

NEGOTIATING MIXED MESSAGES: MASCULINITY AND IDENTITY IN GAY  
MEN IN FRATERNITIES

by

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(Under the Direction of LAURA A. DEAN)

ABSTRACT

Utilizing a narrative inquiry approach, this research study was designed to investigate the ways in which masculine socialization occurs in society by illuminating the experiences of gay men in fraternities and how they learned about what it means to be a man. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What messages do gay men in fraternities receive about what it means to be a man?
2. How do gay men negotiate these messages in the maintenance of their own identities?

Eight men between the ages of 23 and 50 who identified as gay or Queer men and participated in a fraternity for at least two years as an undergraduate student took part in this study. Each man submitted a typed memory story and participated in a semi-structured interview; narratives for each man were constructed from the data collected. Two overarching conceptual categories emerged from this data. The first category, performing masculinity versus authenticity, was associated with five contradictory discourses: (1) reinforcing standards of masculinity; (2) distancing self from stereotypes

about gay men; (3) compulsive heterosexuality; (4) personal authenticity; and (5) vulnerability, intimacy, and sex. The second category was organization versus individual and was divided into two contradictory discourses: (1) organizational values: espoused and enacted and (2) enhancing personal reputation through organizational affiliation. Each major theme is constructed of two opposing components to demonstrate the ways in which participants had to negotiate mixed messages within their organizations.

The findings of this study suggest that fraternities serve as a site of masculine socialization for college men. While encouraging men to form deep, life-long bonds with their brothers, fraternities also reinforce certain ways of performing masculinity. The men must also balance their personal aspirations with the expectations of the organization. Understanding these mixed messages can assist student affairs professionals in disrupting negative aspects of masculine performance, such as aggression, drinking to excess, and sexual assault. Student affairs professionals can utilize a better understanding of masculine socialization to develop programming, such as bystander intervention programs, that will enhance collegiate experiences for both men and women.

INDEX WORDS: Masculinity, Gay Men, Queer Men, Fraternities, Identity  
Negotiation, Gender Performance, Narrative Inquiry

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all the men who inspired me to explore this topic and who encouraged me along the way. In particular, this dissertation is dedicated to the young men I met during the summer of 2011 who shared their leadership struggles with me. Additionally, it is dedicated to the eight participants who allowed their stories to be told.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“The problem is, I don’t think my brothers will do anything I planned. I don’t even know why they elected me,” Justin said. Justin was the president of a large fraternity chapter in the southeastern United States, and he was gay. As a participant in a leadership institute for fraternity and sorority officers, Justin was spending the last day of the program creating a plan for change within his fraternity chapter. Part of this process entailed sitting down with a student affairs mentor to discuss his plan. Justin had just finished explaining a thoughtful and detailed plan that, according to my own experiences, seemed as if it would be effective. I had minimal feedback for him, so I asked him if he had any concerns about implementing his plan when he got home. He went on to discuss his fraternity experience so far, how he had been elected to the position because he was considered responsible and would take on the tasks no one else would do. He wanted to make his chapter better: end hazing, stop binge drinking, reduce damage to the chapter house, gain the respect of the campus administrators, win awards, and in the end, make the fraternity experience one that would be worthwhile for all members. But he was afraid that, because he was gay, his brothers would not take him seriously.

Justin was the first of three gay fraternity men who approached me with similar concerns over a two-week period just before I began a PhD program in College Student Affairs Administration at the University of Georgia. Each of these men held an executive

officer position in his chapter, wanted to create change within his chapter, and expressed concerns that his brothers wouldn't follow his leadership. I couldn't help but wonder how many other undergraduate men were having the same experience. As I prepared to conduct my first study, I was inspired to learn more about the experiences of gay men in fraternities.

Very little literature was available on this topic specifically, so I began to focus on both leadership and identity development in gay men and fraternity men separately. Through this process, I was introduced to two concepts that furthered my interest in understanding the experiences of gay fraternity men. The first was described by Johnson (1996), who noted his own interactions with gay men in college who were attempting to be the "best little boy in the world." I had witnessed this behavior myself, both in the undergraduate men I met prior to starting my degree and in the gay men I knew to be alumni of fraternities. The second concept was that of hegemonic masculinities, or the idea that there is one kind of masculinity and that it is narrowly defined and strictly enforced (Connell, 2005). As I collected data for my first study, I heard stories from my participants that reinforced this interest. Gay fraternity men were certainly receiving messages from their brothers about what it meant to be a man, and they were often reproducing those messages in an attempt to fit in to their chapters. I wanted to understand how those messages informed their construction of their own identities. That is, how do gay men define their own masculinity when a very narrow definition of what is masculine is strictly enforced all around them?

Had the data collection for this study progressed quickly, my curiosity about this topic may have ended there. However, this study took nearly three years to complete.

During that time I developed as a person and a scholar. Societal upheaval also shaped my perspective on the world and on my research. When I first conceptualized this study, I would have been loathe to admit it, but subconsciously, I thought of myself as “saving” the men I wanted to study. I was performing the role of “the good ally” while not acknowledging the problems with that stance.

I was also clinging to old ideas about what it meant to be a good researcher. Prior to beginning my doctoral program, I spent time sitting in Atlanta rush hour traffic designing studies in my head, but they were all quantitative, all surveys, and all based in positivism. Once I started my program, I learned about qualitative research and was attracted to it, but I still saw it as a precursor to a quantitative study. That is, I needed to use qualitative methods for my pilot study but that was just a way to get enough information about the topic to design an effective quantitative study that would serve as my dissertation.

