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Latina Sorority Involvement and the College Experience: Social and Academic Impact

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LATINA SORORITY INVOLVEMENT AND THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE:
SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC IMPACT

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By

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2009

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SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC IMPACT

By

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Membership in a Latina-based sorority communicates messages to sisters as well as the university community. These messages usually reflected the goals and principles of the organization which is often what attracts women to join. Once they are part of the sorority their affiliation impacts their college experience. This study looks at the effect Greek membership has on participants' social and academic lives. Through narrative analysis the women's responses were examined to understand their perceptions of how joining Delta Tau Lambda Sorority impacted their college experience. The human and rhetorical agency of members was examined through their survey responses. Their experiences reflected that the sorority created an agential space that allowed them to embrace their culture, while providing service to their communities, yet being supported in their educational quests. Limitations are addressed and ideas for further study are provided.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2005, there were 11 million undergraduate students in the United States (U.S.), according to the Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions Report by the U.S. Department of Education's (USDE) National Center for Education Statistics (USDE, 2007). The reasons why individuals pursue higher education are as diverse as their backgrounds. In 1999, the University of Colorado at Boulder conducted a survey of their undergraduates to find out why students attend college. The top three choices selected by participants were to: (a) gain skills and knowledge, (b) obtain a degree to get a job, and (c) become a better person.

Regardless of the reason, "few people will argue the profound effect attending college has in a person's life" (Astin, 2001, p. 1). Undoubtedly, this "profound effect" is nurtured by meeting the needs of students as individuals; recognizing them as diverse, creative, and self-regulating, while seeking to become economically and socially adept (Boyer, 1987). While some individuals grow and develop during their college careers as a result of positive experiences in supportive institutions, this is not the case for all students. Despite the fact that each year students enter college pursuing similar academic goals, the college experience may have a "different effect on different kinds of students" (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005, p. 626). For example, while attending college many majority/Anglo students can live independent lives, free of issues related to their racial or ethnic heritage while students of color, such as Latinas, are often the voice of a race, the spokesperson, whether they want to be or not (Olivas, 2006; Watson, 2002).

Undoubtedly, the educational experience is dynamic; as such, historically within the U.S. different people have had different experiences in institutions of higher education. According to Takaki (1993), the perception of the early English who migrated to what is now the U.S., was

that Indians lacked civilization. Drawing from past scholarship, Morris (1997) asserts that during the mid 1800s members of U.S. dominant society viewed education as the key to assimilating Native Americans. Native people, including the ancestors of Latinos/as, have been viewed as the *other* (Takaki, 1993), “an individual who is perceived by the group as not belonging, as being different in some fundamental way” (Melani, 2001, para. 1). The way Native Americans were treated began a tradition of categorizing non-Whites, “minorities,” as the other in educational settings. This legacy of prejudice against minority cultures in the U.S. has transcended generations.

Statement of Problem

In 2003, Latinos were officially declared the largest minority group in the U.S. by the Census Bureau (www.census.gov), yet they are underrepresented in higher education (USDE, 2002). The underrepresentation of this group has colonial roots, a history too involved to address in this thesis. Challenges for this group often start when they enter elementary school. Many Latinos are marginalized early on by being placed in special education classes based on assumptions from teachers, and because they are beginning to juggle their Latino and American cultures (Cooper, Denner & Lopez, 1999). Consequently, the Latino dropout rate has been high for many decades (Schnailberg, 1998). As noted in the USDE (2003b) Condition of Education 2003 Report, Latinos leave school at a rate of 27%, more than three times the rate of Whites and two times the rate of Blacks. “Latinos continue to be the least educated of all major U.S. ethnic groups,” from elementary to college (Pérez and Rodríguez, 1996 as cited in Rodríguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres & Talbot, 2000, p. 511). Although dropout rates are high for both Latino genders, Latinas tend to have the “lowest graduation rate of any group of girls” (Ginorio & Huston, 2001, p. 2). Once Latinas drop out, they are less likely to return to school, obtain a GED,

or go to college. However, Latinas who graduate have a higher likelihood of going on to postsecondary education leading to higher paying employment opportunities (Romo, 1998). Latinas as it relates to this research stands for women of Latin American roots. This includes women who themselves, their families, or ancestors come from Central America, South America, or the Caribbean. My definition is not about language, it is about cultural heritage.

Research shows that the road to higher education can be difficult for Latinas. Those who make it to college encounter obstacles that threaten their ability to complete their academic goals. According to Rodríguez et al. (2000), the barriers Latinas face as they participate in college are: (a) socioeconomic status, (b) cultural stereotyping, (c) academic under preparation, (d) institutional marginalization, and (e) stress factors. The awareness of the challenges Latinas encounter within higher education aids in the understanding of the significance for this study.

Significance of Study

While the Latino presence has increased in the U.S., their “enrollment in higher education has not kept pace relative to their population growth” (Turner & García, 2005, p. 178). Undoubtedly, enrollment and retention issues need to be addressed as the Latino population continues to rise within the U.S. Given the statement of need, proper support is necessary for Latinas to remain in school because of the additional obstacles they face as a doubly marginalized group due to their ethnicity and gender. Many Latinas want to go to college and be successful in spite of the challenges in their paths (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005).

Knowing the difficulties this group faces to earn a college education, it is important to understand their experiences during postsecondary schooling. Studies such as this one will better assist future generations of scholars, as well as, university staff and administrators. In an effort to fill the void of studies about the Latina experience in higher education, this research addresses

Latina student involvement outside of the classroom, specifically in a Latina-based Greek-letter sorority (LGLS). I chose to focus on this type of student organization because little research has been done on LGLS and the college experience, and also because I am a founder and member of the Latina-based Greek organization, Delta Tau Lambda ($\Delta\text{T}\Lambda$), Sorority, Inc.

To better understand the impact college experiences have on student achievement, scholars have investigated such factors as the impact the university environment, teaching, advising, school activities, and/or involvement in student organizations have on students' college experiences (e.g. Astin, 2001; Light, 2001). Astin's (2001) work suggests that students make individual choices about their academics, and the activities in which they participate. These in turn, shape their personal experiences and their levels of satisfaction with their particular institutions. Light (2001) interviewed graduating seniors and found that students who made connections between what went on inside and outside the classroom reported a more satisfying college experience.

Thus, examining the role that LGLS have on the college experience of Latinas can tell us much about their student engagement, success, and satisfaction. Often, culture-specific organizations in a colligate setting are started to support the special needs of students. For example, during the 1970s, Cuban students experiencing homesickness founded the Cuban American Student Association (CASA) at the University of Florida (Delgado-Romero, Hernández & Montero, 2004). The social organization offered them an opportunity to socialize and identify with other Cuban students. Similarly, Latina-based sororities offer Latinas opportunities to identify with the cultural heritage of fellow members. Padilla, Trevino, González, and Trevino (1997) found that involvement in ethnic student organizations assisted

students of color to bridge the cultural gap between their communities and the predominantly White institution (PWI) they attended.

A number of factors have been identified as important to the retention and success of minority students in American higher education. Saenz, Marcoulides, Junn, and Young (1999) focused on “Tinto's (1993) theory of university departure which identifies academic and social integration as two of the most important factors that keep individuals invested in school” (p. 199). Proper integration into the fabric of higher education is particularly important for Latinas since they are doubly marginalized. These scholars are in line with Rodríguez et al. (2000) which found support networks assist in alleviating feeling of alienation and isolation faced by many Latinas entering higher education, a finding also noted by Olivas in her 1996 and 2006 research of LGLS. Latina support groups provide students with the opportunity to share survival strategies, learn more about their own culture, discuss experiences of marginality, and redefine gender roles (Capello, 1994). The current study will examine narratives of Latinas in a LGLS, the choices they made during their undergraduate careers, and the impact their involvement in the sorority had on their college experience. The data can help administrators better support this student population. Exploring the reason for, and the outcome of, joining a Latina-based sorority will add new insights into an area within communication studies and student life that is now beginning to draw significant scholarly attention.

Past academic research reflects the important role membership in Greek-letter organizations play in the educational success of college students. For example, a longitudinal study by Astin (1999) showed that “students who join social fraternities, sororities, or participate in extracurricular activities, are less likely to drop out of college” (p. 523). Pike's (2003) study of student engagement in Greek organizations found that senior-year members of fraternal

organizations tended to be more involved and had higher academic achievements than students who were not part of the Greek system. He also found that fraternity members experienced greater personal development gains through senior-year than did non-Greeks (Pike, 2003).

Unlike their White and Black Greek counterparts, LGLS are understudied; with limited scholarship focusing on the impact Greek-letter organizations have on members' success (e.g. Delgado-Romero et al., 2004; García, 2005; Layzer, 2000; Muñoz & Guardia, 2009; Patterson, 1998). Of the aforementioned studies only Patterson's (1998) and Layzer's (2000) research focused on a specific Latina sorority both addressed identity and student development. In contrast to these studies, one communication scholar explored issues of identity from a communication studies perspective as it relates to numerous LGLS utilizing critical theory (Olivas, 1996, 2004, 2006, forthcoming; Olivas & Alvarado-Hernández, forthcoming). This study, like Olivas', is from a communication studies perspective. However, it differs in that it specifically investigates the college experience and how membership into a Latina sorority impacts women academically and socially via the messages communicated by the organization and its members. The current research is similar to Patterson and Layzer in that it looks at one Latina sorority. But, it is different because it focuses on the college experience and members' agency and agency development. Outside of Olivas' research, this is the only other study of LGLS from a communication studies perspective. This study is also conducted from an insider perspective, since I am a founder and member of Delta Tau Lambda Sorority. I have been involved in the creation and shaping of the sorority, the establishment of our scholarship, fostering mentorship, and supporting our continued growth. In my role within the organization I have been immersed in driving the sorority forward but had not stopped to think about the impact it had on members' college experiences or the academic implications of membership. I had my

own unexplored point of reference which this research allowed me to study further. It is important that Greek life research is also conducted by Greek members. This is what I have set out to accomplish as an insider of a Latina Greek-lettered organization. In so doing, such studies can serve to provide insights that non-Greek scholars may not be equipped to provide. Although Patterson and Olivas are both honorary members of sororities, they have not experienced the sorority from a day-to-day perspective as a full-member would.

Given that organizations play an important role in socializing students to universities and the ties that fraternal organizations offer, this study will look at the experiences members have had within a particular Latina-based sorority, ΔΤΛ. To better understand the college experience as it related to Greek membership and the impact of a culturally based organization, I utilize agency theory, specifically human and rhetorical agency. The messages communicated by the organization are examined to explore the agential space created within the sorority. The discourse generated by student organizations, create environments in which students persist or desist in their educational quest. In this research I looked at participants' narratives to understand members' perception of how the sorority has affected their college experience, more specifically their social and educational spheres.

Definition of Terms

The ensuing terms are provided to better understand participants' narratives as well as the overall study. Some terms are defined by traditions of Greek-letter organizations rather than the meaning of the actual word.

ΔΤΛ – Delta Tau Lambda Greek letters.

Big Sister – Members who are part of the sorority are big sisters to the women who are going through the process. It is similar to a mentor role.

Chapter – The local group of undergraduate students on a particular campus, or graduate/alumni/professional members in a region, belonging to a Greek organization.

Greek – A member of a fraternity or sorority. It is a general term that embodies all fraternal members regardless of organization affiliation.

Hell week – marks the final week before the intake process ends and pledges became official members of the organization.

Intake Process – The process organizations established to replace pledging which denounces hazing. For many members the term pledging is interchangeable with intake process, but it is not for most national governing bodies of fraternal organizations.

Latina/o-based Greeks – fraternities and sororities that may or may not be composed of only Latina/o members but that have a strong focus on the Latina/o community and related issues.

Line – Potential members going through the process may be referred to as being "on line" or being a line rather than pledging. A line signifies the group of women going through the process at a particular time, usually during a semester or quarter term. The women who go through the process at the same time refer to each other as line sisters or LS.

Mainstream Greek Organizations – Mainstream is used to describe fraternities and sororities that were started for the majority group, also referred to as White Greeks.

Pledges – People going through the pledging process.

Pledging – The process individuals go through to join a Greek-letter organization. Some people use pledging interchangeably with intake process.

Sisterhood – Another word for sorority. Sisterhood and sorority are often used interchangeably.

Sorority – A group of women bonded together by organizational rituals, founding principles, ideals, and aspirations of the group.

Sorors – is short for sorority sister. It is a nickname members of the same sorority call each other, mainly used among Greeks of color.

The chapters that follow will support the need for this study and expand the understanding of Latina-based organization, as well as their impact on members. Chapter 2 offers a literature review related to the college experience including that of women and students of color. It also consists of reviews of Greek life, as well as Black and Latino Greeks. Chapter 3 explains the methodology of the research. Chapter 4 analyzes the survey responses using agency theory to better understand members' narratives. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the study's findings, addresses limitations, and provides suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of current and pertinent literature about the college experience, building towards a discussion of Greek life. Since the focus of this study is on a LGLS the review of literature on college experience will focus primarily on student organizations and peer interactions. Because this research examined students' experiences in a Latina sorority a review on women and students of color's college experiences has been included. To fully understand the mechanisms of a Latina sorority there must be a broader understanding of the Greek system. Fraternities and sororities will be discussed in terms of their roles on campus and their impact on members. The Greek system literature will lead into a review of historically Black fraternities and sororities and Latina/o Greek-letter organizations. The review of Greeks of color and mainstream Greeks literature contrasts experiences in order to identify differences, while also highlighting similarities. Finally, the chapter will conclude with the theoretical perspective used for this research project, related to theories of agency.

