldview	58.3 (3,598)	-
Minority worldview	9.4 (577)	-
Nonreligious	17.9 (1,094)	-
Other worldview	14.3 (876)	-
Political leaning		
Very liberal	-	6.3 (186)
Liberal	-	15.7 (461)
Moderate	-	40.8 (1,200)
Conservative	-	30.5 (895)
Very conservative	-	6.7 (196)
Involvement in campus organizations		
No other organizations	24.3 (1,486)	-
1 other organization	27.2 (1,664)	-
2 to 3 other organizations	39.1 (2,388)	-

** Sorority participants n = 6,115*

*** Fraternity participants n = 2,938*

and validated by Duran et al. (2024) reported in Time 2. Respondents responded to an agreement ratings scale for each item from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). The scale measured conformity to others' behaviors in their sorority/fraternity (e.g., "When it relates to my chapter, I usually go along with 'the status quo'"), which is in congruence with scholarship on meaning making (an aspect of our framework). The descriptive statistics for the outcome and other study measures are in Table 2 (see following page)..

Individual-level Predictors

The individual-level predictors included in the analyses for Study 1 were organizational conformity at Time 1 (α = .87), affective commitment (α = .93; adapted by Dyad from Meyer & Allen, 1991), normative commitment (α = .90; adapted by Dyad from Meyer & Allen, 1991), empathy (α = .93; Davis, 1983), openness to diversity and challenge (ODC; α = .94, see Pascarella et al., 1996), and perceptions of inclusive sorority chapter climate (inclusive climate; α = .92, see Duran et al., 2024).

We also employed the 26-item Measure of Fraternal Sisterhood (Schutts et al., 2017), which includes five subscales that Schutts and colleagues argued reflect five distinct schema of fraternal sisterhood: accountability (six-items; α = .87), belonging (five-items; α = .94), common purpose (five-items; α = .93), shared social experience (five-items; α = .75), and support and encouragement (five-items; α = .88). Schutts and colleagues found the scales had internal consistency reliabilities ranging from .61 for shared social experience to .94 for belonging.

For all measures, participants rated their agreement using a ratings scale from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) for each item included in these predictors. We scored all scales by using the mean of the items in each measure (see Table 2). These continuous variables were group-mean centered for our analyses.

We also included variables associated with students' identities for Study 1 (see Table 1). All demographic predictors were effect coded to avoid positioning any group as normative (Mayhew & Simonoff, 2015). We used three identity-related variables in our analysis. We included participants' self-reported racial and ethnic identities based on their response to the question, "What is your race or ethnicity?" Participants reported their sexual identity by responding to the question, "What is your sexual identity?" We attempted to retain as many sexual identities as possible in our analysis, but merged "queer" (n = 43) and "other" (n = 17) because of the small number of participants identifying their sexual identity as other. Participants reported their spiritual identity by responding to the question, "What religion do you follow, if any?" Participants identified their religion or faith from a list of a dozen

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Continuous Variables

		Individual-level (Sorority n = 6,115 Fraternity n = 2,938)		Institutional Level (Sorority n = 206 Fraternity n = 169)	
Variable	α Sor. / Frat.	Sorority M (SD)	Fraternity M (SD)	Sorority M (SD)	Fraternity M (SD)
Organizational conformity (Type 2)	.86/.92	1.96 (0.76)	2.22 (0.73)	-	-
Organizational conformity (Type 1)	.87/.91	2.01 (0.75)	2.18 (0.76)	1.99 (0.22)	2.21 (0.24)
Affective commitment	.93/.94	3.93 (0.83)	4.16 (0.72)	3.92 (0.27)	4.17 (0.25)
Normative commitment	.90/.93	3.88 (0.83)	4.03 (0.79)	3.88 (0.25)	4.05 (0.27)
Empathy	.93/-	4.26 (0.60)	-	4.26 (0.17)	-
Openness to diversity and challenge	.94/.94	4.23 (0.63)	4.02 (0.70)	4.23 (0.17)	4.02 (0.23)
Organizational identification	-/.88	-	4.13 (0.68)	-	4.16 (0.22)
Political and social involvement	-/.92	-	3.95 (0.63)	-	3.94 (0.20)
Inclusive chapter climate	.92/-	4.21 (0.66)	-	4.21 (0.25)	-
Accountability sisterhood	.87/-	4.17 (0.64)	-	4.16 (0.18)	-
Belonging sisterhood	.94/-	4.00 (0.90)	-	3.95 (0.32)	-
Common purpose sisterhood	.93/-	4.18 (0.72)	-	4.16 (0.24)	-
Shared social experience sisterhood	.75/-	3.76 (0.74)	-	3.74 (0.22)	-
Supportive sisterhood	.88/-	4.39 (0.59)	-	4.38 (0.18)	-
Accountability brotherhood	-/.92	-	4.31 (0.64)	-	4.33 (0.21)
Belonging brotherhood	-/.94	-	4.21 (0.73)	-	4.21 (0.26)
Shared social experience brotherhood	-/.95	-	3.95 (0.63)	-	3.90 (0.36)
Solidarity brotherhood	-/.76	-	3.90 (0.88)	-	3.64 (033)