While conducting that pilot study, however, I began to see qualitative inquiry as the legitimate type of research that it is. I no longer felt the pull to do a quantitative study because I wanted to delve more deeply into the personal experiences of gay men in fraternities. During this time, I also attended the Social Justice Training Institute (SJTI), which spurred me to move from performing allyship to doing justice work that might not earn me praise from those I was focused on helping. I was able to understand that I get benefits from justice work and I am not doing it simply to be altruistic. This realization began to inform how I designed this study, but I had not fully internalized it yet.

After data collection for this study began, the Black Lives Matter movement emerged in opposition to the extrajudicial killings of Black people by police officers.

*The Hunting Ground* (Ziering & Dick, 2015), a documentary about campus rape and administrative indifference to reports of sexual assault, debuted and raised national consciousness about rape culture on college campuses. Personally, I began working at a women's college that was grappling with decisions about whether and how to serve trans\* and gender non-conforming students on campus. These societal and institutional changes called for me to become a bolder advocate for social justice in a number of arenas. I undertook this study in order to uncover the ways in which men are socialized to perform masculinity with the hopes that the findings would point to ways to disrupt these messages and broaden what it means to be a man, improving the lives of gay men in fraternities. As the world and I changed, I finally understood that by making life on college campuses better for men, I could also make life better for women and for myself. It is with that hope that I present this completed dissertation study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) estimates that approximately 380,000 college students participated in fraternities in the 2015-2016 academic year (North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC), n.d.). Because the NIC only governs the organizations that choose to affiliate with the umbrella organization, this number is likely higher, when taking unaffiliated organizations, including multicultural and local fraternities, into account. While the exact number of gay men on any given campus may be difficult to ascertain due to variations in identity development and disclosure, Case (1998) estimated that gay men choose to participate in fraternities at a rate that is similar to their proportion in the campus population. Case, Hesp, and Eberly (2005) revisited Case's survey and found that approximately five to six

percent of all fraternity and sorority members identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB). Gay men who responded to that survey, however, believed that the percentage of gay men in fraternities was much higher than the percentage of gay men on campus. Ultimately, it is difficult to determine the prevalence of LGB members of fraternities and sororities due to the fact that students are still developing their identities in college and many of those who participate in fraternities and sororities do not reveal their sexual orientation to their fellow undergraduate members (Case et al., 2005). The invisibility of this population should not diminish the importance of their experiences.

Participation in fraternities offers many benefits for gay men. They tend to join these organizations looking for friendship and camaraderie with other men, rather than sexual relationships (Case, 1998; Case et al., 2005; Hesp & Brooks, 2009). The promise of an active social calendar of parties, formals, and sports events also attract many gay men (Case et al., 2005). Fraternity and sorority members report greater gains in academic and personal development and perceive their campus to be more supportive than their peers do (Pike, 2003). These experiences can lead to greater engagement on campus, both socially and academically (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). After graduation, fraternity membership can afford members access to a vast network of alumni, which can be helpful in their future careers (NIC, n.d.).

Often, however, fraternities advocate a strict enforcement of masculinity, transmitting a very narrow definition of what it means to be a man within the context of the organization (Rhoads, 2010). Many fraternities perpetuate hegemonic masculinity; those that differ are rare (Anderson, 2008). Gay men who participate in fraternities often experience the interrelated effects of hegemonic masculinity, such as heterosexism,

homophobia, and discrimination. That is, gay fraternity men may witness or experience harassment and derogatory remarks about other gay men (Anderson, 2008; Case, 1998; Hesp, 2006; Hesp & Brooks, 2009; Kimmel, 2008). They may also simply assumed to be heterosexual (Case et al., 2005). Additionally, gay men in fraternities may participate in the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity (Laird, 2013). This environment of stigmatization, marginalization, and perpetuation of harmful ideas about masculinity and where gay men fit in to the concept of masculinity may have an effect on the ways in which gay fraternity men develop their own sense of identity, but there is very little research on this topic.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore what messages gay men receive about what it means to be a man and how those messages may be used in the construction of their identities. Beginning in early childhood, gay men are socialized to understand societal expectations about masculinity from a variety of sources, such as family members, peers, educators, and religious leaders (Levine, 1998). Because this socialization is so pervasive and effective, it becomes almost unnoticeable; deconstructing dominant paradigms of masculinity can help to make it visible (Robinson, 2002). One way to reveal these socialization techniques is by accessing the memories that have been incorporated into identity construction (Biklen, 2004).

Power is a key component of masculinity and, because men most often are the performers of masculinity, that power is generally understood in a simple dichotomy of men as the oppressors and women as the oppressed (Robinson, 2002). Yet men are also dominated by other men who enforce societal expectations about masculine gender

performance (Connell, 2005). Deconstruction of this dominant paradigm of masculinity, including understanding how it is reproduced, and liberation of both men and women through this understanding, drive this study. Feminist understandings of power, patriarchy, and dominant social structures can be helpful in examining masculinity from this standpoint (Layland, 1990). Therefore, a feminist theoretical orientation guided the methodological choice.