The College Experience

How college affects students has been studied for decades and many factors impact the experiences people have in institutions of higher education. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) summarized that the impact of college on students is predominantly based on individuals' efforts and involvement in academics, interpersonal relationships, and extracurricular activities at their institutions. They assert that men and women's efforts, including their engagement with extracurricular activities during their undergraduate careers, are critical determinants of how the college experience is shaped. Their updated research supported their 1991 findings that while in college it is important to building relationships with fellow students, as well as professors, as it is an essential part of developing as individuals (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). As they explored

student interactions more in depth they found that “peer relationships promote positive academic and social self-concepts, self-confidence, and leadership skills” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 614).

From Astin (2001), we understand that the college experience is influenced by what happens inside and outside of the classroom. He found that students who become deeply involved in their studies can become cut off from other aspects of college life. For many students what wove them into the fabric of their institution were their relationships with their peers. Astin (2001) noted that students affect other college students, since “most people see their peers as important sources of influence” (p. 53). Astin’s view on student relationships supports Pascarella and Terenzini’s (2005) conclusion that student persistence and college graduation are impacted by meaningful peer interactions. They argued that “students’ attraction to other students who are like them, including attitudes and values, had a powerful influence in students’ socialization to peer group norms through progressive conformity, which encourages students to adapt their goals and values to accommodate those of the peer group” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 615). Peer support is essential for successful integration into higher education.

Light (2001) found that undergraduates differentiate between two types of learning: academic and interpersonal. *Academic learning* is the knowledge students’ gain from in class instruction, out of class assignments, and course materials. “*Interpersonal learning* involved students’ acquisition of information about and from peers’ backgrounds, perspectives about life, as well as school” (Light, 2001, p. 145). He also explored what student involvement looked like in a traditional campus. He stated that when it came to activities other than courses, students had to seek opportunities on their own through student life program and other avenues, especially in a residential campus. Light (2001) highlighted that college students tend to be involved,

partaking in events outside of academics; often finding ample opportunities to be active. He added:

Whether it was public service, the arts, athletics, a student-run newspaper, special interest groups, or student organizations, an overwhelming majority of students were heavily involved in activities outside-of-class. (Light, 2001, p. 13)

Student involvement in extracurricular activities enhanced student experiences personally. In their research, Logue, Hutchens, and Hector (2005) looked at student leadership acquired through extracurricular activities. They found that the personal benefits and skills gained by being leaders on their campus were positive overall. Students' experience growth as individuals, academically, and professionally. One participant described her college experience as really positive as a result of her leadership development while in school. This growth and development lead to self-understanding (Logue et al., 2005).

Outside-of-class activities can be seen as a second curriculum. Kuh (1995) explored the out-of-class experience and acknowledges that the academic curriculum provides the foundation for colleges, but there are also advantages to extracurricular activities. Like Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), Kuh found that students gained skills from their collegiate involvement such as "critical thinking, as well as relational and organizational skills" (p. 150). He explained that these skills are associated with the satisfactory experiences people account during, and after, college. Out-of-class activities are available to all students who have the time to invest during their postsecondary education. These experiences, which extend beyond academics, tend to enrich people's life through and after graduation. Kuh (1995) found that amongst college friends when they talk about the "good ol' days" they often recall their out-of-class activities, and the peer relationships they fostered, rather than the classes they took.

College Experience of Women

Many women face challenges in everyday life thanks to stereotypes such as being the weaker sex, being emotional, or being less intelligent. These images can carry into the higher educational setting. These stereotypes impact scholastic achievement and for many continue on to influence their self-esteem and identity (Steele, 1997). “Women are the group most victimized by sexist oppression. As with other forms of group oppression, sexism is perpetuated by institutional and social structures; by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress” (hooks, 2000, p. 43). Oppression of this kind and gender stereotypes extend to higher education. In addition to institutionalize oppression there are many inequalities women experience in the classroom. Although not all of these inequalities are malicious, they often manifest as a result of socialization processes rooted in a male dominated society (Gmelch, 1998).

The education of women became a reality thanks to pioneers in the women’s movement; efforts that started well before 1841 when Oberlin College graduated the first three women in the U.S. with bachelor’s degrees (Lasser, 1998). As it relates to women and academia, Solomon (1985) stated that “education has profoundly changed the contours of women’s lives in America. The impact of women’s education has had revolutionary implications for society; however, educated women had still not achieved equal status with men within or outside the realm of education” (p. xvii). Today, women graduate at higher rates than men, 58% according to the USDE (2003a). In spite of the progress women have made, they still face obstacles within higher education, such as gender stereotyping. Many women have to work harder to prove themselves in an academic setting.

If college provided an undifferentiated education bestowed equally on young men and women, then the issue of access would settle the question of gender

inequality. But in fact, women and men experience college differently and face markedly different outcomes. (Jacobs, 1996, p. 167)

Along the line of Jacobs' statement one example of these differences is *occupational segregation* which affects women in college, for some as early as elementary schooling, by impacting their academic choices. Occupational segregation refers to the unequal distribution by gender in career training, education, and employment. The correlation between gender equity and academic achievement is impacted by the breakdown of men and women in educational departments (Bradley, 2000).

Bradley goes on to explain that cultural norms in our society emphasize women as nurturers, which may influence girls and women towards educational choices that lead them into caretaking-based occupations, despite the possibility of making less money. "Such cultural scripts go along with the so-called feminine values fields such as humanities and arts, and masculine values of business, natural sciences, mathematics, and engineering" (Bradley, 2000, p. 4). These experiences in college can be stressful for women when they feel forced to follow an educational path they do not want. Moreover, their identity may be negatively impacted when others look down on them for pursuing a degree in a "masculine value" area.

Jacobs (1996) explored the unequal aspects of education. Jacob, like Bradley (2000), points out that "gender inequality in the U.S. is less a matter of access and more a matter of gender differentiation in educational experiences and outcomes" (p. 177). The college experience for some women is filled with frustration that can impact how they see themselves and their success within higher education. Jones' (1997) study on identity development in college women found that the identities of participants varied greatly depending on the nature of their lived

experiences, as well as perceptions of self influenced by people, events, and occasions. For all, “a significant influence in developing identity was their college experience” (p. 382).

College Experience of Students of Color

People of color have been viewed as the other in this country for centuries and have been fighting against stereotypes since the immigration of European settlers. The change in access to higher education has led to an environmental evolution of the homogenous White campuses:

Today's student body represents a tapestry of differentiation in social background, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, lifestyle, and sexual orientation. This has resulted not only in the colorization of the academy, but in the proliferation of a constellation of students that challenge traditional values, assumptions, and conventions which have long been entrenched in the academy. (Rendón, 1994, p. 33)

However, diversification of education has come at a price for many minorities. Students of color face challenges relating to perceptions of their under preparation and being admitted into college for reasons other than their merit.

Scholars have noted that these students often experience college very differently from their White counterparts, especially in predominantly White institutions. Watson et al. (2002) examined the reality of campus culture and found that many students of color start out excited about their schools because of the diversity showcased during the courting phase of recruitment. However, Watson and colleagues reported that students were disappointed when they uncovered the reality of their culturally homogeneity institutions. According to these researchers, sometimes students feel deceived or blatantly lied to in such situations. Besides their institutions'

misrepresentation of diversity, students of color have to deal with how they are perceived by others on campus.

Watson et al. (2002) also addressed how students of color are “often placed in a role of spokesperson for their racial and ethnic groups, a role they are expected to play in nonminority settings” (p. 67). Such experiences, and the negative perceptions some majority students hold, makes it difficult for many minority college students to develop interpersonal relationships with their White peers (Guiffrida, 2003). This can be exacerbated by the fact that at PWIs, “they were often the only Blacks in their classes, residence hall floors, or places of employment” (Guiffrida, 2003, p. 309). The expectation to represent an entire race, while fighting off unspoken stereotypes, adds pressure and further disappoints many students of color in postsecondary education.

Students’ experiences are shaped by the knowledge that they are taken at face value, not as individuals. The expectations placed on minority students are outside of their control. This can be stressful for people of color in higher education, a fact that is complicated by the fact that they do not see many images of themselves across campus. It is difficult for some students when there is a void in representation of students and professors of color in their institutions (Watson et al., 2002). For people of color to successfully navigate college they need a support system to counteract the negative experiences they deal with. The literature on college experience and peer groups by Astin (2001) and Light (2001) supports Watson et al.’s (2002) contention that:

The importance of establishing relationships with individuals on the collegiate campus is important for all students, but this issue becomes a matter of utmost importance for the minority student. The importance of these relationships are attributed to the incongruity between individuals and institutional cultural patterns

and norms, such as, the lack of commitment to diversity and multiculturalism. (p. 102)

At times students of color self-segregate in educational settings. In many high school lunchrooms across the U.S. the racial divide is very evident (Tatum, 2003). In a similar fashion, Villalpando (2003) noted that “students of the same race or ethnicity tend to congregate together on college campuses, whether it is in the residence or dining halls, or simply in conversational groups on campus” (p. 619). He goes on to say that college groupings are not thought of uncommon, or bring about the same sort of attention, when it involves White students. Tatum (2003) explained that there is a need for groups of Black people to come together in predominantly White environments because there are not the same opportunities to share, via planned and unplanned encounters, as there are in predominantly African American communities.

Students of color often share a common bond due to similar experiences. They “self-segregate” in order to support each other in a group where they feel safe and understood (Olivas, 2006; forthcoming). In Olivas’ (2004) book chapter about the identity negotiation of LGLS women, she observed that “higher education has traditionally been unavailable and nonsupportive to any group of people other than 18 to 25 year-old White males” (p. 241). In Villalpando’s (2003) study, a student in a PWI shared the following reasons for joining a Chicano-based student organization:

I decided to attend one of the first meetings of the semester of the Young Democrats student organization. They had a hard time relating to me. Beginning with the president asking if he could call me “Mocky” for short since they could not pronounce Cuahutémoc. Their goals and mission had absolutely nothing to do with achieving political equality. They were more worried about bake sales and

organizing a mixer for the local congressional candidate. Give me a break! When I finally attended my first MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán] meeting later that semester, the first issue they discussed was their ongoing volunteer tutoring program for Spanish-speaking children at the local elementary school – and, they did not propose to change my name. They actually understood the indigenous roots and historical significance of my name! (p. 631)

In line with these findings, Rendón (1994) looked at diverse students' development in college. She pointed out that students often felt “alienated and intimidated by the college culture” when they did not fit the stereotypic affluent, White student profile (p. 34). In her research many students expressed a desire to eliminate perceptions of them as incapable of learning. Doing so is important since students of color who feel that they do not fit into the culture of an institution have a much more difficult time succeeding. Similar to the conclusions drawn by Watson et al. (2002), Rendón (1994) found that relationship building was important for students to be invested in and tied to their college. In particular, learning was enhanced when student took the initiative to become more involved in their college. For example, they met with professors regularly and were involved in various student organizations.

The study showed that those students who became involved in the social and academic fabric of the institution appeared to be more excited about learning. These were students who met with their instructors regularly and who were members of clubs and organizations. (Rendón, 1994, p. 39)

Furthermore, Rendón (1994) summarized the need for validation of students of color in institutions of higher education:

What is needed is the active academic and interpersonal validation of these students. Students who get no validation, or who experience invalidating situations in class, will likely rely on out-of-class validation to carry them through. However, not all students are able to get out-of-class validation. In fact, some students may actually be invalidated outside of the classroom. Some minority students related that their friends made them feel like they were wasting their time attending college. Some family members actually discourage students from going to school. These are among the most fragile students, who in the absence of both in and out-of-class validation will likely leave college. (p. 45)

Rendón (1994) argued that students, no matter how emotionally frail, can become invested in college academics and engaged in social communities with the proper support and guidance from their institutions. She showed a further need for positive interactions for students of color which include positive and validating relationships outside of the classroom with faculty and peers which is supported by the extant literature in this area (Austin, 1999; Boyer, 1987; Light, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Watson et al., 2002).

Another group of scholars, Saenz et al. (1999), support Rendón's findings. They explored social integration as it relates to the college experience of students of color, Saenz and colleagues found that when students feel they do not fit in or who have negative experiences in school they are more likely to dropout. Social integration was conceptualized as evolving from attending campus events and performances, such as sports activities, plays, or other fine arts events. (Saenz et al. 1999). They also highlighted that involvement in campus organizations and volunteer work promoted student retention. Like others in the field, Saenz et al. noted the importance of, and need for, positive peer interaction and student satisfaction in higher education. Zea, Reisen, Beil,

and Caplan's (1997) study also supported the impact of peer interaction highlighting the impact negative peer relationships have on student success. As positive interactions can help, negative interactions can impact attrition. The need for positive peer relationships can be more important for students of color in their quest to persist in college.

Jones, Castellanos, and Cole (2002) explored minority student experiences in a predominantly White institution. There were mixed findings regarding the students' experiences at the university. In their research, students shared that race and ethnicity had an important part in the experiences while in college (Jones et al., 2002). They also found that two out of their three focus groups "voiced a sense of alienation and reported that they had faced discrimination, whereas several students in one group reported having fewer problems with such issues" (Jones et al., 2002, p. 28). The students who stated they had lesser problems with prejudice were in the minority, echoing the findings of other research such as Rendón's (1994).