options. We recoded Christian identities as "majority worldview;" other major religious identities as "minority worldview" (e.g., Judaism); "Atheistic or Agnostic," "Spiritual," and "Other" as "other worldview;" and "nothing in particular" as "nonreligious worldview."

Finally, we included six variables about students' lived experiences, as well as students' self-reported class year and parent or caregiver education status. We also included four variables related to each participant's involvement in other campus student organizations and their leadership within their sorority or other organizations (see Table 1).

Institution-level Predictors

The institution-level predictors included in the analyses were the group means for the continuous individual-level predictors based on each participant's college or university affiliation. The descriptive statistics for these predictors can be reviewed in Table 2.

Analysis

To account for the institutional clustering (i.e., students nested within institutions) in our data, we relied on hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), the preferred analytical strategy for this data structure within the field of higher education (see Mayhew et al., 2016). Our intraclass coefficient for the unconditional model was 0.065, $p < .001$. The reliability estimate was .599, indicating adequate stability existed across the parameter estimates for each institution (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

After reviewing the unconditional model, we added individual-level predictors to the model across four blocks. Block 1 included the students' identities and lived experiences (e.g., reported racial and ethnic identities). Block 2 included the remaining demographic variables (e.g., sorority leadership role). Block 3 included the pre-test measures for organizational conformity at Time 1. The remaining continuous variables were entered during Block 4. The reliability estimate of the final individual-level model continued to be sufficient at .620 (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Upon finalizing the individual-level model, we constructed intercepts and slopes-as-outcomes models to identify if any institution-level predictors could explain the variability in the intercepts and slopes. We added all of the institution-level predictors to our model at one time. The reliability of the student-level intercepts in the model remained adequate at 0.261.

Study 1 Results

Preliminary Analysis

We present the descriptive statistics for the continuous variables, including the outcome, in Table 2. The mean score for organizational conformity at Time 1 was 2.01 (SD = 0.75) and at Time 2 was 1.96 (SD = 0.76). These scores were statistically different, $t(6114)$, $p < .001$, $d = .93$, 95% CI [.03, .08], suggesting that participants' organizational conformity declined from Time 1 to Time 2. In addition, we reviewed the kurtosis and skewness of the outcome. We found the values for kurtosis (.71) and skewness (.82) were in the ranges for normally distributed data.

HLM Findings

Findings of the final model from Study 1 are in Table 3. At the individual level, we found that two of the five sisterhood subscales, belonging sisterhood ($\gamma = -0.18$, $p < .001$) and common purpose sisterhood ($\gamma = -0.07$, $p = .010$), were negatively and significantly related to conformity. Shared social experience sisterhood was positively associated with the outcome ($\gamma = 0.17$, $p < .001$). Perception of sisterhood may affect organizational conformity. We found that inclusive climate ($\gamma = -0.16$, $p < .001$), empathy ($\gamma = -0.11$, $p < .001$), and ODC ($\gamma = -0.11$, $p < .001$) were negatively related to the outcome, while normative commitment was positively associated with organizational conformity ($\gamma = 0.07$, $p < .001$). None of the identity or lived experiences variables were statistically significantly associated with the outcome.