Narrative inquiry can help “reveal cultural and social patterns through the lens of individual experiences” (Patton, 2002, p. 478). Because individuals create narratives in service of their identity construction (Polkinghorne, 1988), this methodology is appropriate for interrogating the ways gay men in fraternities incorporate messages about what it means to be a man into their own identities. Storytellers reveal how they made sense of an experience through their stories; by listening and analyzing to these stories, researchers can understand that meaning-making process (Bailey & Tilley, 2002). Therefore, I solicited memory stories from participants, asking them to focus on the ways in which they learned what it meant to be a man in the context of their fraternity. I also interviewed each participant to evoke more stories related to the fraternity experience. I analyzed these stories in order to explore the messages they received in the context of the fraternity, how they experienced hegemonic masculinity, and how these incidents influenced their construction of their identities as gay men. Therefore, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What messages do gay men in fraternities receive about what it means to be a man?

2. How do gay men negotiate these messages in the maintenance of their own identities?

### **Significance of the Study**

There is a paucity of literature focused on gay men in fraternities in general (Case et al., 2005), and especially in regard to the role masculine socialization may play in these environments. There is even less research centered on identity development of gay men in the face of hegemonic masculinities. In addition to attending to this gap in the literature, this study will seek to uncover the ways in which privilege is reproduced, even by those who do not hold such privilege. Revealing the ways in which gay fraternity men collude with their heterosexual brothers in perpetuating hegemonic masculinity can serve to undermine complicity as a social norm (Bell, 2010). Additionally, naming the subtle ways in which gender oppression occurs in real-life contexts can be valuable in dismantling patriarchy (Butler, 1990). Hegemonic masculinity oppresses both genders, as it not only subjugates femininity, but limits men's emotional responses and ability to build relationships with both men and women (Edwards & Jones, 2009). By illuminating methods for masculine socialization, this study can help college student affairs administrators better understand the processes of privilege and oppression that are likely occurring when they are not present. This can lead to setting appropriate expectations for and enhancing the ability to work effectively with all college men, not just gay men in fraternities (Harris & Barone, 2011). Ultimately, these understandings can lead to the creation of fraternities that are affirming spaces for all varieties of masculine gender performance (Anderson, 2008).

### **A Note About Language**

Throughout this dissertation, readers may notice that I use the terms LGBT, LGB, homosexual, Queer, and gay men. These terms are utilized intentionally and not interchangeably. First, my goal is to use the most precise language to refer to the population about which I am speaking. When speaking about a general population, such as when I discuss my experience working with Atlanta Pride, I use LGBT because lesbians, gay men, bisexual persons, and transgender individuals are all present in that context. When writing about the literature others have contributed to my understanding of this study, I generally try to honor the words used by the original authors. This can, at times, be problematic, especially when reviewing older works that utilize the term “homosexual.” This word is clinical and is often used by anti-gay activists to conjure historical images of lesbians and gay men being treated for mental illness because of their sexual orientation. The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (2010) advises news organizations to restrict use of the term; I avoided it where possible. Additionally, some authors used the umbrella acronym, LGBT, when none of the study participants were transgender. In those cases, I altered their language and utilized LGB to more precisely convey the population included. The term “Queer,” once a derogatory term, is in the process of being reclaimed and carries a political connotation that is broader than simply an identity descriptor (Dilley, 2005). Use of the word Queer addresses the complexity of identity, especially as understandings about the fluidity of sexual identities emerge. By identifying as Queer, men and women resist narrow categorization of their identities (Levy & Johnson, 2011). To recognize the diversity of the community, recruitment materials will utilize the phrase “men who identify as gay or queer” and I

will refer to participants as Queer when they have identified as such. When portraying my participants' voices, I will always use their own words, even when their use is in opposition to this statement. For my own work, I am focused on gay men only; therefore, I used the phrase "gay men" or "gay fraternity men" to discuss the participants of this study.

Additionally, the profession of fraternity and sorority life comes with its own problematic terms. Many older texts and even some current professionals in the field use "Greek" as an umbrella term for fraternities and sororities. However, this term is outdated, as it evokes the popular film *Animal House*; this is problematic for organizations that want to be seen as values-based organizations promoting leadership development and same-sex friendships (Torbenenson, 2009). The submission guidelines for *Oracle*, the research journal of the Association of Fraternity and Sorority Advisors (AFA) (2016) ban the use of "Greek" in the publication. I will utilize the phrase "fraternity and sorority" to denote the general community and use "fraternity" when speaking about men only.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

An exploration of the literature on gay men in fraternities will ground an understanding of how gay men negotiate their identities in conjunction with the messages they receive about masculinity within the fraternity context. Due to the lack of literature on this topic, however, it is necessary to understand the complementary and overlapping topics related to college men, gay men, and fraternity men. The pervasive nature of societal gender norms and masculine socialization, therefore, drives the understanding of these areas of knowledge. Additionally, the use of collective memory work and its roots in the feminist research tradition, as well as the liberationist intent of this study, necessitates the use of a feminist theoretical framework for this study.