Positively embracing the experiences of the spokesperson (Watson et al., 2002), the students in Jones et al. (2002) study talked about their desire to involve, represent, and aid their communities. The students acknowledged their multiple roles within their collegiate experience and found that for them classes were only part of the equation. They "expressed a responsibility and a sense of obligation, to represent and voice their opinions in order to make a difference in their community. Students saw themselves as a part of society, instrumental in changing stereotypes and racist minds, while also, consciously representing diversity" (Jones et al., 2002, p. 29). The study's participants held a strong sense of responsibility to give back to their communities and emphasized the importance of assisting "their people."

Like Astin (2001), Kuh (1995), and Light (2001), Jones et al. (2002) also explored student involvement. They found that taking part in student life is a critical component to the

college experience. Latinos, for example, emphasized the value of engaging in the greater campus life endeavors at their university. The students highlighted the significance of being active on campus as well as “being a change agent and influential in a PWT” as students of color (Jones et al., 2002, p. 30). In his research, Light (2001) found that students felt that ethnic and racial organizations played a highly constructive role on their campus. Many understood that the primary purpose of each student organization is to offer diverse students a place to “meet, mingle with, and enjoy friends from similar backgrounds” (Light, 2001, p. 199). He found that:

Many students expressed that it was critical for leaders of student organizations to keep in mind that they have an opportunity to make major contributions to the campus as a whole, going beyond just their organizations’ created, sponsored, and organized cultural events. (p. 199)

Such activities give student groups an opportunity to celebrate their “culture, background, special interest, and customs while simultaneously sharing them with the wider campus community” (Light, 2001, p. 199). As such, fraternal organizations too offer men and women the ability to create bonds based on shared interest (Olivas, 2006; forthcoming).

College Experience of mainstream Fraternities and Sororities Members

Greek-letter organizations have been around for centuries. According to Kimbrough (2003) the first fraternity created was Phi Beta Kappa at the College of William and Mary in the late 1700s. This organization gave way to a new way of life and involvement for students at institutions of higher learning. The Greek system now is met with mixed reviews. Some universities see it as a great leadership opportunity for students, while others find no benefit to, or correlation with, the standards set by the institutions. In the 1980s there was a wide spread effort across U.S. colleges to reform fraternities and sororities, with some schools eliminating the

organizations from their campus altogether. The push to change or improve Greek life revolved around colleges that did not find value in these types of organizations (Neuberger & Hanson, 1997). Additionally, findings from studies exploring traditional White fraternities and sororities ignited anti-Greek sentiments. For example, a review of literature from the 1980s and 1990s conducted by Pike (2003) revealed that membership in fraternal organizations was associated with higher levels of drinking, lower levels of personal development, and lower levels of academic achievement, which are traditional stereotypes of Greek life.

To this day, many university staff share concerns about the effect fraternities and sororities have on students' grade point averages (GPA). Grubb's (2006) research at the University of Delaware found that "Greeks had a one to two percent lower overall GPA by their senior year than non-Greeks" (p. 1102). On the other hand, fraternal members were in a better place to graduate on time. He also found that more Greek students had GPAs above the minimum requirement set by their institution as well as declared majors sooner, opposed to students who were not part of fraternities and sororities. According to Grubb, given what people get out of Greek organizations during and after college – leadership, networking opportunities, lifelong friendships – the one to two percents gap in GPA does not seem that meaningful to many people who sought membership in a fraternal groups.

Pascarella et al. (1996) examined the results of the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL). This survey of 18 universities and five community colleges, looked at the cognitive effects of Greek affiliation. The NSSL data showed that fraternities had lower levels of comprehension, mathematics, critical thinking, and composite achievement by the end of their first year. Pascarella, Nora, Edison, Hagedorn, and Terenzini (1994) study supports the findings of Pascarella et al. (1996) in which they found that Greek membership had a negative impact on

participants, specially White males. The NSSL results for sororities showed that reading comprehension and composite achievement were negatively affected. Out of this survey strong encouragements emerged to evaluate the purpose of Greek organizations and the institutions' mission as did Neuberger and Hanson (1997).

Along with the academic and social behavior concerns that stem from being in a fraternal organization, mainstream sororities have additional stereotypes. Handler's (1995) explored the stereotypes of sorority member's concern about finding a husband. Participants in her research perpetuated the stereotype that women are catty, and that women in sororities have little substance. While there are many studies that cast Greek membership in a bad light there are others who see it as a positive experience for students.

Neuberger and Hanson (1997) studied the efforts of Dickinson College to evaluate their Greek system due to the administration's concerns about the value of these types of organizations and the effects they had on students. In spite of the negative views of the fraternal system at Dickinson the Greek members were able to impress the Committee by demonstrating their affection and loyalty to their organizations. In their responses fraternity and sorority representatives:

Identified the benefits derived from Greek membership, which included such claims as the ability of fraternities to make integration into campus life easier, the sense of community and lasting friendships they provide. They also highlighted opportunities fraternal organizations provide to develop leadership and social skills and to perform social service, their encouragement of high ideals and academic achievement, and the network of contacts they engendered that would extend beyond college. (Neuberger & Hanson, 1997, p. 95)

The sentiments expressed by the students in Dickinson are supported by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) who found that fraternal organizations positively impact different aspects of members' lives such as their interpersonal skills, community orientation, and civic engagement. Overall they found that what had negative impact on students most times did not have a lasting effect past college. Ultimately, the Committee conducted a review of academics, student conduct, and overall attitudes of Greek members. Their findings did not confirm that being in a Greek organization interfered with the mission of the college (Neuberger & Hanson, 1997).

Hayek, Carini, O'Day, and Kuh (2002) researched the levels of engagement by Greek members. They found that "students who belong to Greek-letter organizations did not fare worse, in many cases they fared better than other students in terms of their levels of engagement in educationally effective practices" (Hayek et al., 2002, p. 657). They went on to share that given their efforts in and out of class, students felt they advanced academically and personally at their institutions. They speculated that this success may stem from the new guidelines being set by the national bodies of fraternal organizations, and the proactive engagement of student affairs staff. This research focus on what the university can do to create a better relationship with fraternities and sororities. They stated:

An institution-wide focus on good educational practices can only enhance the quality of the undergraduate experience for all students, including members of Greek organizations. The premise is that a rising tide will lift all boats, meaning that as the quality of the educational experience increases for all students, members of Greek organizations will also benefit. (Hayek et al., 2002, p. 659)

The suggestions made by Hayek et al. go along with Kuh's (1995) notion of the outside-of-class experience and how it plays an important role in student development which shapes the college experience.

Historically Black Greeks

The creation of Black Greek-letter organizations (BGLO) originated from their segregation from White fraternities and sororities since historically White Greek-letter fraternities and sororities typically excluded minorities (Alpha, Phi Alpha, n.d.; Giddings, 1988; Wight, 1996). Greeks of color emerged out of need, to support students socially and civically via fraternities and sororities. Giddings (1988) stated that these organizations were created "out of a desire to form social bonds with like-minded students" (p. 18). Due to the fact that Black students did not have access to the mainstream Greek system, they created their own organizations, the first being Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity founded in 1906 at Cornell University. There were other attempts to start Greek societies prior to 1906, but the first and lasting was Alpha Phi Alpha (Kimbrough, 2003). Discrimination has plagued fraternities and sororities for many years. Perhaps not as rampant as a decades ago, racism continues to impact Greek life (Heidenreich, 2006); as demonstrated by fraternity members at Auburn who painted their faces black for a party (Lords, 2001). These racist experiences and sentiments continue to help the membership growth for Black fraternities and sororities, as, does the need to belong to an organization that focuses on the academic and career success of Black members.

Guiffrida (2003) cited Tinto's (1993) theory of departure as it relates to African American organizations. He focused on Tinto's notion that "college students who perceive their norms, values, and ideas as congruent with those at the center of their institution they are more likely to become academically and socially integrated into college" (Guiffrida, 2003, p. 304). In

his study, Guiffrida found that the affiliation in African American organizations promoted cultural connections for Black students and social integration into the university. A student in Guiffrida's (2003) study explained that he met a lot of his friends through his membership in Black organization. Because his classes did not have a lot of African Americans, the groups he joined connected him to his community. The involvement with these organizations also allowed students to give back to other African Americans.

Like mainstream Greeks, BGLO have had their share of negative press due to cases of hazing in both fraternities and sororities. Kimbrough (1997) explored the intake process of Black Greeks. In his review, Kimbrough found that hazing has had a long tradition in college stemming from the negative practices used on first year students who were degraded both mentally and physically. He explained that when Black colleges tried to get rid of hazing, fraternities decided to build the practice into their initiation process during hell week.

In the 1990s Black Greek organizations changed their policies in order to reduce the risk of hazing going from pledging to a membership intake process (Kimbrough, 1997). However, some doubt that membership intake will stop organizations from finding ways to still "pledge" prospective members. Incidents related to hazing have continued to occur well after the official change to the new intake procedures. Roberts and Wooten (2008) felt that this change could be successful. They state that in addition to establishing these new practices, "BGLOs may need to revisit their missions to ensure that they still embody the positive deviance that has energized member engagement" (p. 284).

While there may be some similarities within fraternal organization there are also substantial differences that impact the college experience amongst White and Black Greeks. When Pascarella et al. (1996) examined the NSSL data they found that joining a fraternity was a

modest positive effect for men of color compared to the negative findings for White men.

Amongst the negative views of fraternities and sororities there are many positive reasons to join a Black fraternal organization. For example, in his 1995 study, Kimbrough found that Black Greeks experienced leadership development through participation in their fraternities and sororities. Roberts and Wooten (2008) explained:

From their inception, Black Greek-letter organizations have provided a forum for African Americans to fulfill their personal need for affiliation and belongingness, to develop leadership abilities, and to collectively engage in social action for the betterment of the Black community. (p.273)

Latina/o Greeks

Much like the founding of Black Greek organizations, Latino fraternities and sororities were born out of need to support and empower this multiethnic and bilingual group. Like their Black counterparts, Latinos attending various colleges across the U.S. founded their respective organizations as a consequence of discrimination (Delgado-Romero et al., 2004; Olivas, 1996, 2004, 2006; forthcoming; Olivas & Alvarado-Hernández, forthcoming). For example, at the University of Florida some Latino and Black students felt it was not easy to be accepted into the mainstream Greek life at their school. They worried about being attacked because of racism and not being able to pay fees and dues (Delgado-Romero et al., 2004). The choice not to join a predominantly White fraternal organization for some Latino students is an issue of comfort, being that many Latinos want to celebrate their cultures. They want more than friends in their fraternity brothers and sorority sisters; they want a family. One of the participants in Guardia and Evans' (2008) study stated that speaking Spanish with fellow members of their Latino fraternity was like speaking Spanish with his own family. Aspects of membership such as language and

familiarity are what attract Latinos not only to Latino-based fraternities, but to LGLS as well (Guardia & Evans, 2008; Layzer, 2000; Olivas, 1996, 2006, forthcoming; Olivas & Alvarado-Hernández, forthcoming; Patterson, 1998). Little research has been done on the college experience of Latina/o Greek-letter organizations. Guardia and Evans (2008) explored ethnic identity development of Latino fraternity members. Through their qualitative research they learned that involvement was an important part of their membership and collegiate experience. Their participation in their communities helped shape their identity as Latino males. A member remarked that it was their culture that defined them as an organization. To members it was more than a fraternity when culture was involved; it turned into a family that supported them and shaped their experiences. Membership facilitated identity exploration and development, as well as, expanding their awareness of their own ethnic group and the overall Latino community (Guardia & Evans, 2008).

Like Black Greeks, Latina/o Greeks attempted to establish long-lasting fraternal organizations. In 1931, two fraternities came together to specifically support the needs of Latino men, predominantly international students from Latin America (Olivas 2006; forthcoming), in universities in the U.S. “Both groups [agreed to merge](#) and unified under one name, Phi Iota Alpha, making it the first Latino Fraternity” (Phi Iota Alpha, n.d.). The first Latina sorority would come forty-four years later. With similar goals of supporting Latinas attending college, Lambda Theta Alpha was founded in 1975 at Kean University (Lambda Theta Alpha, n.d.). “The number of Latino Greek-letter organizations (LGLO) grew substantially, especially during the 1980s and 1990s” (Guardia & Evans, 2008, p. 165), with LGLS rapidly multiplying across the U.S. in the 1990s (Olivas, 2006). Today, it is estimated that there are more than 75 LGLOs but this number is difficult to verify since many groups are not part of an umbrella organization

(Kimbrough, 2003) such as the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organization (NALFO, n.d.) which represents 13 sororities and 8 fraternities. Nationally, there are currently 28 active LGLS (Olivas & Alvarado-Hernández, forthcoming), many of which continue to expand.

Latino-based Greeks have encountered obstacles when attempting to be recognized as fraternal organizations. Delgado-Romero et al., 2004; García, 2005; Layzer, 2000; Olivas 1996, 2006; and Patterson, 1998 have addressed issues faced by a Latina sorority as they tried to establish a chapters in universities throughout the U.S. In Delgado-Romero et al.'s (2004) study, the sorority researched “encountered strong resistance from the university staff when working with Greek life. Their primary concern was one of viability: would this organization achieve minimum membership numbers? How would this organization survive on a campus with so many other Greek organizations?” (p. 245). Ultimately, they were asked what many Latinas have heard when they set out to start Latina-based sororities; why not join an existing organization? The mere act of trying to be recognized on some campuses can be difficult for LGLS.