We found that the institution-level sisterhood variables of accountability sisterhood ($\gamma = -0.41$, $p < .001$) and belonging sisterhood ($\gamma = -0.19$, $p < .001$) were statistically negatively associated with organizational conformity. The conceptualization of sisterhood within a college or university's sorority community may affect members' organizational conformity. Like accountability and belonging sisterhood, empathy ($\gamma = -0.25$, $p = .022$) and inclusive climate ($\gamma = -0.26$, $p < .001$) were negatively and statistically significantly related to the outcome. Sorority communities that value empathy or inclusivity lessen the pressure for members to conform to sorority norms.

The final Study 1 model explained 83.7% of the between-group variance in organizational conformity and 17.7% of the within-group variance. The total amount of variance explained by this model reached 23.2%, though additional variance can be explained by the inclusion of additional predictors.

Table 3

Specified Coefficients for the Final Models

	Sorority Model		Fraternity Model	
Predictor	Coefficient (SE)	Sig. (Dunnett's test, if needed)	Coefficient (SE)	Sig. (Dunnett's test, if needed)
Intercept	4.78 (.38)	<.001	2.61 (.56)	<.001
Individual-level				
Class year				
Sophomore	0.01 (.02)	.739	-0.05 (.03)	.087
Junior	-0.03 (.02)	.116	-0.01 (.02)	.629
Senior	-0.04 (.02)	.052	0.03 (.02)	.248
Fifth year or greater	0.07 (.05)	.213	0.03 (.05)	.522
Racial/ethnic identity				
African American or Black	-0.05 (.08)	.530	0.11 (.10)	.234
Asian	0.12 (.05)	.013 (>.05)	-0.08 (.07)	.234
Indian	0.02 (.09)	.832	-0.04 (.11)	.728
Latino or Hispanic	-0.02 (.04)	.556	0.03 (.06)	.655
Native American or Native Alaskan	-0.05 (.12)	.671	-0.19 (.20)	.352
Middle Eastern or North African	0.04 (.07)	.606	.05 (.15)	.721
Multiracial or Multiethnic	-0.06 (.04)	.099	-0.13 (.07)	.047 (>.05)
White	0.04 (.03)	.176	-0.05 (.04)	.249
Other racial or ethnic identity	-0.02 (.12)	.847	0.29 (.14)	.039 (>.05)
Sexual identity				
Asexual	0.08 (.06)	.188	-	-
Bisexual, Omnisexual or Pansexual	<0.01 (.04)	.964	-	-

Predictor	Sorority Model		Fraternity Model	
	Coefficient (SE)	Sig. (Dunnett's test, if needed)	Coefficient (SE)	Sig. (Dunnett's test, if needed)
Gay or Lesbian	0.07 (.07)	.338	-	-
Heterosexual	-0.02 (.02)	.582	-	-
Queer or other	-0.16 (.08)	.035 (>.05)	-	-
Questioning	0.03 (.05)	.557	-	-
Parent or caregiver education status				
First-generation college student	-0.01 (.01)	.583	-0.02 (.02)	.409
Continuing-generation college student	0.01 (.01)	.583	0.02 (.02)	.409
Political leaning				
Very liberal	-	-	0.04 (.05)	.424
Liberal	-	-	-0.02 (.03)	.476
Moderate	-	-	-0.07 (.03)	.010 (<.05)
Conservative	-	-	-0.02 (.03)	.524
Very conservative	-	-	-0.07 (.06)	.209
Spiritual identity				
Majority worldview	0.01 (.02)	.663	-	-
Minority worldview	0.02 (.03)	.514	-	-
Nonreligious	-0.02 (.02)	.307	-	-
Other worldview	-0.01 (.02)	.749	-	-
Involvement in other campus organizations				
No other organizations	-0.01 (.02)	.821	-	-
1 other organization	0.01 (.02)	.486	-	-