#### **Using Feminist Theory to Study Men**

Feminist theory, at its core, is focused on recognizing the oppression exerted upon women in patriarchal structures, especially Western culture (Crotty, 1998). Feminism spans both the academic and sociopolitical realms. These traditions are not separate, however, as many feminist researchers infuse sociopolitical agendas in their academic work (Prasad, 2005). Crotty (1998) concluded that feminist research is informed by an “abiding sense of oppression in a man-made world” (p. 182). However, feminism is not a monolithic movement; many individual movements are incorporated under the feminist theory umbrella (Prasad, 2005). For example, liberal feminism focuses on the individual

woman. This mode of thinking is directed at encouraging women to reject gender norms and liberate themselves, rather than focusing on an overall societal structure (Crotty, 1998). Women's voice/experience feminism recognized that the male experience is portrayed as the norm and advocated for a paradigm shift (Prasad, 2005). Marxist feminism was concerned with "women's work," or the division of labor along gendered lines, both in and outside the home (Crotty, 1998). Radical feminism was centered on the concept of a pervasive social hierarchy along gendered lines (Prasad, 2005) and often involved sexual and reproductive issues, from sexual harassment to contraception and abortion (Crotty, 1998).

These movements placed the politics of sex and gender as the primary concern of feminist theory (Agger, 1997). hooks (1984) challenged the belief that "a hierarchy of oppression exists, with sexism in first place" (p. 35). While she did recognize that gender oppression was a concern that all humans experienced, either as oppressed or oppressor, hooks sought to overturn beliefs that anti-racist work and feminist work were incompatible or were competing concerns. Instead, hooks advocated for a conceptualization of feminism the elimination of all forms of domination, including those related to race, class, and gender (hooks, 1984).

While there are many feminisms present in contemporary critical social research, the most relevant to this study is a focus on male supremacy and gender performance. Male supremacy is evident in cultures where men are seen as the universal person, whereas the feminine gender is "marked"—that is, femininity is not as valuable as masculinity. In fact, in many societies femininity is viewed as a lack of masculinity

(Butler, 1990). However, it is important to recognize that masculinity and femininity exist on a continuum rather than being a dichotomous variable (Agger, 1997).

Patriarchal culture has invested great time and energy into devaluing the economic and political contributions of women. Therefore, when men choose professions or responsibilities that are considered traditionally “pink collar,” they are seen as less valuable than men who take on traditionally masculine roles (Agger, 1997). In this way, patriarchy oppresses not only women within the system, but men as well by holding them to very strict standards of masculine performance.

Butler (1990) posited that gender is a performance, and it is important to recognize the power relations that exist based on such performances. Agger (1997) stated, “people actually ‘produce’ their genders in a way that they perceive to be socially and culturally relevant” (p. 105). In this way, gender performativity is a response to the expectations of patriarchal culture. Therefore, the way in which a person performs his or her gender is subject to geographical location and historical context (Butler, 1990). Culturally approved gender performance is not stagnant; it changes in space and time.

Some theorists deny the possibility of using feminist theory as a basis for research on men (Crotty, 1998), but this is short-sighted. Layland (1990) explored the conflicts inherent in using feminist theory to explore masculinity. She concluded that a feminist understanding of power and patriarchy is useful when investigating masculinity. hooks (1984) declared “men are not exploited or oppressed by sexism, but there are still ways in which they suffer as a result of it” (p. 72), advocating for the inclusion of men in feminist movements. Additionally, Bird (1996) advanced the idea that a great deal can be learned about gender inequality by studying relations both *between* men and women and *among*

men and women. Brod (2002) stated, “to let the study of gender be equivalent to the study of women is to leave men as unmarked by gender and hence normatively human” (p. 166). Therefore, using feminist theory is helpful to understand how gay men negotiate their identities in settings populated primarily by men against a background of hegemonic masculinity and strict gender performance.

### **Masculinities**

Critical consumers of research, especially research in college student development, often argue that many existing models of student development are based on White men, who represented the standard for humanity in the eyes of past researchers (Davis, 2002). Therefore, much of the recent research in student development has focused on non-dominant populations without considering that the same sociological influences have influenced men’s development via the lens of gender (Davis & Laker, 2011). This sets up a false dichotomy, though, as most of those studies do not look at masculinity or gender as a construct. More recently, emerging research has focused on men, masculinities, and ways in which men build their gender identity (Davis, 2002). A discussion of masculinities provides an important societal context for the development of men’s identities.

Sociobiological research on men has focused on evolutionary theory in order to explain the differences among genders. These studies portray men as a cocktail of testosterone and biological impulses, helpless to control their evolutionary urges toward promiscuity and aggressive competition with other men in order to ensure the reproduction of their genetic lines. However, these studies are based on specious information, with studies conducted to look only at “normative” behaviors among

humans that are then tied back to their genetic codes. There is little room left for understanding their socialization in modern culture (Kimmel, 2011).

Alternatively, Connell (2005) argued that masculinity is a social construction. Men are not acting according to these historical needs; their behavior reflects the current patriarchal standard. A man's gender identity is constructed through relationships with both men and women as well as societal expectations (Brod, 2002). Power becomes a key component in understanding masculinity as a social construction; masculinity is associated with authority and dominance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005)

It is important recognize that there are multiple masculinities; all men do not have the same experience or perform masculinity in the same manner. Connell (2005) identified four relations among these multiple masculinities in Western society: hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalization. The relationships among these four presentations of masculinity are helpful for understanding the experiences of gay men in fraternities.

### **Hegemonic Masculinities**

Hegemonic masculinities are the apex of the masculinity hierarchy. Men who represent this category live up to the strictest interpretation of what it means to be a man in their society. This form of masculinity depends on the dominance of men and subjugation of women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Emotional detachment, competition, and objectification of women are behaviors that can often be observed among men who are striving to achieve this standard (Bird, 1996).