Sisterhood in Color

Because of the cultural component of Latina/o-based fraternal groups, most LGLOs have modeled their organizations after BGLOs; hence why many Latina sororities are compared to Black sororities. In the case of sororities of color their needs for forming include both gender and race with which both African American women and Latinas contend with on their college campuses. Paula Giddings (1988), in the history of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, stated that “racism, sexism, and a sense of racial obligation helped shape the Black Greek-letter groups” (p.18). Layzer (2000) explained “where Black women can unite around shared historical oppression, Latina women can unite around the ethnic label ‘Latina’ and its implications of shared historical oppression” (p. 8), a theme also noted in the work of Olivas (1996).

For college women who participate in sororities their experiences are impacted by the relationships they forge. Handler (1995) explained that the ties that bring sisters together are more meaningful than that of friends; thus, the relationships among sisters surpass the expectations of friendships. She goes on to state that the bonds shared by Greek women are often credited to their organization. Handler (1995) shares what brings women together in sisterhood:

In many ways, sororities are a celebration of women's friendships. They are the embodiment of the relational model of women's nature: women need each other. Sororities help satisfy that need; however, women in sororities need each other not only for the intrinsic value of their emotional bonds, but also as a guiding force in the navigation through the heterosexual culture of college and Greek life.

(p. 252)

These shared experiences strengthened the bond among women in Latina-based sorority as well.

Olivas (1996) and Layzer (2000) both examined the founding of Latina sororities. Olivas engaged in a comprehensive study of numerous LGLS chapter founding and development in the U.S. while Layzer observed one Latina sorority's efforts to start a chapter at a university. In Layzer's and Olivas' studies, the women wanted to form close bonds in the absence of family, to have people they could relate to, and to share experiences. One of the participants expressed that she "wanted to be with people who spoke the same language, and had the same roots, especially in a big university campus" (Layzer, 2000, p. 16). Beyond a sense family, LGLOs formed as a means of regaining and/or preserving members' ethnic identities. For example, by transforming their Greek names into Spanish names, or a mix of the two (Olivas, 1996, forthcoming), Latinos have injected their culture into Greek life.

The desire to create an organization that is culturally specific can be seen as a form of segregation as explored by Olivas (2006; forthcoming), Tatum (2003), and Villalpando (2003). However, as previously discussed organizations for students of color help students integrate into the campus and to persevere through graduation. Olivas (2006) suggests that the self-segregation of Latina sororities “supported the women to safely express [themselves], and thus negotiate, their racial/ethnic identities, while allowing them to develop leadership skills they may not have been able to develop in co-educational or White-dominated organizations” (p. 160). Many women in Latina-based organizations want the best of both worlds, a group of their own that supports them and a campus that acknowledges them.

Layzer (2000) research addressed the issue of acknowledgement. The participants wanted to be recognized by both the Greek system at their university, as well as the Latino community on campus. As with the sorority in Delgado-Romero et al.’s (2004) research, the group of women in Layzer’s (2000) study talked about their struggles to be recognized:

With all the barriers that they put for our organization to be considered and respected as a Greek organization, I do believe it’s a way of oppression. It is a way of keeping the power for certain people, and not for the rest. (p.25)

It can be difficult for women in these groups to face the constant challenges to integrate into the campus in their own terms. “Latina sororities serve as sanctuaries where members are shielded from hostile external forces, including those who view them as inferior” (Olivas, 1996, p. 32). Unfortunately, for many students of color they are marginalized in their own educational institutions which make organizations such as Latina-based sororities more than a luxury but an imperative part of their success.

Being part of a LGLO has components of identity and personal development along with academic and social growth. Olivas (1996; 2006) found that Latina-based sororities look to enhance career paths and the social engagement of members, while also participating in organizational activities, including community service, which provides a means for (re)constructing their “racial/ethnic” identities and/or maintaining their cultural heritage. For many women in Layzer’s (2000) study their heritage and dedication to service went hand in hand. Hurtado and Carter (1997) explained that for Latinos to feel comfortable and invested at PWIs they had to build and maintain connections in and outside of the college environment. This reflects why community service tends to be so important for Latino-based organizations. Layzer stated that in the sorority context, the participants in her study talked about sisterhood in terms of solidarity, defining themselves, establishing “resist-stances,” and performing a service to the community. Working together in community endeavors and supporting each other through their college careers bring about a sense of camaraderie for LGLS members.

Theoretical Perspective

Fraternal affiliation has been looked at from many theoretical perspectives; for the purpose of this study agency theory will guide the research. “The term agency is polysemic and ambiguous, it can refer to invention, strategies, authorship, institutional power, identity, subjectivity, practices, and subject positions, among others” (Campbell, 2005, p. 1). Agency encompasses different aspects from organizational to individual. In the case of ΔΤΛ some members joined possessing a strong sense of agency while others developed their agency through the organization. The focus of this study will be on rhetorical and human agency. *Rhetorical agency* is the ability to question, which leads to the creation of meaning and reason (Turnbull, 2004). *Human agency* refers to the ability people possess to create meaning and

handle situation they come up in their lives (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Turnbull (2004) stated that “agency can be understood as a fundamental property of questioning that arises from the necessity of questioning as the foundation of reason. Rhetorical agency is thus a defining characteristic of humanity” (p. 208).

According to Emirbayer and Mische (1998) the concept of human agency emerged from John Locke’s (1978) rejection of traditional thinking, his value of personal experiences, and his belief in the societal relationships among people. Bandura (2000) explained the role of people in the acquisition of agency as follows:

People are in part products of their environments, but by selecting, creating, and transforming their environmental circumstances they are producers of environments as well. This enables them to influence the course of events and to take a hand in shaping their lives. (p. 75)

As it relates to this study, the participants have chosen not only to be part of a sorority, but a specific organization with a prescribed target group — a Latina-based sorority. Their decision to join such a group has shaped their lives as undergraduate students and as professional women. Through their choices and experiences rhetorical and human agency can be explored as associated by Geisler (2004) who suggested that “one of the comforts of the traditional model of humanistic agent was the close link between the mission of rhetoric and the concept of rhetorical agent” (p. 15).

Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) define the conception of agency as fundamentally imbedded socially and in relationships. They feel that “since [agency] centers around the engagement and disengagement by actors of the different contextual environments that constitute their own structured yet flexible social universes” (p. 973). When studying sorority members

there is expectation that member experiences will be both social and relational due to the nature of the organization. Hence, agency goes beyond the individual; it can also be used to understand the collective. Bandura (1989) summarized that:

Persons are neither autonomous agents nor simply mechanical conveyers of animating environmental influences. Rather, they make causal contribution to their own motivation and action within a system of triadic reciprocal causation.

(p. 1175)

For the purpose of this project, I will explore how agency is manifested in individuals and their environs, in particular contexts such as LGLS.

Gasman and Payton-Stewart (2006) looked at agency from an outsider's perspective studying a Black sorority. In her work, Gasman addressed how her personal experiences with African American professors put in perspective her reality as a member of the majority group. Through these interactions she became interested in learning more about the Black community. Gasman's friendship with Payton-Stewart, a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first historically Black sorority, allowed her to gain access to sorority information and history that helped her research on philanthropic efforts of African American sororities. In the study Gasman explored and sought to understand the course Black women charted in Greek organizations, the impact these organizations have had on members and the communities they service. She felt captivated by the women's agency and leadership. The current research on a Latina sorority will similarly look at agency but instead of the organization as a whole, it will examine narratives of members in order to explore how agency emerges for individual women.

The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions of members of a Latina-based sorority. These women have joined an organization that communicates certain messages and

expectations to members and non-members. In the literature reviewed, it has been noted that participating in extracurricular activities shapes the college experience. This study sets out to understand how membership in a Latina sorority shapes the experiences of their members. Being that sororities have a prescribed purpose, be it social, academic, service, and/or a combination of the aforementioned, the agency of the members may be affected. Sorority members are individuals, yet they are also part of an entity, a Greek organization with a driving purpose. Within the sorority's identity-related constraints, I examined how agency plays out for LGLS membership vis-à-vis their personal beliefs, identities, academic interests, and so forth; since agency shapes the lives of members due to the questioning of their experiences, environment, surrounding, and relationships.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The current study used a qualitative research approach, via a survey, which allowed me to understand the unique experiences of participants. While this type of data is not statistically generalizable, it provides insights that quantitative methods may miss as explained by Watson et al. (2002):

Qualitative research assigns value to the ‘voice’ of the participant. Qualitative research models seek to uncover patterns of relationships among the voices of participants within the community. Researchers seek a holistic understanding of how participants within the phenomenon construct meaning and use this newly created framework in a practical manner. (p.26)

This chapter will discuss the methodological aspects of the current study. Most of the research on Latina Greeks explored herein have been qualitative in nature and revolved around identity. A qualitative research method worked best for this study as well since it sought to understand the experiences sorority members had during their collegiate career in relationship to their sorority. Qualitative exploration allowed the voices of the participants to be heard and for me to explore commonalities and underlined messages. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explained that it is not easy to narrowly identify this type of research. There are many methods within the qualitative realm hence there are many ways to conduct studies. This wide range of opportunities for academic exploration is what appealed to me as the researcher.

My expectation was that women’s experiences within a Latina sorority would be varied. To truly appreciate their perceptions of membership there was a need for academic research that allowed the uniqueness of their voices to come through while at the same time bringing their messages together. Watson et al. (2002) explained that “qualitative research models seek to

uncover patterns of relationships among the voices of participants within the community” (p. 26). The current study sought to find patterns of relationships among participants’ perceptions who are members of a Latina-based sorority. Qualitative studies focus on people, organizations, and the like, in their natural habitat, which allows researchers to try and make sense of life occurrences and the meanings people give them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Since this study is based on responses provided via an electronic survey I required a tool that would allow me to bridge said narratives, hence the use of interpretive approach. This approach “views research as nonlinear, recursive process in which data collection, data analysis, and interpretation occurs throughout the study and influence each other” (Willis, Jost & Nilakanta, 2007, p. 202).

Participants

With permission of the National Board of Delta Tau Lambda Sorority, Inc. members were invited to participate in the study via email. In January 2009 the national board also voted and approved the use of the real name of the organization, Delta Tau Lambda Sorority, Inc. The message sent provided a link to an anonymous 10-question survey through an electronic service. While the organization and the participants were in agreement to use the name of the sorority, I chose to make the survey anonymous in the hopes that members would feel more comfortable with answering questions honestly. Given my insider role I did not want the women to feel like they would be penalized in any way for their honesty. While I have knowledge of LGLS I was cognizant of the potential limitations that could occur had the survey not been confidential, such as participants not exploring less than positive experiences. On the other hand, as a result of my affiliation with this organization, I do bring an understanding of this particular sorority and its membership, thus affording me a history of knowledge that can be used to assist in determining unfounded biases. I took my role of researcher with the utmost respect; as such I was *reflexive* in

the analysis process, reflecting on my experiences and interpretation in order to help ensure that I was not bringing in my personal bias to the study, while also keeping in mind the possible biases in the responses. Reflexivity is “where researchers engage in explicit self-aware meta-analysis” (Finlay, 2002, p. 209).

Only members who joined the sorority during their undergraduate college years were asked to respond. Participation was voluntary, and no academic or monetary compensation was given. Responses included current collegiate members and sorority alumnae. At the time the survey data was collected the sorority had chapters in Alabama, Illinois, Florida, Michigan, and Texas. In addition there were members in Arizona, California, Nevada, and Oregon where no chapters of the sorority had been established. Out of the 8 collegiate chapters 4 are in residential campuses and the other 4 are in commuter campuses. However, the residential campuses had the highest number of members and alumnae at the time this survey was conducted.

Thirty members started the survey but 27 completed both the demographic and questionnaire portions. The participants’ ethnic/racial breakdown was:

Chilean	3.30%
Columbian	6.70%
Cuban/Cuban American	3.30%
Dominican/ Dominican American	3.30%
Ecuadorian	3.30%
Mexican/Mexican American	30.00%
Nicaraguan	3.30%
Puerto Rican	30.00%
Latina Other	6.70%
Multiracial	16.70%
Non-Latina	3.30%

The average age of respondents was 23. Eleven of the participants were attending a university, 2 had stopped out - meaning they stopped going to school, had not graduated, but intended to return at some point - and 14 had graduated. Ninety percent spoke both English and Spanish and 53.3% were first generation college students. Of the 27 women who completed the survey portion, eight had not researched other sororities prior to joining Delta Tau Lambda, while 18 did seek information on other organizations. Of the 18, 1 considered a White sorority, 1 explored a Black sorority, 11 looked into other Latina sororities, 2 researched both Black and multicultural sororities, 2 looked into Black, multicultural, and Latina sororities, and 1 sought information on White, multicultural and Latina sororities.

Delta Tau Lambda Sorority, Incorporated

Delta Tau Lambda was founded on April 2, 1994 at the University of Michigan by Maria Victoria Ramos and myself. We saw a need at our campus for an organization that offered more than a social sorority. We wanted an organization that supported Latinas cultural as well as offered civic engagement and personal development. Our mission was to build a sorority that would bring about change to our communities through service, while working with women that strived for academic achievement, professionalism, and leadership. The driving purpose of the organization is to work with young Latinas to see education as a tool to attain their goals. The organization also recognizes the importance of building bonds within the Latino community and other communities of color.

Delta Tau Lambda has 8 collegiate chapters, one interest group, and 5 professional/alumni chapters across the U.S. Commitment to academics is supported by the Lydia Cruz and Sandra Maria Ramos scholarship that was established in 1995. The scholarship is awarded annually to a Latina high school student attending a 2 or 4 year institution of higher

education. Members also support both local and national service endeavors. The sorority recognizes breast cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and mental health as their national charitable causes.