Predictor	Sorority Model		Fraternity Model	
	Coefficient (SE)	Sig. (Dunnett's test, if needed)	Coefficient (SE)	Sig. (Dunnett's test, if needed)
2 to 3 other organizations	0.04 (.02) 2.175	.030 (>.05)	-	-
4 to 5 other organizations	0.08 (.03) 2.488	.013 (>.05)	-	-
6 or more other student organizations	-0.13 (.05) 2.446	.014 (>.05)	-	-
Current leadership role in sorority or fraternity				
General member	0.02 (.01)	.116	0.02 (.02)	.579
Executive board or committee member	-0.02 (.01)	.116	-0.02 (.02)	.579
Highest prior leadership role in sorority				
General member	.001 (.01)	.183	<-0.01 (.02)	.988
Executive board or committee member	-0.01 (.01)	.183	<0.01 (.02)	.988
Number of leadership roles in campus organizations				
No organizations	0.02 (.02)	.405	-	-
1 organization	<0.01 (.02)	.918	-	-
2 to 3 organizations	<0.01 (.02)	.921	-	-
4 or more organizations	-0.02 (.05)	.699	-	-
Organizational conformity (Time 1)	0.16 (.02)	<.001	0.29 (.03)	<.001
Affective commitment	-0.03 (.02)	.192	-0.15 (.04)	<.001
Normative commitment	0.07 (.01)	<.001	0.02 (.03)	.523
Empathy	-0.11 (.02)	<.001	-	-
Inclusive chapter climate	-0.16 (.02)	<.001	-	-
Openness to diversity and challenge	-0.11 (.02)	<.001	-0.12 (.04)	.001
Organizational identification	-	-	0.11 (.04)	.002

	Sorority Model		Fraternity Model	
Predictor	Coefficient (SE)	Sig. (Dunnett's test, if needed)	Coefficient (SE)	Sig. (Dunnett's test, if needed)
Political and social involvement	-	-	0.01 (.04)	.783
Accountability sisterhood	-0.02 (.02)	.290	-	-
Belonging sisterhood	-0.18 (.02)	<.001	-	-
Common purpose sisterhood	-0.07 (.03)	.010	-	-
Shared social experience sisterhood	0.17 (.02)	<.001	-	-
Supportive sisterhood	-0.01 (.03)	.622	-	-
Accountability brotherhood	-	-	-0.21 (.03)	<.001
Belonging brotherhood	-	-	-0.18 (.03)	<.001
Shared social experience brotherhood	-	-	0.09 (.02)	<.001
Solidarity brotherhood	-	-	0.15 (.02)	<.001
Group-level				
Organizational conformity (Time 1)	0.33 (.05)	<.001	0.41 (.07)	<.001
Affective commitment	0.20 (.10)	.053	-0.23 (.17)	.151
Normative commitment	-0.12 (.09)	.161	0.01 (.11)	.915
Empathy	-0.25 (.11)	.022	-	-
Inclusive chapter climate	-0.26 (.07)	<.001	-	-
Openness to diversity and challenge	0.07 (.10)	.486	-0.09 (.13)	.523
Organizational identification	-	-	<0.01 (.14)	.975
Political and social involvement	-	-	0.07 (.14)	.600
Accountability sisterhood	-0.41 (.11)	<.001	-	-
Belonging sisterhood	-0.19 (.08)	.022	-	-

Predictor	Sorority Model		Fraternity Model	
	Coefficient (SE)	Sig. (Dunnett's test, if needed)	Coefficient (SE)	Sig. (Dunnett's test, if needed)
Common purpose sisterhood	0.02 (.10)	.875	-	-
Shared social experience sisterhood	0.16 (.09)	.072	-	-
Supportive sisterhood	-0.01 (.15)	.960	-	-
Accountability brotherhood	-	-	-0.36 (.11)	<.001
Belonging brotherhood	-	-	-0.01 (.12)	.900
Shared social experience brotherhood	-	-	0.20 (.06)	.001
Solidarity brotherhood	-	-	0.15 (.06)	.013

Note: We used Dunnett tests for the post-hoc examination of the statistical significance for categorical variables.

Study 1 Discussion

An example of a significant variable was normative commitment ($\gamma = 0.07$, $p < .001$), a variable capturing the duty that one feels to their organization, which positively predicted conformity. Feeling an obligation to peers paralleled a desire to adapt to the norms of those around them, showcasing a reliance on external forces (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Kegan, 1994). In this case, sorority women demonstrated insularity that is regularly associated with SFL organizations.