Power is implicit in this relationship, as Connell (2005) noted, "hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and

institutional power, collective if not individual” (p. 77). While hegemonic masculinities can be reinforced through violence, dominance of these identities is more likely to be achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Though it is nearly impossible to live up to the hegemonic standard, both women and men engage in behaviors that reinforce and reproduce this standard, especially as they participate in the socialization of young boys (Robinson, 2002). Men can learn as much about what it means to be a man from mothers, sisters, and romantic partners as they do from other men (Dancy, 2012).

### **Subjugated Masculinities**

Subjugated masculinities are frequently associated with femininity. Gay men most often fall into this category, as do straight men who exhibit qualities that may be perceived as feminine (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Men who cannot or will not perform masculinity according to cultural ideals are often seen as “transgressors” and can be reviled, punished, or ignored by those who are striving to uphold hegemonic standards (Dancy, 2012). Gay men, in particular, often receive harsh sanctions from their peers when they do not conform to traditional gender roles (Levine, 1998).

The coming out process is often complicated by socialization around masculinities. As gay men construct and reveal their identities, they navigate the interplay between sexual orientation and gender identity (Berila, 2011). This can lead to an exaggerated performance of gender that is hypermasculine (Levine, 1998) or conforms to media stereotypes of gay men as “flamboyant,” feminine, or weak (Layland, 1990). Because femininity is seen as “less than” in the eyes of those practicing hegemonic

masculinity, there is no lower form of masculinity or manliness than this (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

### **Complicit Masculinities**

Hegemonic masculinities are unattainable for most men, yet they are not completely subjugated either. Because the lives of men are inextricably intertwined with the lives of women, many men cannot build satisfying lives with wives, mothers, and daughters without conceding some power (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, “men who received the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance could be regarded as showing a complicity masculinity” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Because so few men are able to achieve hegemonic societal standards, men who are complicit in the socialization process are primarily responsible for upholding hegemony (Robinson, 2002). Additionally, “a degree of overlap or blurring between hegemonic and complicit masculinities is extremely likely if hegemony is effective” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 839). That is, many men believe that others are effortlessly able to live up to these impossible standards because the behaviors of those who are complicit reinforce the hegemony (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

### **Marginalized Masculinities**

Marginalized masculinities are often related to race, class, or ability. The dominant masculine ideal in the United States is not only masculine, it is rich, white, and physically dominant, as well. Therefore, while men with lower socio-economic status or men of color may enact the currently accepted behaviors to be a part of the hegemony, they can never fully attain that status. Authorization is the key to this masculine

relationship; the group in power authorizes who is an acceptable representation of the hegemony, and those who fall outside of that narrow range cannot attain that status no matter how hard they work to enact hegemonic masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

African American men are dominated by white men in the United States, placing them in the realm of marginalized masculinities. Historical factors related to slavery and the civil rights movement inform African American men's conceptions of their own masculinity. Race is inextricably tied to masculinity for these men and they often see themselves through the eyes of their oppressors (Dancy, 2012). African American men tended to uphold several tenets of hegemonic masculinities. Emotional detachment, toughness, strength, and aggressiveness were seen as definitive markers of masculinity (Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011). Competition, in terms of both athletic ability and the ability to achieve sexual relationships with women, were also important to African American men (Harper, 2004). Additionally, African American men placed a strong priority on being responsible (Harris et al., 2011) and preparing to take care of a family (Harper, 2004). Accumulation of wealth and possessions, in particular an excess of material goods, was one way to showcase responsibility (Harris et al., 2011). Leadership and community advancement were also seen as important components of responsibility (Harper, 2004). These behaviors align with hegemonic conceptions of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), but also reveal a tenuous relationship with those ideals. Marginalization of African American men has transformed dominant conceptions of masculinity into something new (Dancy, 2012).

## Performance of Masculinity

Butler's (1990) assertion that gender is performed rather than ingrained is consistent with this conception of multiple masculinities. Men are told they are the dominant population, yet many feel personally powerless (Capraro, 2000). This is because, as they construct their own gender identity, men incorporate both hegemonic and non-hegemonic conceptions of masculinity (Bird, 1996). Yet men believe they must perform a certain type of masculinity to be accepted by their peers.

Kimmel (2010) purported, "Masculinity is a *homosocial* enactment. We test ourselves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because we want other men to grant us our manhood" (p. 24). Manhood cannot be granted by women; their status in society is so low they are inconsequential. Yet men live with a constant fear that other men will pierce the armor of their masculine performance, revealing a "true self" that cannot possibly live up to cultural standards of masculinity. This, Kimmel (2010) asserted, is the root of homophobia, and why it is "a central organizing principle of our culture of manhood" (p. 24). This fear of being "unmasked" causes men to remain silent when they witness sexism, heterosexism, and racism among their fellow men. Homophobia is responsible for an exaggerated performance of what it looks like to be a man (Kimmel, 2010).

Men are often subject to gender-role harassment, or the sanctioning of those who are not "man enough" (Funk & Werhun, 2011). Even very young men are rewarded for perpetrating hegemonic masculinities. Pascoe (2007) detailed the subjugation of high school boys and girls by their male peers. The men in her study used "fag" as a disciplinary measure to police gender role adherence; it had nothing to do with sexual

orientation. Being called a fag was the worst insult these boys could imagine. Pascoe also described a culture of “compulsive heterosexuality” in which teen boys talked about heterosexual sex constantly, using stories of their sexual prowess with women to assert their dominance as men.