The mission of ΔTA is to build and strengthen Latinas' position in society through community service, commitment, and professionalism. Members unite to develop and empower Latinas, women of color and women in general through personal evolution and teamwork. They have built a strong foundation of resources through networking and community connections. The sorority is a collaboration of diverse women creating opportunities for growth and change.

Empowerment to ΔTA means to support Latinas and all women with their personal goals and to strengthen their voices as individuals. Members of the organization want sisters and all other women to embrace their identities and self-worth. This is supported by assisting young Latinas to gain confidence in themselves through education events, and the establishment of high school mentorship groups. The commitment to member empowerment is supported through professional development and an annual national retreat where members from all chapters come together to network, participate in a service project, and discuss sorority business.

Procedure

There were 10 open-ended questions that comprised the survey along with demographic data. Because the survey was anonymous, member narratives included in this study were given pseudo names. Given that no names were collected ensuring anonymity was simple. All responses were stored electronically through the serviced utilized.

Member narratives helped to understand why the women in the study decided to join a Latina sorority. Given the literature review for many Latinas having a group of women they could identify with was important. The survey also explored why members joined Delta Tau

Lambda and the messages the sorority communicated to them and the university community. The focus was on what this particular organization communicated to members that led them to join and how their membership impacted their college experience as well as their agency.

In the literature review, Light (2001) talked about the importance of social activities on the college experience. With this in mind I set out to learn from participants how their college experience was shaped by being members of Delta Tau Lambda, and how the membership impacted their academic and social lives. The areas of study are grounded in the members' perspectives about the impact the organization has had on them. As a doubly marginalized group, Latinas face a number of obstacles in order to graduate from college. Having a support system to help them through these years is essential. Olivas (2004, 2006) and Olivas and Alvarado-Hernández (forthcoming) state that Latinas do not want to sacrifice their cultural identity while pursuing their degrees. Therefore, the college experience for Latinas includes culture. Latina-based sororities can provide cultural validation, a support network of like-minded women, social involvement that connects students to their campus, and the community service many members want to partake in. I wanted to learn more about the college experiences of Delta Tau Lambda members and how it affected their agency within a cultural/social sorority. This research will examine similarities and differences to previous studies through the lens provided by the college experience literature as well as, rhetorical and human agency theories.

Survey Questions

Participants addressed the following questions:

1. Prior to joining a Delta Tau Lambda did you research other sororities (i.e., traditionally white, Black, multicultural, etc.)?
2. What attracted you to a Latina Sorority?
3. Why did you choose to join Delta Tau Lambda?

4. How has being part of a Latina sorority impacted your academic achievement?
5. How has being part of a Latina sorority impacted how you see yourself as a member of the university community?
6. What are the messages that Delta Tau Lambda communicates that have been most important to you?
7. How do Delta Tau Lambda members talk to potential members? What kinds of things do you say to recruit potential members?
8. What does Delta Tau Lambda represent/communicate to the university community?
9. What has Delta Tau Lambda meant to your college experience (in terms of education, social, etc.)?
10. Share any additional information, opinions, and/or stories about your experience as a member of Delta Tau Lambda, or a Latina Sorority in general.

Data Analysis

The study's data was analyzed in two ways: participants' responses about membership and the college experience, as well as my interpretation of the narratives. As an insider I did not want to limit participation hence I decided to make the survey anonymous and utilized pseudo names. Because the data collection was an electronic survey I chose narrative analysis to explore participants' responses. Riessman (1994) explained that the source of the research is the story. The open-ended survey questions allowed me to weave together the participants' stories to gain a greater understanding about the impact membership had on their college experience. Elliott (2005) summarized Mishler's (1995) narrative analysis explaining that it was "based on the three different functions of language: meaning, structure, and interactional context" (p. 38). The questionnaire responses showed how Latina sorority participants structured their time in college, created meaning for their lives, and how their experiences compared to other women.

This study explored narratives of past and current undergraduate students detailing their experiences as part of a Latina sorority. I reviewed the messages communicated to members, as perceived by the participants, and how membership in $\Delta\Gamma\Lambda$ impacted the women's academic and social lives. Through the theories the study explored whether being part of a Latina sorority has helped or deterred members from creating and/or enforcing agency. Further, I looked at the aspects of membership that have made participants question what they want for themselves and the changes they made accordingly. The messages the organization communicates to members, the relationships built, and the outcome of membership will help understand the level of agency demonstrated by the women in the sorority.

CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS

Similar to the many students who find comfort in their cultural organizations, as was the case for Cuahutémoc, the MEChA student referred to earlier in this thesis (Villalpando, 2003), young Latinas join LGLS to support their cultural and gender needs. “Though still small in numbers, compared to long-established mainstream fraternal organizations” and historical Black Greeks, “Latina sororities have emerged as an important ingredient for success for many Latinas in colleges” and universities (Stuart, 2008, para. 6). Olivas (2004) explained that “because of Latinas’ feelings of racism, alienation, and need to belong, LGLS began to establish chapters at predominantly White institutions” (p. 214). Her longitudinal research studies (1996; 2004; 2006; forthcoming) have found that many LGLS members join these organizations because they do not want to give up their culture in order to be successful in college; hence Latinas founded, and joined Latina-based sororities.

My Delta Tau Lambda Journey

My decision to start Delta Tau Lambda was impacted by a number of events in my life. I was born en la isla del encanto (the island of enchantment), Puerto Rico. In 1986 before I started 8th grade my family and I moved to Michigan. We were supposed to move to New York like good Puerto Ricans but my parents secured jobs in Michigan instead. I did not want to move but the decision was not up for a vote. My parents wanted us to get our education in the States so that we could have more opportunities. Growing up in an island where the majority of the people are ethnically similar, I did not question my ethnicity. That changed for me at 13 years of age; walking home from school on a nice spring Michigan day a car drove past my brother and me. The passenger stuck out his hand (what I now know was in a Nazi salute) and yelled White power. Back then I did not know the connotation of “White power” but I knew in the pit of my

stomach that it was not just a joyful proclamation of race love. I knew I was different when I moved to Michigan but on that day I learned that for some people being different was bad.

I did my best to “fit in” through high school. To me that meant trying to lose my accent and working to pronounce my name with an English accent. It was hard to fit in and not be different when the only Latinos at the school were my brother and I, there were three of us but my oldest brother graduated before us. The school I attended had a tardy form to track students that arrived late to class. The form asked for the student’s name but also for the race, which meant that if I was late 50% of the Latinos in school were late. I felt they were using these forms to stereotype students, I could not see any other reason as to why they would ask for students’ race. This was another reminder of how different I was; I am not sure that other students pondered the races question as I had.

When I got to college my brothers, my parents, and I were all in school. My parents were completing their doctorates while my brothers and I were pursuing our bachelor’s at the University of Michigan. College was a fresh start for me. I had a chance to be more social and to be accepted for who I was, since the college environment was more diverse than my high school. Yet, although there were more Latinos, Michigan was still a predominantly White institution.

I was involved in a summer program for students of color my first year with the majority of participants being African American. The program included break out groups with a staff counselor. We discussed different topics usually revolving around issues Black students faced. I learned a lot during these meetings but I also had experiences I wanted to share. Finally, one day I asked when we were going to explore issues affecting Latino students. My suggestion was not well received and it was never explored. I sensed that my fellow participants felt I wanted to sensor them but in all actuality I was simply trying to share my perspective. At the end of the

summer we did presentations for our classmates and families about our experiences during the program. I saw this as my opportunity to ensure that other Latino students were not blatantly left out of conversations from that moment forward. I shared my experience with all in attendance about the day I wanted to address Latino student issues. After we were done my counselor told my parents and I that I was assertive. I had never heard the word prior to that day. I liked being described as confident and self-assured. I took the description to heart and did my best to remain assertive throughout my time at Michigan.

Being a minority within a minority (Latinos within the student of color label) at the university was hard. Often times it felt like we were fighting for crumbs. We wanted more Latino faculty at the university, a student lounge that catered to Latino students, more Latino-based events and programming, but being 4% of the student population meant that there were others with “higher needs.” Being Latinas within this group was even harder. We had to fight all the stereotypes afflicting students of color plus stereotypes of women. We were expected to be second to men, assumed not to be as smart, and fought the whore/virgin dichotomy (either you are a good girl or a bad girl) often attributed to Latina women, largely as a result of media influences. I remember having exhaustingly long days at school. I had to be on guard, ready to verbally fight the ignorance that came my way. I had to explain why I did not need a green card, how the land of Latinos had been exploited at the hands of big business, or defend my right to speak Spanish with my friends. In order to survive these experiences I needed to offset them with positive ones. My friends were my support system, however I found myself wanting more from these relationships. I wanted to be in an organization that would transcend my time at Michigan while validating my ethnicity and gender.

I did not know much about Greek life when I got to Michigan. My oldest brother was part of a mainstream fraternity and I was not too impressed by what I saw, partying and drinking but nothing really meaningful. Two of my best friends introduced me to Black sororities. One of them was a legacy, meaning her mother was a member of the organization. I went to an informational with her to support her in her quest to gain membership into her mother's sorority. I was very impressed by the commitment to help their communities and uplift Black women. I instantly wanted to be a part of that Greek life. I later found out that there were also Latina Sororities in existence. Being that my identity was so strongly defined by my Puerto Rican culture; a Latina sorority was a better fit for me. During this time I became very close with Maria Victoria Ramos. We shared a passion for services and the empowerment of Latinas. We had a lot of friends who were Black Greeks and with their support and our passion we decided to start Delta Tau Lambda Sorority, Inc.

Delta Tau Lambda was an avenue for us to demonstrate that Latinas were smart, strong, dedicated, and committed. We came together to give Latinas confidence in themselves, to love their culture, their beings, and their voices. The best way to honor our heritage and our families was by giving back. Community services made me feel like a made a difference in a person's live, even if in a small way. I was very lucky to have parents that encouraged me to go to college. But I knew this was not the case for all Latinas. I wanted us, as sorority members, to serve as an example for young Latinas to know that they could do it too. They could continue onto higher education and pursue their dreams with a college degree in hand. I remember in the 1990s Charles Barkley, a professional basketball player, stated that he was not a role model. I felt completely the opposite. Not only was I a role model for fellow Latinas, but I was honored to be one. My organization aided me in my quest to encourage young women to go to school. I was

willing to share my struggles and my successes. Most of those successes directly involved my membership and involvement with Delta Tau Lambda. As a founder it was important to me that members felt the same way. I wanted them to be proud to be part of an organization that stood strong for the voices of Latinas, and supported them in their times of need.

Until now, I had not stopped to think how my membership in ΔTA impacted my college experience. This research has allowed me to reflect on those times. Fifteen years later I recognize that my personal strength and convictions were strengthened by membership in my sorority. My affiliation with other strong women helped me to know that I was not alone. I did not have to fit in, it was not forced, it was a natural union of women who shared passion for community, for empowerment, and for education. I thought I was assertive after the summer program I attended but through the sorority I became even more assertive as well as thoughtful. Recognizing my role model status helped me to think carefully about my actions and how I represented Latinas and my organization. While I was not always successful, since I was not always the positive Latina I wished to be, I was comforted by the fact that I had a group of women who will still care for me and helped me through those times. I became well-rounded by learning from my fellow sisters' experiences. Their lives enriched and continue to enrich my life. I don't think my time at Michigan would have been as meaningful had I not been part of the sorority. When I am asked about my greatest accomplishment I proudly answer, founding Delta Tau Lambda.

This study sought to understand the impact membership in the sorority has had on participants' college experiences. This research begins by looking at how the women arrived at the decision of joining a Latina sorority and how that compared to the reasons for specifically joining Delta Tau Lambda. The study also examined what messages communicated by the organization resonated with members and university community. Narrative analysis addressed

the effect membership had on academics and the college experience. In order to analyze the responses, human and rhetorical agency theories were used to guide the study.

In this chapter we will see a variety of opinions in terms of the impact members have seen, or felt, as a result of joining a Latina-based sorority. As will be seen through the narratives, ΔTA members are cognizant of the changes they have gone through via the process of membership. “Because social worlds result from human agency, they remain inherently dynamic and changing” (Collins, 1998, p. 96). Members’ questioning, reasoning, and actions have led to their personal evolution thus affecting their college experience, a journey in differences and similarities. Yet, the shared experiences are what brought, and kept, these women together.

Why a Latina-based Sorority?

Many of the reasons past scholars have noted for why participants sought membership in their respective sororities are echoed in this study. In short, the women wanted to belong to a group that would be able to understand them, share traditions, language, and service (Guardia & Evans, 2008, Layzer, 2000; Olivas, 1996, 2006, forthcoming; Patterson, 1998), while affording them a safe place to also express their *Latinidad* (Olivas & Alvarado-Hernández, forthcoming). *Latinidad* encompasses all facets of Latino identity. One interviewee in this study, Donna, explained:

A Latina sorority attracted me for numerous reasons. The first and most important was to have a safe place; to feel comfortable around people that may look like me and may experience daily things as I do. The second was to be around a group of women that was empowering and not detrimental. The third was that I wanted to find a way to impact my community on a larger scale.

Latina sororities build an agential space where members are supported and empowered which is why Donna feels safe within the group. She sees this in the members thus feeling uplifted by them. What she gains from the organization drives her, as other participants, to serve her community.

Some members recognized differences amongst other Greeks, when compared to Latina-based organizations. From Carmen's perspective there seemed to be a connection between women in a Latina sorority that were not there in mainstream fraternal groups. She felt a sense of common bond brought about by similarities. Marta expressed that her comfort derived from members' shared experiences and language as well as their similar backgrounds. For Karen, it was important to join an organization with women who had some of the same challenges (i.e. being marginalized) she had experienced.