But conversely, those who reported higher rates of empathy ($\gamma = -0.11$, $p < .001$) and belonging ($\gamma = -0.18$, $p < .001$) to their sorority were also less likely to conform to organizational norms. This suggests that sorority women can feel deeply connected to their sisters while at the same time differentiating themselves from the attitudes and behaviors of their peers. Such ideas of being an empathic person are valued by those in sororities, given their relationship to philanthropy (Asel et al., 2015). In addition, belonging may help students thrive and foster autonomy or interdependence (Strayhorn, 2019). What these results demonstrate is that it is important to help students understand that they do not have to be the same as someone to still be compassionate and empathetic towards them. In fact, going through the process of empathizing may be key to assisting individuals in isolating their own feelings about a situation and differentiating them from their peers, hence, displaying more complex meaning

making (Kegan, 1994). Faced with an issue within or outside the sorority context, advisors can support members in understanding what empathy can look like, even if one's perspective on the event differs from others' perspectives. The same phenomenon around empathy was significant when it concerned the group-level variables in the sorority dataset. This suggests that chapters that demonstrate cultures of empathy similarly minimize organizational conformity.

Study 2 Design

Similar to Study 1, we used secondary data collected by Dyad Strategies, LLC (Dyad) through internet-based surveys distributed to the undergraduate membership of two single historically white social fraternities during the 2019–2020 academic year (Time 1) and 2020–2021 academic year (Time 2). Data from Fraternity A was collected during survey administrations during the fall terms, while data for Fraternity B was collected during the spring terms. At Time 1, Fraternity A had a membership of 12,712 undergraduate men at 204 U.S. higher education institutions. Fraternity B had a membership of 11,115 undergraduate men at 174 U.S. higher education institutions during the same time period. During Time 2, the membership of Fraternity A was 12,943 undergraduate men at 202 U.S. higher education institutions, and the membership of Fraternity B was 9,798 undergraduate men at 169 U.S. higher education institutions. Response rates ranged from 30.2% for Fraternity B during Time 1 to 63.4% for Fraternity B during Time 2.

Our final data set included 2,938 cases clustered within 169 higher education institutions. Like the sorority data set, the majority of fraternity participants identified as white (77.1%). Of the remaining 22.9% of members, 7.9% identified as Latina/e or Hispanic, 4.3% identified as multiracial or multiethnic, 4.2% identified as Asian, 2.6% identified as African American or Black, 1.4% identified as Indian, 0.9% identified as Middle Eastern or North African, 0.7% identified as Native American or Native Alaskan, and 1.0% identified with other racial or ethnic identities. The descriptive statistics for the self-reported individual identities and experiences of participants are found in Table 1. The mean institutional cluster size was 17.38 (SD = 16.17; median = 13), with a range from 5 to 103 members. The institutions were dispersed across the United States, with 41.4% located in the South, 26.4% in the Midwest, 18.0% in the West, and 14.7.% in the Northeast.

Measures

Outcome

Like Study 1, the outcome was organizational conformity at Time 2. The internal consistency of the measure in the fraternity data set was .92 (see Table 2 for descriptives).

Individual-level Predictors

Consistent with Study 1, the Study 2 individual-level predictors included Study 2 organizational conformity (Time 1; α = .91), affective commitment (α = .94), normative commitment (α = .93), and ODC (α = .94). The fraternity data sets did not include empathy, inclusive climate, or the sisterhood subscales. Instead, given the availability of secondary data and in line with our conceptual approach, we included organizational identification (α = .88; Edwards and Peccei, 2007) and political and social involvement (α = .92, Pascarella, 2007).

Further emphasizing our need to split these studies into two, our models included McCreary and Schutts's (2015) 21-item Fraternal Brotherhood Questionnaire. McCreary and Schutts (2015) identified four schemas of brotherhood: accountability (six items; α = .92), belonging (five items; α = .94), shared social experience (five items; α = .95), and solidarity (five items; α = .76). Participants rated their agreement to items reflective of each of the schema (e.g., "I would never 'sell out' a brother who did something wrong," is associated with the solidarity brotherhood schema).