These behaviors appeared in both college men and young professionals, as well. Kimmel (2008) described a process of constantly jockeying for a position, where men employ a variety of behaviors to express their masculine dominance. Demonstrating knowledge of sports, drinking copious amounts of alcohol in social settings, and bragging about sexual conquests were among the ways men in his study practiced and reinforced hegemonic masculinities (Kimmel, 2008). Harris (2008) found that men often contrasted their own beliefs about the important components of masculinity against other men. These men defined character, integrity, and respect as aspects of masculinity that were personally important to them and identified athleticism, possession of a muscular build, and competitiveness as important to their peers. Yet, those same men engaged in hypermasculine gender performances that were directly opposed to their espoused values when in social situations. These behaviors included misogynistic and homophobic comments as well as excessive alcohol consumption and aggressive competition with peers (Harris, 2008).

### **College Men and Masculinities**

In student affairs, the prevailing attitude is that most standing theories are based upon men; therefore, studying men is unnecessary (Davis, 2002). While men should not be held as the neutral standard for humanity in research as has historically been the case, they should not be ignored, either; they are gendered beings and must be studied that way

(Hearn, 2004). As men engage in homosocial behaviors on college campuses, they reinforce hegemony through a variety of behaviors. While some behaviors associated with hegemonic masculinity are positive, the strict enforcement of these behaviors is problematic (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Negative behaviors, such as violence, aggression, and excessive drinking often attract a great deal of attention (Capraro, 2000). This can lead to an expectation of mediocrity for college men; as long as they refrain from damaging property, drinking to excess, and engaging in unwanted sexual contact with women, they will be praised (Harris & Barone, 2011).

Davis (2002) endeavored to understand how societal gender roles influenced the identity development of college men. Five themes emerged from this study. First, the *importance of self expression* stood in contrast to the stereotype of the uncommunicative man. However, none of the participants in the study could articulate this theme without mentioning that it went against gender roles in some manner. The second theme, *code of communication caveats*, further illuminated the difficulty participants had with the first theme. First, men found it easier to express their true thoughts and feelings with women, but generally only with women they saw as friends, not those who were potential romantic partners. Second, they communicated very differently with men in one-on-one settings versus in groups. Finally, communication of affection to other men was generally done non-verbally or while men were sitting side-by-side. *Fear of femininity* was the third theme; men in the study expressed great frustration that they could not fully communicate their thoughts and feelings due to this fear. The fourth theme was *confusion about and distancing from masculinity*. Men in the study were not able to articulate their own relationship to masculinity; they appeared to have not thought about

it, yet at the same time resisted identification with stereotypical norms of masculinity. The final theme, *sense of challenge without support*, describes the feelings men have about support for women and other non-dominant populations on campus. They expressed frustration that women seemed to receive more time, attention, and resources on campus as compared to men (Davis, 2002).

Edwards (2007) likened men's identity development to putting on and taking off a mask. This model described how men develop their identities first through constant interaction with societal expectations:

The participants' descriptions of society's expectations of men in general were thorough, clear, immediate, and consistent. Major components of these overall expectations included being competitive, in control of emotions or unemotional, aggressive, responsible, the breadwinner, in a position of authority, rational, strong, successful, tough, and breaking the rules. (Edwards, 2007, p. 108)

These external expectations are transmitted by the dominant culture; men in subordinated cultural groups may have additional expectations in order to be seen as men.

Edwards (2007) also purported that men begin to perform masculinity according to those societal expectations, which takes place in three phases. In phase one, men begin to feel the pressure to put on a mask in order to be seen as a man. They observe other men who seem to be naturally meeting the societal standard to be a man, but their own insecurities lead them to believe that they could never live up to such a standard. Phase two is marked by the masculine performance, or actually wearing the mask. This mask is created in response to society's expectations of them and is a way for the men to be accepted. Sometimes, the men will perform in one arena, such as sports, in order to

“prop up” their masculinity as they fail to live up to societal standards in another area, such as by being gay or creating art. Men begin to recognize the consequences of wearing the mask in phase three. They experience a loss of their own humanity as the effort to live up to this strict standard affects their relationships with both women and other men. Finally, men begin to recognize that the mask they have created does not fit them, and they are able to transcend external expectations.

Harris (2010) described college men making meaning of masculinities. They defined various aspects of masculinities as being respected, being confident and self-assured, assuming responsibility, embodying physical prowess (Harris, 2010). In Badaszewski’s (2012) study on positive masculinity, participants identified responsibility as a major component of positive experiences with masculinity. These men also found benevolence, development of a sense of self, and identifying role models as important components of these experiences.

### **Gay Men**

Johnson (1996) wrote about his observations of gay college men from his perspective as an admissions counselor. He purported, based entirely on anecdotal evidence, that gay men seemed to be striving to become “the best little boy on the face of the planet” (p. 38). That is, they appeared to strive for the highest recognition in leadership and academics, as if in hopes that it would “make up” for their sexual identity, which they perceived to be a detriment. This appears to be a reference to Reid’s (1973) autobiographical work, *The Best Little Boy in the World*. In it, Reid describes how he utilized perfectionism in order to compensate for being gay as well as hide his identity. In discussing his high school experience, he says,

Another important line of defense, the most important on a practical day-to-day basis, was my prodigious list of activities. 'Highly motivated; a self-starter,' the teachers would write on my character reports. Hell, yes, I was motivated! No one could expect me to be out dating on Saturday nights if the school paper was going to be on the stands on Tuesday (p. 39).