Emirbayer & Mische (1998) stated that "agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past as well as oriented toward the future and toward the present" (p. 963). When women join a sorority they do so for life. Therefore, as women search for a sorority that meets their needs they must think about their past (experiences that shaped them), the present (what they will do today within the organization), and the future (after they graduate from college). Their personal agency drove them to seek an organization that offered them shared experiences with other women, allowed them to be active in their communities, and be supported in order to graduate. One of $\Delta\tau\lambda$'s mottos is "con fuerza construiremos, con honestidad creceremos, con unidad nunca seremos vencidas" [with strength we will build, with honesty we will grow, with unity we will never be defeated] (Delta Tau Lambda, n.d.). This is the kind of support that Latinas look for in LGLS. Emirbayer & Mische (1998) state that agency also represent future orientation, the fact that these women join an organization that has life-long

membership show that commitment to members' agency throughout their lives. As well, the motto highlights that through their unity they will succeed, and continue to be successful.

For some members being part of a Latina sorority was not just important but also a call to social action. Barb reflected:

I have always emphasized how great it is to be a Latina at this time and think that we have so much more to accomplish within our community. As a group with a commonality, we need to become more accepted, both in American society's eyes and the American government in my opinion. This is why I joined a Latina organization because I felt I would impact the LATINO community the most.

Service for Latinas looks differently but the goal is often the same, to help their communities. It can be events such as educational program on health care, talking to students about going to college, or collecting food for families in need. Other members were attracted to LGLS because of the blending of culture and gender, such as, Tiffany:

My culture and identity are something I'm proud of and [are] important for me to celebrate, and ΔTA was the ultimate celebration of that. We celebrated Strong Women and Strong Latinas; you can't get any better than that.

The fact Tiffany claims she is proud of her "culture and identity" provide support for Olivas' (1996, 2004, 2006, forthcoming) findings that Latinas often join these organizations in order to maintain and/or (re)construct a Latina identity. Many women view strength as surviving racism, sexism, and other challenges during their collegiate experience as "strong Latinas." This perceived strength helps some women become more assertive as they face their own challenges.

The recurring theme of family from the Latino Greek literature review (i.e. Delgado-Romero, 2004; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Layzer, 2000; Olivas 1996, 2006) was also present with

participants in the current study. Julie liked the idea of having a support system she could identify with, while Briana was drawn to a Latina sorority for the sense of family that would come with joining. Liliana stated:

I was attracted to a Latina sorority because I am Latina but also I have a deep sense of commitment to the members of my family that have had to struggle to have the things that I take for granted, i.e. my education.

A large number of the women in this study are first generation college students. For some, their parents were not able to pursue higher education due to economics, lack of education, and/or no family support. They are able to reflect on their families' experiences and contrast it with their advantages of access to education. Their appreciation for their families' "struggles" lead some women to join LGLS in order to have a support system that will help them persist through graduation.

In choosing a Latina sorority, these women demonstrate human agency. They knew what they wanted from this type of organization – to be supported culturally, empowered, and valued. They wanted to fit in and share experiences that brought them together as a group, as a *familia* (family), qualities which they felt were lacking in mainstream sororities. The notion that Latinas join LGLS in order to (re)construct a sense of *familia* is supported by past scholarship of LGLS (Olivas, 1996; 2004; 2006). The women want their experiences and identities affirmed through the sorority, and its members, in order to become more confident thus building and strengthening their agency.

Gloria Anzaldúa (1990) remarked that "the world knows us by our faces, the most naked, most vulnerable, exposed and significant topography of the body. When our *caras*, our faces, do not live up to the image that family or community wants us to wear we experience ostracism,

alienation, isolation, and shame” (p. xv). Latinas face a lot of challenges in education as a doubly marginalized group which affects them and leads them to react in ways which may not be accepted by their families, peers, society, or academia. It can be seeking higher education even when their families oppose it, or protesting unfair treatment on their campus while other classmates continue with the status quo. Latinas seek groups of like-minded women because they see in each other shared histories and experiences – they recognize it in their *caras*. “Personal agency requires both the reasons and the resources, which include skills, alliances, legitimacy within societal structures, and cultural capital, to act” (DeTurk, 2006, p.44). For the women in this study their sense of agency compelled them to act, resulting in them joining ΔΤΛ, an organization they view as meeting their personal and cultural needs.

Why Delta Tau Lambda?

For a few of the participants their first experience with a Latina sorority came from learning about Delta Tau Lambda. Estella remarked:

I did not look into any other sororities. I was not thinking about joining a sorority. I could not see myself doing it. My closest friend at the time joined and told me a lot about it and how different Delta Tau Lambda was from the stereotypical party type sororities. Then I learned about the sorority’s goals, and knew all the women, and loved it.

Sorority stereotypes continue to be exploited in the media and scholarship, as well as perpetuated across college campuses (Olivas 2004, 2006, forthcoming). It is not unusual to hear comments like those of Estella. Social sororities are very good at the social aspect of Greek membership and not as good with the philanthropic side. It took the encouragement of a fellow Latina to

convince Estella to give ΔΤΛ a chance, to at least get information to see if in fact it was different, because she was not interested in just a social organization.

While some women had no knowledge of Greek-life, some members, such as Tiffany, had knowledge of Greek life and had experiences with other organizations, Latino and non-Latino. She, like Estella, felt that the Greeks at her campus were only social which left Tiffany having an overall negative view of Greek organizations. Their perceptions changed when they learned about Delta Tau Lambda and what the organization represented. However, the majority of the members had researched other sororities, mainly Latina based, and found that Delta Tau Lambda was the best fit for them, which eventually led them to seek membership. For example, Amarilis shared:

When I heard about ΔΤΛ, researched it and met a couple of women, I saw a group of strong, diverse, confident and professional women. I loved the diversity.

Everyone was fighting for the same cause and all of them had an unconditional love for the organization that was evident in their smiles, passion, and dedication for ΔΤΛ. Yet each person was so unique, and had their own unique personality. I could tell that unlike other sororities the women were not about molding others to be like them but rather helping you grow as a person by being yourself and accepting yourself. I also liked the professional aspect and all the ideals of the organization fit with my own personal ideals.

While ΔΤΛ is comprised predominantly of Latinas and the organization is Latina/o community focused, its membership is diverse both in ethnicities and races. The diverse makeup of the organization is embraced and it is why the sorority states that they seek to empower Latinas, women of color, and women in general, but the main focus of the organization remains Latina-

based. There is also diversity in terms of socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and ability.

For these women, another reason for joining ΔΤΑ was to give back to the community. These findings are in line with Olivas' (1996, 2006) research, wherein she found that service and giving back was important to women joining LGLS. "Intention-in-action is not just an event that occurs by itself. It can occur only if an agent is actually doing something, or at least trying to do something" (Searle, 2001, p. 83). The agency of the women in this study is manifested in part via the service they provide to their communities. The women in ΔΤΑ participate in national service endeavors such as Race for the Cure and the American Diabetes walk, but they also do community projects such as child safety fairs, soup kitchens, as well as cleaning parks and beach shores. Estella explained that community service was very important to her and expressed her love for helping others. Sara noted:

I appreciated the values found in both community service and professionalism.

While other organizations prided themselves more on social activities I wanted to join a sisterhood that found the balance between sisterly bonds and professional values. I was always fond of participating in community service activities, but a sisterhood gave me another opportunity to create stronger ties with other opinionated women of color as well.

Many of the women in the organization consider everything they do as professional. This is because they show up to services events on time, they keep their commitments, and if members do not, they are addressed about it. There is an expectation among members that they must uphold the principles and protect the image of the sorority at all times. This is the same if they service project is for a national organization or a small local soup kitchen. Similarly, Joana chose

Delta Tau Lambda because it was an opportunity to express her passion for her community. With the sorority she was able to participate in service events that both educated and helped her community. Joana also felt $\Delta\text{T}\Lambda$ gave her the advantage of building and growing a strong network with women she considered to be future leaders. Because of $\Delta\text{T}\Lambda$'s strong commitment to professionalism, many members are sought by other organizations and offices within their universities to hold leadership positions, for example, chairing pan-Latino student organizations and serving as ambassadors for their schools. Like the participants in Logue et al.'s (2005) study, the women who participated in this survey grew as people from their leadership in Delta Tau Lambda. Joana appreciated having an outlet for leadership and the opportunity to help others. Again, many of the members serve in other organizations in executive board positions and are sought to assist with events and leadership trainings.

The strength and character of the women who were part of the organization was appealing to participants prior to joining. Sara celebrated being around opinionated women of color. Though different, they shared many similar challenges – academically, socially, and emotionally. Being around strong women gave members a safe environment to grow personally as well as to learn and sharpen their leadership skills. Jody reflected:

I chose Delta Tau Lambda because I felt it would help in my growth as a woman.

I had something to contribute as a Latina, as a woman from Detroit [Michigan], and as someone with a passion to end racial inequities, and make community connections. I saw myself as a piece to the $\Delta\text{T}\Lambda$ puzzle, and knew no other Greek organization fit my needs.

Guiffrida (2003), Jones et al. (2002), Rendón (1994), and Watson et al. (2002) addressed how racial differences affect students of color. These inequalities affect education from access

through graduation. Many members of the organization feel passionate about higher education being an option for Latinas. It is also one of the organization's goals. Members do their part by having college visits and hosting the mentoring group, Tau Lambda. Donna chose to join Delta Tau Lambda because she believed that the mission, values, and goals of the sorority were along the same lines as her own. She also saw an opportunity to accomplish things on campus with the help of other strong women who had a vision similar to her own. The organization stood out to Donna because Δ TA members did not just talk about creating change, they follow up with actions. For example, the founders set out to help Latinas go to college by setting up a scholarship fund.

The women's dedication to service and leadership stems from their agency. Some women came into the organization with a strong sense of agency while others develop it because they were part of the sorority. The organization and members actively questioned the state of their community, university, members and acted accordingly. "To begin to understand agency requires an examination of how rhetors, or groups of rhetors, reach a moment in which they want or are invited to speak" (Sowards, forthcoming, p. 7). Seeking membership in Delta Tau Lambda was the moment many of the women chose to speak, to take action. Moreover, through Δ TA the women recognized their power as individuals and as a group. They came together for different reasons but the underline goals of community service, networking, and professionalism, were present for all. It was their desire to impact their communities and give back that shows their agency like in Gasman and Payton-Stewart (2006) study. Gasman as an outsider studying a Black sorority gained a new lever of appreciation once she saw the level of agency, strength, and influence the women processed within their organization and community.

There are different properties of human agency. For many of the women of Delta Tau Lambda it manifested as self-reactiveness. Bandura (2006) described agents as self-regulators. “Agency thus involves not only the deliberative ability to make choices and action plans, but also the ability to construct appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution” (Bandura , 2006, p. 165). This call to action and readiness to act is what attracted many members to the sorority. It is what built, or strengthen, agency for participants. Rhetorical agency is the capacity to deal with questions clearly and completely (Turnbull, 2004). In choosing Delta Tau Lambda the women answered a question for themselves, which organization was the best fit for them. They also answered what they could do within the organization, hence their interest in service and leadership. Searle (2001) stated that “agents are conscious entities that have the capacity to initiate and carry out actions” (p. 83). Agents within ΔΤΛ get involved and carry out events and service endeavors, which is what brought many women to the organization.

Impact on Academics

Twenty-six out of the 27 women who complete the survey answered the academic question. Twenty-two of them felt that being part of Delta Tau Lambda had impacted their academics while the other four thought it did not. Of those who felt the sorority had impacted their grades, 18 thought they were more successful thanks to being part of the organization while four expressed that being members had negatively impacted their academics. Liliana did not think that the sorority impacted her academic achievement. She felt that she had done well in school before joining ΔΤΛ and did the same afterwards.

Tiffany felt that while she was pledging it helped her academics. However, once she became a member and more involved in the sorority it hindered her academic achievement.

Tiffany did just enough to get by because she was so busy, between school and the sorority, she did what she could. Grubb (2006) found in his study that as a fraternity gets smaller in size, members' GPA go down as well, due to the increased demand on their time to upkeep the organization. For Briana the process also helped at first, but after she became an official member it was hard for her not to be social with her new friends and sisters. Barb mentioned:

It [membership] honestly has hurt a bit because our chapter is really busy and we are small so we have many things to do and because I love the sorority so much, I don't have my priorities straight, school should be first but I love ΔTA too much.

For Estella, the sorority seemed to take up a lot of time and made her grades worse in the beginning. However, membership quickly taught her how to manage time and multitask, allowing her to do more than she had imagined. Sally also felt that being successful academically could be a challenge but she found support within the organization. She explained:

Despite being an excellent student, the pressures of being at the university were too much for me, and by being part of the organization I was able to withstand the pressures and struggles and complete my degree.

Donna felt that being part of a Latina sorority pushed her to reach higher. From her experience “being surrounded by people that were determined, successful, and always reaching for their dreams it was inevitable not to follow in the same path.” Many of Donna’s sisters are working on masters and terminal degrees which inspired her to accomplish more.

Bandura (2006) explained that agents are self-reflective. “People are not only agents of action. They are also self-examiners of their own functioning, reflecting on their personal efficacy, the soundness of their thoughts and actions, and the meaning of their pursuits, and they make corrective adjustments if necessary” (p. 165). For the women who recognized that the

sorority was interfering with their schooling they made adjustments to successfully function within both arenas. These members were self-reflective agents.