With the exception of political and social involvement, all of the items for the predictors used five-point agreement rating scales. Like Study 1, all continuous variables in Study 2 were group-mean centered for our analysis. See Table 2 to review the descriptive statistics for the continuous variables in our study.

We included effect-coded variables associated with students' identities and lived experiences, like in Study 1 (see Table 1). The only identity-related predictor in our model was students' self-reported racial and ethnic identities. Our models also included members' self-reported political leaning, class year, parent or caregiver education status, and fraternity leadership status.

Institution-level Predictors

Like Study 1, the institution-level predictors included in analyses were the group means for the continuous individual-level predictors based on each participant's college or university affiliation. The descriptive statistics for these predictors can be reviewed in Table 2.

Analysis

Our analytic plan for Study 2 mimicked that of Study 1. We relied on HLM to analyze the data, and we examined the continuous variables to ensure they did not violate assumptions for linear regression. We created an initial unconditional model to identify the amount of the outcome variance explained by the variance between institutions. The unconditional intraclass coefficient for the Study 2 model was

0.044, p < .001. The reliability estimate was .386, indicating adequate stability existed across the parameter estimates for each institution (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

After creating an unconditional model, we added individual-level predictors to the model across four blocks. Block 1 included the students' reported racial and ethnic identities. Block 2 included the remaining demographic variables (e.g., political leaning). Block 3 included the pre-test measures for organizational conformity at Time 1. The remaining continuous variables were entered during Block 4. We specified models during each step. As in Study 1, we performed Dunnett's tests to examine the statistical significance of the effect-coded predictors.

Upon the final specification of the individual-level model, intercepts and slopes-as-outcomes models were constructed to identify if any institution-level variables could explain the variability in the intercept and slopes. The reliability of the intercept in the final individual-level combined model for Study 1 was adequate at .523 (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). After specifying the individual-level model, we added group-level predictors to the final models at the intercept and slopes (see Table 3). The reliability of the student-level intercept remained adequate at .256.

Study 2 Results

Preliminary Analysis

The descriptive statistics for the continuous variables in Study 2 can be reviewed in Table 2. The mean scores for organizational conformity were 2.18 (SD = 0.76) at Time 1 and 2.22 (SD = 0.73) at Time 2. These scores were statistically significantly different, $t(2,937) = 2.66$, $p = .008$, $d = .83$, 95% CI [.01, .09], suggesting that participants' organizational conformity increased from Time 1 to Time 2. In addition, we reviewed the kurtosis and skewness of the outcome. We found the value for skewness (.74) was within the range of normally distributed data, while the value for kurtosis (1.10) slightly exceeded this range. We elected to not transform the variable to allow for comparisons between Study 1 and Study 2 and retain interpretability.

HLM Findings

At the individual level, all four Fraternal Brotherhood Questionnaire subscales were statistically significant predictors of organizational conformity. We found that accountability brotherhood ($\gamma = -0.21$, $p < .001$) and belonging brotherhood ($\gamma = -0.18$, $p < .001$) were negatively associated with the outcome, while shared social experience ($\gamma = 0.09$, $p < .001$) and solidarity brotherhood ($\gamma = 0.15$, $p < .001$) were positively related to organizational conformity. Affective commitment

(γ = -0.15, p < .001) and ODC (γ = -0.12, p < .001) were negatively related to the outcome. Organizational identification was positively associated with the outcome (γ = 0.11, p = .002). Only one identity/lived experience predictor was statistically associated with the outcome. We found that moderate political leaning (γ = -0.07, p < .05) was negatively associated with organizational conformity after conducting a Dunnett's test.

We found the institution-level brotherhood variable for accountability (γ = -0.36, p < .001) was statistically negatively associated with organizational conformity, while shared social experience (γ = 0.20, p = .001) and solidarity (γ = 0.15, p = .013) were statistically positively associated with the outcome. The conceptualization of brotherhood within a higher education institution's fraternity community may affect a member's organizational conformity.