Downs (2012) echoed this finding in discussing his observations of psychotherapy patients. These men, he related, moved from being overwhelmed by shame, to compensating for shame, to cultivating authenticity. Laird (2013) reported that gay college men in her study described themselves as driven and organized; these descriptors allowed the men to feel that they were good leaders, which was a distinction they deeply desired.

### **Identity Development in Gay Men**

Multiple theorists have approached identity development in lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals. Cass (1979) advanced a social psychological model of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity development. The model consists of six stages, each of which possesses a cognitive and an affective component; that is, each stage takes into account both how individuals see themselves and how they feel about their own perceptions and the perceptions of others about themselves. In *Prestage*, LGB individuals consider themselves to be heterosexual; they preference being heterosexual over being homosexual. The first stage is *Identity Confusion* and is marked by the dawning realization that the individual may have non-heterosexual feelings. In *Identity Comparison*, the second stage, gay men, lesbians, and bisexual persons become able to manage their feelings about their newfound identity and acknowledge that they may be

different from their friends and family. *Identity Tolerance* is demarcated by an internal acknowledgement by the individual that he or she may be gay, lesbian, or bisexual and an initial attempt to reach out to others who identify similarly. Individuals are able to fully accept their non-heterosexual identities and form friendships with other LGB community members through frequent contact in the fourth stage, *Identity Acceptance*. The next stage, *Identity Pride*, describes gay, lesbian, and bisexual people focusing entirely on LGB culture and engaging in activism; this can sometimes be to the detriment of their interactions with heterosexual people. In the final stage, *Identity Synthesis*, individuals see the world as less of a dichotomy between LGB and heterosexual communities. They are able to see their sexual identity as just one aspect of their overall identity.

D'Augelli (1994), alternatively, posited a lifespan model of LGB identity development which emphasizes person-environment interaction. Three variables are important to the overall model: the actions of the individual as well as the individual's subjective interpretation of those experiences; the individuals' interactions with important people in their lives, such as friends and family; and the larger context, including societal, historical, and geographical norms. There are six processes involved in D'Augelli's model of LGB identity development; these processes are interactive and may or may not be undertaken in order. The first process, *exiting heterosexual identity*, encompasses the recognition that an individual's attractions and affections are non-heterosexual and the sharing of that recognition with others. *Developing a personal lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity status* is the second process. This involves the individual determining his or her own interpretation of what their sexual identity, be it gay, lesbian, or bisexual, means for his or her own life. The third process, called *developing a lesbian, gay, or bisexual*

*identity*, occurs when the individual creates a support system of friends and family members who are aware of and accept the individual's sexual identity. The next process, *becoming a lesbian, gay, or bisexual offspring*, involves the act of revealing one's sexual identity to his or her parents and dealing with whatever reaction occurs. The fifth process is *developing a lesbian, gay, or bisexual intimacy status*, in which an individual learns to relate to a significant same-sex partner in an intimate way. D'Augelli remarked that this may be difficult to achieve due to a lack of open lesbian and gay couples in society; however, this may no longer be as difficult as when the model was established due to historical and societal changes. *Entering a lesbian, gay, or bisexual community*, the sixth process, occurs when an individual makes a decision about how to interact with the larger LGB community (D'Augelli, 1994).

Cass (1979) and D'Augelli (1994) purported long-standing models that have been used by many student affairs scholars and practitioners, but these models are also problematic. First, these models place a strong emphasis on the coming out process (Dilley, 2005). Such primacy of the coming out experience does not reflect modern college students' experiences. These students will often have multi-layered relationships within the institution—interacting with faculty and a variety of staff members who have varying levels of understanding of LGB student experiences. For example, hall directors, academic advisors, judicial officers, professors, and career counselors will interact with these students in many different contexts across campus. Negotiating the coming out process with each of these individuals may not be worthwhile for the student (Berila, 2011).

Like a great deal of research on non-heterosexual college students, these models fail to recognize the fluidity of identity; they assume that students are either LGB or straight, in or out. The understanding of these students' development is still held in opposition to and within the understanding of heterosexual student development (Dilley, 2005). As the understanding of non-heterosexual identities continues to develop, these models leave no room for queer identities that resist categorization (Levy & Johnson, 2011). Finally, these models exalt the understanding of one identity over all others, disregarding the concept of intersectionality (Harper, Wardell, & McGuire, 2011). For example, these models ignore the fact that gay men are socialized around both masculinity and heteronormativity. Their identities as gay men are developed in ways that intersect with both their understanding of their culture's definition of manliness as well as the stigmatization of LGB people (Levine, 1998). Without a more nuanced understanding of LGB student development, LGB students continue to be seen more as exotic populations than ordinary members of society (Layland, 1990).

### **Gay Men and Masculinities**

Levine (1998) asserted that gay men are socialized in masculinity in the same ways that heterosexual boys are: "Families, schools, and churches teach all boys, including those who later become gay, how to be manly" (Levine, 1998, p. 12). Yet some gay men "trangess" traditional codes of behavior and do not conform to societal gender roles (Dancy, 2012). These behaviors in young boys are stigmatized and punished by both adults and peers in an effort to teach them "appropriate" gendered behaviors. These sanctions fail because men who do not conform already understand the expected roles (Levine, 1998).