For many, the sorority provided a learning environment that helped them achieve their personal goals, as well as look forward to their futures. Joana felt that membership had a tremendous impact on her academics. The sorority provided support for studying via study groups, an opportunity to help the women learn from one another. She also thought it helped to truly show the importance of academic achievement for the Latino community. In other words, the fact that members of her sorority are graduating with terminal degrees is proof that membership in Latina-based sororities support such efforts.

Karen found encouragement to continue on with school after receiving her bachelor's. Supporting this perspective, Dawn stated that $\Delta\Gamma\Lambda$ is an academic oriented sorority which pushed her to always try her best and achieve her goals. For Julie, the sorority played an important role towards her desire to complete her bachelor's degree. It allowed her to focus academically. It also provided a support system of women which she saw strengthened over the years. She had a sense of being able to rely on this group beyond her college career. As a result of being a member, Julie became more assertive and her self-esteem increased.

The narratives on academic impact reflected both positive and less than positive outcomes due to membership. The similarity for both is that the women had control over how the sorority influenced their academics. Some recognized they were doing too much which negatively affected their GPA while others used the organization as a tool. Anzaldúa (1990) notion of *haciendo caras*/making faces can be seen in some of the participants' academic evolution. Making faces is about adapting to what is going on in an environment. Some of the sisters were not doing as well academically as they wanted but in their outward demeanor, their

caras, it was not apparent to outsiders. However, within the sisterhood the women were able to share with their sisters and gained the support needed to improve and succeed in their courses. Making *caras* is about learning to handle the multiple roles a woman plays as a member of a Latina-based sorority. Some members had to juggle their academic needs and the sorority. In their persistence to graduate they strengthened their agency. “Rhetorical agency might be understood as a process in which an agent negotiates past and present, individual and societal, dispositions that constrain, limit, or facilitate one’s ability to create rhetorical space” (Sowards, forthcoming, p. 34). The negotiation for some participants was difficult but through their dedication most women ultimately found a way to manage the organization and academics, which allowed them to strengthen their rhetorical space.

Messages to Members and University Community

Delta Tau Lambda communicates many kinds of messages to its members; these messages encourage women to join the organization. Once they are members, these same messages keep most women motivated and engaged. For Liliana the message she heard was one of empowerment. She felt that women need positive and empowering feedback to offset what is represented in the media and mainstream America in terms of images of Latinas, other women of color, and women in general. Delta Tau Lambda empowers women by supporting their endeavors both civically and personally. The women are encouraged to lead in the sorority and the community.

The message that resonated with Briana was professionalism. She also thought the organization strived to create healthy and supportive female relationships. Sara shared, “I wanted to join a sisterhood that found the balance between sisterly bonds and professional values.” The importance of networking amongst sisters and their support of each other was a thread

throughout the survey. The ability to be professional and network often stemmed from the confidence the women possessed. Teresa felt the most important message to her was that she is a strong woman, and that she can depend on her sisters. Along with the message of strength other members heard a loud and clear message of independence that helped Rita feel empowered:

These women do not rely upon men to get them to where they want to go in life. I come from a family where the men run everything and my voice was silenced for way too long. Women need to know that they are valuable, knowledgeable, strong, beautiful - not just trophy wives.

These narratives lend support to Olivas' (2006) findings that Latinas joining LGLS to both uphold traditional values rooted in *familia* and *respeto* (respect) while simultaneously consciously working to break with traditional gender roles that oppress Latinas. The fact that the women come together to defy stereotypes and gender roles demonstrate members' agency.

Sowards (forthcoming) studied Dolores Huerta, the co-founder of the United Farm Workers Union. She detailed how Huerta was viewed by critics as a Dragon Lady. This persona was described as "extremely aggressive, combative, and uncompromising, which violated expectations of marginality related to race, gender, and class" (p. 17). Sowards looks at Huerta's public persona much differently. She sees the persona as *caras* that Huerta uses both personally and through her activist work in order to be successful in different areas of her life. This is not negative, according to Sowards (forthcoming), because Huerta draws from her identity and social construct to deliver actions which yield results. Often sororities are described in a negative light as that of the Dragon Lady persona. However, the messages the sorority communicates to members served to reinforce the positive aspect of Greek membership, specifically from Latina-

based organizations. The rhetorical space the women create is supported by their actions of service and empowerment.

There are also nonverbal messages communicated to the university community that are rooted in self-representation. For example, Tiffany shared that Delta Tau Lambda represents respect, leadership, and strong women. Sally felt the sorority is known for its community service and dedication to excellence in all the events the organization holds. She also felt that the members were outstanding women who are involved in many other groups besides ΔTA . These findings echo those of Olivas (2006).

Delta Tau Lambda members took pride in how they were viewed by the community and the impact they had through their service endeavors. Patricia highlighted the sorority's focus on Latino youth's futures. She felt the organization helped young people gain knowledge and appreciation of Latina women struggles, and the Latino community. Patricia also liked the focus on unity within the student community whether they are Greek or not. Jody proclaimed:

Delta Tau Lambda represents a group of women committed to their community, their fellow women of color, health and social justice causes, education... the list goes on. We represent Phenomenal Women, movers and shakers, strong, educated women who care about positive change, progression and growth in themselves and others.

The women in ΔTA are leaders and take their role in the university community seriously. They are committed to represent and support endeavors which improve their environments. Delta Tau Lambda seeks to make long lasting impacts with and through their members. Julie explained:

Delta Tau Lambda embodies excellence and is constantly working to portray itself as more than just a passage of rites in a university setting. Delta Tau

Lambda is more than an organization in a four year institution, it is a support system that encourages activism beyond our college years and prepares us for professionalism in the real world.

Many Greek organizations engage members during their undergraduate years; however, it can be difficult to continue the involvement once members graduate. Delta Tau Lambda, like many other Greek organizations, works to strengthen bonds for alumnae sisters. For those women who remain active they find the satisfaction of working with younger members while continuing to volunteer. Their continual involvement as alumnae of the organization continues to impact their agency while helping to build agency for younger sisters.

Participants felt that the messages to members were very similar to those communicated to the university community. Overwhelmingly, the women heard the sorority was dedicated to community service, strived to be professional, and empowered members. The personal messages positively supported human agency by reinforcing the power and self-esteem of members. Given that Latina-based sororities are cultural, social, and service organizations they impact member's agency. However, it is also the agency of individual members, and their dedication to the organization, that creates an environment where members can develop their agency. It creates a cyclical agential relationship where the organization and members impact agency.

DeTurk (2006) explored an approach that brought structure and agency together by delving into the system and communication within both. "One assumption is that system change occurs through the actions of individual actors. Change at the system level, in turn, can facilitate individual awareness and relationship building at the interpersonal level" (DeTurk, 2006, p. 37). This approach recognizes the above mentioned relationship that agency is not just impacted through the membership in the sorority but that individuals' agency impacts the organization as

well. The messages communicated by the sorority are reinforced by members' actions. The commitment to community services is supported because members follow through with their service projects. The message communicated by the sorority to members and the community are so because of the members support and act on the mission and goals of ΔΤΛ.

Impact on College Experience

There are many factors that impact the college experience, such as membership in a sorority. In order to understand how membership affected participants, they had to reflect on their experience and question how those experiences shaped their time in college. According to Turnbull (2004) “rhetorical agency of discourse is a necessary consequence of the principle of questioning” (p. 219). The survey participants utilized their ability to question ultimately deciding to join Delta Tau Lambda which in turn impacted their college experience.

The ability for human agency is configured through self development and self-sufficiency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). A goal of this study is to explore the impact membership in LGLS has on participants' college experience both academically and socially. Findings indicate that the participants' reflections included both their personal agency and that of other members. Carmen felt the sorority meant everything to her college experience:

Educationally, it intensified my determination to graduate. Socially, it allowed me to grow into a networking machine. Professionally, it gave me the tools to gain the respect of my fellow classmates, colleagues, administrators, employers and community. Being a part of this organization has truly changed my life.

As the founders created the organization they recognized that Latinas did not network as other groups did. In their creation of the sorority they sought to instill in members to be professional and to utilize resources. Part of this process was to learn to network and to reach out to fellow

students, staff, and faculty in order to build connections hence why Carmen grew to feel like a networking machine. Members learned skills of how to conduct presentations, organizing events, and creating budgets, which they were able to utilize in other organizations and in their lives after college.

In like manner, membership in ΔTA allowed Tiffany to build strong relationships with other women on campus and the opportunity to do programming. Conversely, some members felt they experienced both positive and negative impacts as a consequence of membership, such as Barb. On the one hand she thought the organization provided a good opportunity to meet more people. However, she felt that members of other organizations did not like the members of ΔTA. In this case, her association with the sorority would impact her negatively. She felt that Greeks on campus looked at her in a bad light. Barb thought that because the sorority holds professionalism in such a high regard that other Greeks felt ΔTA members judged them for how they carried out their organizations' affairs. Barb's opinion was not shared by most members given the number of successful collaboration with other organizations. Overall, most experiences with fellow Greeks were positive.

Light (2001) expressed the importance of student involvement outside of the classroom and the impact on student satisfaction. This correlated with members feeling satisfied with the social aspect the sorority provided. Sally shared that ΔTA had been her college experience. The women impacted her from the first day on campus, before she even knew they were sisters of ΔTA. The women brought her strength as well as challenged her views about herself and others. Membership provided her a social life and gave her a supportive place to grow personally and professionally.

Handler's (1995) study found that developing friendships within a Greek organization was not easy. It was the dedication of sisters working on their relationships, as well as their commitment to the organization and each other that made them successful. Jody expressed:

Delta Tau Lambda has meant just about everything to my college experience. I did not have a true social life until I met these women. They taught me balance, and opened my eyes to the value of sisterhood, and while there were unpleasant experiences, I learned a lot about others and myself that helped me grow into a better woman. It has also provided necessary tools to teach others.... and speak out in order to alleviate the ignorance of the world.

Guardia and Evans (2008) addressed the importance for the members of a Latino fraternity to have support and a sense of family amongst brothers. Olivas (2006) longitudinal study also found that the sororities Latinas joining did so because they perceived them as a social support network that provided them a home away from home. The participants in this study also found strength in the relationships they fostered within the sorority, as Joana stated:

Delta Tau Lambda helped to make my college experience bearable. It provided me with a network of support and a family away from home. It helped in guiding my desire to complete and improve my performance as a student. It also helped to network with other communities on campus.

These relationships were particularly important during stressful times, as it was for Taina:

Delta Tau Lambda held me up during the most [vulnerable] moments of my life, when I lost my father . . . I was on line when it happened. Just when I thought everything was over I literally looked over each of my shoulders and had my

future sisters there to catch me. Once we crossed, the motivation and inspirational words kept me going.

For many members being part of a Greek organization is being part of a family. Many times the relationships are fun and light hearted, but there are also times where members need emotional support for life changing events. Having that support, as did Taina, often time makes a big difference in the women's lives.

The sisterly bond has shaped many of the members' peer relationships in light of their personal development. Dawn felt she had learned many things about herself. She discovered many strengths and weaknesses which allowed her to work on herself. It provided her with the support of other women who were role models, while supporting her educational goals. This same element has driven Dawn to succeed. Likewise, Estella shared:

I love that I have a group of people I can talk to and depend on at times. A group of people I can laugh with and hang out but besides all this I've learned leadership, what it's like to work in a group, managing time and many errands at once. I've learned so many things about myself like what kind of person I am when there's conflict. You'll just never know until you're put in the actual situation.

The organization encourages women to grow as individuals. Some members challenge each other to think through their personal decisions to ensure that they are in fact making the best choice for themselves, both with academics and personal relationships. Being that women are individuals, and regardless of being part of the organization they have different values challenging each other is not always successful. But, more often than not, sisters come from an

honest place of caring for a fellow member and they want her to make the best choices for herself.

Membership in the organization continued to play a role in the life of women who were out of college. Kuh (1995) mentioned that when people reflect on their college experience often what they reminisced about were the out-of-class, social experiences. For Marta it was no different. She said that when she thought of college, $\Delta\text{T}\Lambda$ was the first thing that came to her mind. Liliana reflected over her decade long membership. She said:

It is a family in the sense that you cannot separate yourselves from those in your family even if you don't like them. Delta Tau Lambda operates in much the same way and I am very grateful because I have such wonderful friends with those that I would not have thought 10 years earlier, but because we have stuck it out and grown with each other we have developed lifelong relationships. I have seen greater benefit from $\Delta\text{T}\Lambda$ in my life after college than when I was actually in college.

Many members develop a sense of family with their sorority sisters. The bond becomes so strong that they cannot imagine disassociating from them as they would not disassociate from their biological family. Hence once the women become members they are part of $\Delta\text{T}\Lambda$ for life. For many women participation in $\Delta\text{T}\Lambda$ becomes part of their future life plans (i.e. professional and national sorority involvement). "Huerta's rhetorical success indicates, that although agents are influenced by events and people of the past and the present, an orientation towards what the future holds is an important element of agency" (Sowards, forthcoming, p. 36). Longtime members of Delta Tau Lambda similarly bring to the organization their $\Delta\text{T}\Lambda$ history, present service, and excitement about the organization's future, even after more than a decade.

As previously addressed in this study Latinas are a doubly marginalized group as such they experience college differently. Due to these experiences some women seek groups to support them culturally while understanding their issues as women. The college experience narratives addressed the bounds of sisterhood, being supported through difficult times, and the long lasting impact of the organization. Delta Tau Lambda shaped their academic and social lives. “For many students, the college experience is the first time they have the opportunity to interact with people from diverse racial, economic, or national backgrounds” (Gazel, 2007, p. 534). These experiences allow people to compare and contrast their personal experiences with those of different groups as have the members of Delta Tau Lambda. Looking at college experience facilitates the exploration of larger issues as noted by Gazel (2007) who also cited Carey (2004) and Levine & Cureton (1998). The evaluation of personal experiences during college assists individuals to build agency.