The final Study 2 model explained 61.5% of the between-group variance in organizational conformity and 25.0% of the within-group variance. The total amount of variance explained by this model reached 27.6%. Additional variance can be explained by the inclusion of additional predictors in the model.

Study 2 Discussion

Affective commitment emerged as a negative predictor of organizational conformity (γ = -0.15, p < .001), meaning that the more emotionally connected one feels to their organization, the less likely they are to assimilate to those around them. This result presents intriguing possibilities, especially when interrupting hazardous behaviors among fraternity members, like drinking (Asel et al., 2015) or hazing practices (Tingley et al., 2018). If organizations instill in their members these emotional ties, aligning with more inclusive masculinities (McCready, Goodman, & Duran, 2023), they are able to shield members from conformist attitudes. As a result, instituting programs about understanding what it means to be emotionally connected to a person while respecting their individual well-being and point of view may be useful.

Nevertheless, affective commitment must be differentiated from organizational identification, which proved to have the inverse relationship with conformity (γ = 0.11, p = .002). Whereas affective commitment signified an emotional investment in the group, organizational identification discusses how people come to associate their fraternity involvement with their identity. From the lens of meaning making (see Baxter Magolda, 2009; Kegan, 1994), when one associates a microsystem like a fraternity as core to who they are, it is difficult to disentangle what their own values and beliefs are—therefore, imbuing a sense of organizational conformity. At its very core, organizational identification may be indicative of a binary that exists between "fitting

in" and not, which problematically reinscribes norms that can reinforce feelings of otherness if they do not conform (Joyce, 2018; Sasso et al., 2024; Zimmerman et al., 2018).

Limitations

There are several limitations of our research. First, our samples are from historically white sororities and fraternities, and participants overwhelmingly identified as white. While our findings may be generalizable to historically white sororities and fraternities and white members, they may not reflect the attitudes and experiences of students in culturally-based sororities and fraternities or members with minoritized racial and ethnic identities. That said, we also do not want to in any way discount the relevance of these findings (e.g., the positive importance of shared social experiences to brotherhood and sisterhood) that previous work (Garcia & Duran, 2021) has demonstrated to be of substantial importance within culturally-based SFL organizations. Second, because we relied on secondary data collected by Dyad, we were unable to match some variables across the two studies (e.g., empathy) or include other variables that may relate to our outcome. Although our findings advance the scholarship on sorority and fraternity members' organizational conformity, future studies would benefit from using consistent variables across sorority and fraternity members and including other variables. Finally, though we accounted for members' organizational conformity during Time 1 in our models, we explicitly remind readers that our findings are non-causal. Future scholarship should continue to examine the relationships and effects of variables in our studies.

General Discussion

Informed by our framework integrating scholarship on meaning making and ecological systems, we turn to contextualize results across both studies. What was consistent across the two samples was that interactions with people different from oneself serve to minimize conformist attitudes. In the fraternity sample, this was evident when it comes to individual ODC attitudes ($\gamma = -0.12$, $p < .001$); in the sorority study, this was present with ODC ($\gamma = -0.11$, $p < .001$) and more inclusive chapter climates ($\gamma = -0.16$, $p < .001$), representing a microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). We emphasize that such findings speak to how the chronosystem animates trajectories, and that though minor changes in ODC (a slight decrease for sorority members, a slight increase for fraternity members) matter on their own, the overriding findings reflect the profound influence of patterns of engagement over time.

Interacting with differences serves as a catalyst for development in one's meaning making (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Kegan, 1994), as it exposes people to novel ways of viewing the world. Engaging with

people different from oneself may be the necessary dissonance for people to challenge their existing frames and value systems. Rather than reproducing the assimilationist attitudes that may manifest (Joyce, 2018; Sasso et al., 2024; Zimmerman et al., 2018), fostering these orientations within members can be integral to breaking harmful cycles and attitudes.

Both studies also demonstrated how fostering siblinghood can be beneficial or a hindrance in shaping conformity. This suggests that one can be integrated in an environment, while still being able to differentiate oneself—principles of more complex meaning making (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Kegan, 1994). Belonging and siblinghood have been associated with productive outcomes for SFL membership (Cohen et al., 2017; McCreary & Schutts, 2015). What these studies underscore is that having a sentiment of belonging to one's organization (a key ecological system) can minimize conformity when fostered with a respect for individuality.

And yet, at the individual level, one of the siblinghood variables that did predict a higher sense of organizational conformity was that of shared social experience ($\gamma = 0.09$, $p < .001$ for fraternity men; $\gamma = 0.17$, $p < .001$ for sorority women). Sororities and fraternities are frequently recognized as places where social connections thrive, both in the immediate micro-system of a chapter and on campus as a whole (Harris & Schmalz, 2016; Ispa-Landa & Oliver, 2020). Having a shared social experience, as revealed through our study, increases the likelihood of conforming to the group, making it more difficult to differentiate oneself from one's environment. Thus, addressing the uniformity of social experiences in sororities and fraternities continues to be a pressing matter for practitioners.

Related, an individual- and group-level variable that negatively predicted conformity across both studies was accountability sisterhood ($\gamma = -0.41$, $p < .001$) and brotherhood ($\gamma = -0.36$, $p < .001$). When contextualized within ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), these findings underscore how the cumulative microsystem of a chapter and its norms could mitigate conformist tendencies. Here, when groups foster an overall commitment to keeping each other accountable, they also open up the possibilities of what it means to exist as an individual in the organization.

Concluding Implications for Research and Practice

Given our past studies regarding SFL contexts, what was intriguing to us was that none of the social identity variables across both studies turned out to be significant. Literature demonstrating the homophilic climates in historically white SFL groups suggests that those who do not fit particular ideals grounded upon whiteness, gendered norms, and more experience exclusion. To learn more about why this may

not have been the case, we encourage qualitative and/or mixed-methods scholars to pursue this research with specific historically marginalized communities. Our hope is that our study can provide a solid foundation for work that meaningfully explores culturally-based SFL membership and evaluates the generalizability of our findings beyond this sample. Additionally, we also question how other actors in different microsystems on and beyond a college campus perceive practices of organizational conformity. Finally, we recognize the need to continue studying the wide variety of outcomes associated with SFL engagement (e.g., hazing) and provide our study as an example of the possibilities for engaging in such work quantitatively.

When it comes to practice, addressing issues of organizational conformity is certainly integral for those working in SFL units, but also presents implications for professionals working in various functional areas at colleges and universities. For instance, our research again underscores the value of promoting inclusive campus organizations and the value in fostering attitudes that are open to diversity among members of a group (and with sororities, lessons of empathy can be applied as well). In this case, doing so can minimize conformist attitudes among those in SFL organizations. We see potential in facilitating programs and trainings that similarly bridge ideas of embracing diversity while promoting one's individuality and the internal voice. Such efforts must be done in ways that reach members at all levels of involvement. These collaborations include campus-based staff as well as individual chapter advisors, who can bridge these relationships across campus and in the community. For advisors, this might even include leveraging off-campus networks as a way to broaden engagement.

These initiatives must be considered in collaboration with the connection that we saw between belonging in one's organization and resisting organizational conformity across both studies. What happens when belonging itself can warp into organizational conformity, in which people can view assimilation as the way to feel belongingness? The answer must be in the ways that processes at all parts of an SFL organization occur—from recruitment to new member education to continued education. Instead of emphasizing messages that there is one way to be an SFL member, practitioners should encourage members to emphasize the values of a sorority or fraternity and that there are multiple ways of living out said values. One such way to do this is by considering the many leadership and development programs hosted by sorority and fraternity life offices. For example, during officer training or emerging scholars programs, sorority and fraternity life staff (including chapter advisors) can emphasize these values through curricular components and workshop offerings.

And finally, the shared social experience that public discourse and media associate with SFL organizations is an area that warrants further

attention. Here is where SFL units can continue to partner with other functional areas (e.g., health centers, cultural centers, student activities) to support prosocial behaviors and alternative social events. These efforts should be collaborative to ensure that they are presented with intention, while recognizing the difficult decisions that are part of saying no to social experiences that may otherwise be shared. Senior student affairs officers, for example, can intentionally cultivate these partnerships as part of the leadership structure, resisting otherwise siloed setups in the organizational structure.

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