Gazel (2007) also developed a list of actions that demonstrated agency. She writes about how “agency is employed when participants are co-creators and take ownership of the process” (p. 543). The participants of the current study exhibited agency in their college experience because they decided to seek membership in a Latina-based organization. Their reasoning for joining was to seek support, to network, to improve their leadership, and to give back to their communities. For many of them they successfully accomplished their goals, and many increasing their esteem and self empowerment. Gazel (2007) also stated that agency has a need for accountability to communities. This idea goes along with Layzer’s (2000) and Olivas’ (1999 & 2004) findings that members of Latina-based organizations wanted to actively participate in community services. The women of ΔTA shared in these sentiments. They were role models to

each other and their community in their service endeavors, academic goals, and support of women and youth.

Danielle felt that the sorority helped her see how talented she was, as well as to focus on what was important in her life. The sorority gave her a sense of perspective on the impact she had in this world. Teresa proclaimed that the sorority: “helped me open my eyes to see my full potential and gave me the confidence to continue my accomplishments while in college.”

Sara expressed her love for her sisters. She acknowledged that she was not sure if she could have gotten closer to other women in the same way if she had not joined a sisterhood.

Sharing in Sara’s sentiments, Anne reflected:

I now belong to something bigger than myself. I had to be conscious of how my actions could be interpreted. So that I knew that, at any given time, my sorority would not be embarrassed by my actions/behaviors. I was now taking responsibility for being a role model. It is always a wonderful experience to surround yourself with strong, professional, motivated, passionate, and driven women. You feel like you can conquer the world!

The struggles faced by some Latinas in PWIs – stereotypes, racism, sexism – can negatively impact their identities. Joining a group of women that validates them and builds their confidence is empowering to them. For many participants, where they saw obstacles they learned to see opportunities thanks to their new found self-assurance and strengthened agency. Rhetorical agency according to Campbell (2005) is the ability to act. Delta Tau Lambda members are able to do so through their service projects and leadership opportunities, while also embracing their Latina identities and cultural values. These experiences shaped and enriched the women’s lives. It has allowed members to strengthen their identities as explained by Rita:

Delta Tau Lambda has meant the world to me. It has become what I eat, breathe, sleep and think - and this was my choice to make it this way. I feel that it has made me a stronger woman on this campus and has enhanced my reputation as a respected and well rounded person. I also feel that I can empower other women to be stronger and take charge of their lives. It's an exciting thought to know that one organization can turn someone's life around. There were several instances that ΔTA has kept me from dropping out of college and I will forever be grateful.

Rita's experience demonstrates how the organization helps to build agency. She was able to recognize the difficulties in her life and with the support of her sisters she was able to remain in school. In her 1996 study Olivas also reported that sorority women claimed they would have dropped out had they not been supported by their sorority sisters.

Persistence through graduation is difficult for Latinas. In this organization they have created an environment in which they support each other emotionally, academically, and personally. These relationships empower the women in their personal endeavors while having an opportunity to give back to their communities. These shared interests and experiences continue to support members' agency.

Participants' self-discovery of their voices, value, power, and ability to succeed shaped their college experience and strengthened their agency. Barb learned that she is phenomenal, which helped her with her self-esteem. Sara found:

To be my own, for my own and teach others to reach for their goals. I like to consider myself a selfish person. I say this because I have learned to appreciate myself on so many different scales, and love myself more for them. I have flaws, but I accept the idea that I can change, if I want to or need to. It is ultimately

when I feel comfortable in my own skin, with my own words, and own actions that I can help motivate others to do the same.

A big part that comes out of membership is the increase in self-esteem. Members begin taking the time to work on themselves to better their lives, which in turn allows them to be stronger supporters and role models for other Latinas.

For many, the organization was a catalyst for personal growth while providing a safe environment which allowed them to become the women they want to be. Joana felt that being a part of the organization made an impact in her life professionally and personally played a critical role on how she perceived herself as a woman and her desires to continue growing. Daphne summarized her experience in a Latina sorority by sharing:

I have had many great memories with sisters, either in formal events like our Salute to Latinas, or informally having movie nights or going out dancing. Delta Tau Lambda has pushed me beyond my limits of being a woman, a woman of color, a friend and as a sister. I am eternally grateful to my Big Sisters for having faith in me and allowing me to partake in the intake process and everything since.

The participants' narratives revealed that being part of a Latina sorority has helped their agency by strengthening their self-perception and by providing a network of strong women. Donna explained:

I believe [$\Delta\tau\Lambda$] represents a group of strong women dedicated to both their academics and community. All programs are geared towards empowerment of women with an emphasis on education. Delta Tau Lambda has also participated in programs to unite the community and not only empower women but minorities as a whole.

Women also felt that the programming offered by the sorority supported their values and cultivated a sense of education and empowerment. The organization not only improved the member's agency but through events they try to strengthen the agency of non-members.

For many of the women who took part in the survey joining a Latina sorority was life changing. Daphne shared:

Delta Tau Lambda changed my life for the better. The confident, empowered, supported woman that I am today is because of this organization. It opened up many networking doors for me, as well as taught me many ways of the business world (i.e. agendas, taking minutes, professional attire, etc). It has motivated me to be the best person I can be, while still staying in touch with my roots, be it family or sisters in other states or my cultural heritage. My college experience was enriched with new, beautiful, strong women who welcomed me into a sisterhood that made me a better person, whether that meant I could take on more challenges or learn more about who I am.

Many women felt a strong impact through membership because it influenced many aspects of their lives – academic, social, and professional. Whether the experiences were perceived to be positive or not, many of the participants grew from all their encounters within the organization. Members who participated in this survey that had been in the organization for more than a decade continue to see value in having joined the sorority. This long lasting effect speaks to how the organization has helped to build and strengthen agency in the women of Delta Tau Lambda.

Summary

For the purpose of the study I used human and rhetorical agency to guide the research. Agency has empowered the women of Delta Tau Lambda to support each other and their

communities. It has allowed them to choose their voice and path while in college. The impact of their membership has evolved overtime even for women who have been members for over a decade. Gazel (2007) explained that “more than the acquisition of knowledge, *conscientization* has transformative power to set agency in motion” (p.543). Freire (1970) created the concept of conscientization which is the ability to learn through consciousness while using that knowledge to combat oppression.

The women of Delta Tau Lambda utilized their experiences, membership, and sisterly support not only to develop as women but to help their communities. They combat oppressive environments and situations by providing positive role models as Latinas and as sorority members. The women embrace elements of their Latina identities while moving away from traditional gender roles, all the while creating a safe space for personal and academic growth. The personal strength women gained through membership was a recurring theme from the survey participants. Sowards (forthcoming) highlighted that the “ability to shape one’s own identity illustrates rhetorical agency as a transformative process and the constitution of both speaker and audience identity through empowerment” (p. 37). Delta Tau Lambda supports members’ voices. The organization was founded, among other reasons, to empower and uplift members (Delta Tau Lambda, n.d.). The women who are part of the organization build their identity through their support of each other socially, professionally, academically, and emotionally.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

This study has shown that Latinas need support in PWIs to be successful. Many Latinas have found networks of women in Latina-based sororities that have helped them persevere through graduation. These organizations provide assistance with identity development, encourage culture, and provide a family for women. A strong sense of self, identity, and esteem were some of the positive results of membership in this organization. Delta Tau Lambda encourages women to find their voices and strengths, and shows the beauty of self-acceptance. The sorority also provides a network of women that is constant and far reaching. Women have access to sisters they see on a daily basis as well as other women throughout the U.S.

The agency of the individual women is embraced in this Latina sorority through a collective and collaborative agential process. It is an environment that encourages women to follow their personal and professional dreams, while at the same time creating opportunities to work together in shared goals, such as community service. For this group of women agency was not limited by the sorority, it was enhanced.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that men and women who “belonged to a fraternity or sorority had a significantly stronger sense of belonging by their second year than non-members” (p. 335). They go on to state that the most significant association to belonging was for students who were affiliated with social-community organizations. Perhaps, that is why members of this Latina sorority felt strongly tied to their universities and their communities. They have found a group that merges both the benefits of networking and leadership development of Greek organizations, while providing a sense of culture and service.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study. Only members of one Latina sorority were surveyed. Narratives could have addressed different issues if members from other Latina-based sororities had been included. Having shared experiences and messages from the same organization may limit the scope of responses than if a diverse group of sororities had been represented.

Another limitation is that the majority of the women surveyed followed a traditional path to undergraduate education. Most participants attended college straight out of high school, entering higher education in the 17 to 19 age range. Nontraditional students may view their experience in college and in a sorority differently than a traditional student. Committing themselves to a sorority may require balancing additional responsibilities that could result in their desire to join, and experience in, a sisterhood to look and feel differently.

Most members who completed the survey attended a traditional collegiate campus, meaning that they resided on campus either in residential housing or a nearby apartment. According to Austin (1999), “by simply eating, sleeping, and spending their waking hours on the college campus, residential students have a better chance than commuter students of developing a strong identification and attachment to undergraduate life” (p. 523). Commuter student experiences are vastly different than residential students. Being part of a sorority in a commuter campus comes with a different set of responsibilities and challenges than in a traditional campus.

Lastly, my personal affiliation with Delta Tau Lambda may have impacted the level of feedback by members. Members could have felt the need to be overly positive or not as willing to address possible issues. I tried to mitigate this possible impact by making the survey anonymous and voluntary. The participation, or lack thereof, would have no impact on members

which was expressed to participants prior to taking the survey. I also encouraged members during the recruitment process to be honest with their responses, and provide as much detail as they saw fit. Every effort was made to include a fair range of narratives in this study, including both positive and less than positive comments.

Future Research

There are a number of future studies that can be conducted to learn more about how Latina sororities impact women and universities. Research can be conducted in Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) like the Guardia and Evans (2008) study. There may be a different sense of the support and development for Latinas in institutions where they see reflections of themselves throughout the university. There could be a comparison made between Latina Greeks in PWI and HSI. A more in depth study can contrast the experiences of Latinas vs. Latino Greeks in a HSI.

There would also be an opportunity to study Latina membership in all sororities, be it Latina, Black, or White Greeks. The reasons for joining one type of organization over another may be different. How the women identify themselves and continue their development through their college career may be worthwhile to investigate. It may also be interesting to learn how leadership is developed for Latinas outside of Latina-based sororities.

Another study opportunity would be to explore the membership of non-Latinas in Latina-based sisterhoods. The research could look at what attracted non-Latinas to their sororities and how they feel being part of the organization as it relates to their ethnic backgrounds. Their narratives could shed light on what brought the women to the to a Latina sisterhood as well as what keeps them engaged.

Lastly, it may be worthwhile to look at Latina professionals who joined a Latina sorority in college. Some of the women that participated in this study have been members of Delta Tau

Lambda for more than a decade. Evaluating the long-term effect of membership in a LGLS may be a worthwhile effort. It would be interesting to know what keeps some women involved over years and not others. Also, in a study such as this one, the research can shed light on what traits of the sorority the women took away as they moved into their professional careers and other personal goals.

Conclusion

This qualitative study set out to explore the college experiences of Latinas who are members of a Latina-based sorority, the messages communicated by the organization, and the level of agency of the members. Astin (1999 & 2001), Khu's (1995), and Light (2001) research studies on the college experience shed light on the impact extracurricular activities have on students. In the current study I wanted to understand if membership in a Latina sorority would have the same kind of impact on Latina's lives during and after college as previous research had demonstrated.

The study first addressed why members joined a Latina Sorority and specifically Delta Tau Lambda. Participants shared that they wanted to be part of an organization with women who had similar realities in a college campus. They were attracted to ΔΤΛ for the community service, the professional demeanor, and for the opportunity to network as well as learn from other strong women of color. The leadership skills gained and sisterly bonding were appreciated by many of the women who took part in the survey.

The majority of the participants who completed the survey felt they were supported in their academic efforts through graduation, enhanced their social life, expanded social and professional networks, found a family away from home, and much more. Their experiences in the organization affect their lives both academically and socially. A few members had concerns

about the amount of time the organization took and how that translated into grades and other relationships. However, most members' experiences had positive outcomes due to their membership.

This research also examined the messages communicated by the sorority to members and to the university community. Here again, most respondents felt strongly about the positive messages they received from Delta Tau Lambda. Many felt that the organization represented professionalism, community dedication, and involvement, as well as a celebration of womanhood. The university image was thought to be positive by most members' accounts. One participant did have concerns when it came to interaction and acceptance from other Greeks.

Narratives collected from an electronic survey provided insights on participants' perception of what their membership in Delta Tau Lambda meant to their college experience. One respondent proclaimed that $\Delta\tau\lambda$ was her entire college experience. Women who were members for over a decade found value in the organization and still believed in what it represented years after joining and graduating from college. The women took charge of their college experience by consciously choosing a Latina-based organization in the effort to improve their collegiate career.

Lastly, I identify how participants' agency was impacted by their choice to join a Latina-based sorority. Responses demonstrated that the overall impact on human and rhetorical agency was positive for the women surveyed. The organization shaped their lives by strengthening their self-perception, increasing their sense of empowerment, and creating a safe place for self-discovery. For some members the organization changed her life for the better. The sorority afforded the women an agential space that supported their cultural pride, connection to community, and a network of supportive peers.

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