A popular stereotype about gay men revolves around the persona of the “screaming queen”—one who is flamboyantly effeminate (Layland, 1990). As being out and gay became more acceptable, gay men adopted more traditionally masculine gender roles (Levine, 1998). This led to many gay men attempting to distance themselves from more feminine stereotypes (J. Reid, 1998) and even denigrate other gay men who did not conform to the new masculine ideal (Layland, 1990). Therefore, gay men in college are often receiving mixed messages about what masculinity should look like for them. They are often trying out both hegemonic masculine norms as well as “stereotypical” gay masculine norms in order to decide which is most fitting for them (Berila, 2011).

### **Fraternity Men**

The founding of Phi Beta Kappa in 1776, with its use of Greek letters as a name and Masonic initiation rituals, influenced a new trend in student organizations on college campuses. Promising brotherhood and social connection, social fraternities proliferated nationwide in the ensuing years (Torbenson, 2009). In the 2011-2012 academic year, the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) estimated over 325,000 undergraduates were among its members on college campuses nationwide (North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC), n.d.). Because the NIC represents only those organizations who choose to affiliate, and there are many multicultural fraternities, Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs), and local fraternities that do not fall under the NIC umbrella, the actual number of fraternity men currently on college campuses is certainly higher. These organizations are focused on social activities but purport strong values, generally organized around the ideals of chivalry and gentlemanly behavior; they also promote leadership development (Torbenson, 2009).

Involvement in fraternities carries many negative connotations due to popular media stereotypes regarding hazing, binge drinking, and other detrimental behaviors (Wilkie, 2010). However, most fraternities were founded by a small group of men who shared the same values and ideals. Sometimes the groups had an additional purpose, such as initiating campus change or obtaining additional rights for students in the face of disagreements with campus administrators. Yet each organization's overall purpose was to create a society where shared values could be the basis for deep friendships and a sense of belonging (Torbenson, 2009). As fraternities grew and expanded to multiple campuses, the idea that one could connect with a greater alumni network became a strong incentive for involvement. Promises of career advancement in a variety of areas, from politics to sales, strengthen the desire to join these organizations (Clawson, 1989). These assumptions are borne out in the statistics as of 2013; half of the top 10 Fortune 500 CEOs, 44% of United States Presidents, and 31% of Supreme Court Justices are alumni of social fraternities (North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC), n.d.).

Additionally, modern fraternities promote philanthropy, community service, and educational programming as benefits of membership (Torbenson, 2009). Campus-based chapters raise millions of dollars in support of the inter/national headquarters' chosen charities. Individual brothers generate hundreds of hours of community service. Chapters provide monthly programming on writing resumes, interviewing for jobs, healthy eating, etiquette, and a variety of other useful topics. In general, fraternities can encourage men to grow and develop in a number of different ways to become more effective citizens (Torbenson, 2009). Pike (2003) reported that first year students who participate in fraternities and sororities feel more welcome and supported on campus;

seniors in fraternities and sororities were more involved on campus than their peers.

These tendencies may make these students more likely to persist at their chosen institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Both first year and senior students who were involved in fraternities and sororities reported greater personal development than their peers, and seniors reported greater academic development as well (Pike, 2003).

Additionally, fraternity men reported that they were more likely to participate in collaborative learning activities than sorority women or independent students (Pike, 2003). Therefore, fraternity involvement can have a positive impact on men's learning and development outcomes in college.

Despite these positive outcomes, fraternities have a long-standing reputation for being the sites of excessive drinking, sexual risk-taking, violence, and disciplinary issues (Boswell & Spade, 1996). Hypermasculine gender performance and rampant homophobia are also markers of the fraternity experience (Harris, 2008). Fraternities, where men spend large amounts of time in same-gender social interactions, can become an interesting environment to attempt to understand how certain subcultures elicit behaviors related to this type of gender performance (Brod, 2002).

### **Fraternity Men and Masculinities**

When fraternities make the news, it is nearly always negative, and it often focuses on behaviors that are related to hegemonic masculinities (Wilkie, 2010). Rhoads (2010) described chapters where physical intimidation was used to enforce a strict standard of masculinity. Hazing rituals routinely encouraged new members to engage in physical competitions and demeaning displays in order to prove their worth as men. Compulsive heterosexuality was evident as the men in the chapters also used alcohol to manipulate

women into having sex and encouraged each other to have sex with as many women as possible. Developing exclusive relationships with women was discouraged; men who spent too much time with the same woman were considered less masculine than their peers (Rhoads, 2010).

Kimmel (2008) related incidents of violence, humiliation, and binge drinking within fraternity environments; these behaviors were associated with the performance of a very strict ideal of what it means to be a fraternity man. Boswell and Spade (1996) investigated rape culture in fraternities. Fraternities in this study actively planned parties with marked gender imbalances; they were attended by far more men than women and featured heavy drinking, violence, male nudity, and property damage. Men in these fraternities often participated in heckling women who stayed overnight at the fraternity houses, positioning themselves in public places as the women left in the morning (Boswell & Spade, 1996). Harris (2008) found that fraternity members expressed homophobic ideals more often and more intensely than most other peers; only student-athletes' attitudes approached the same level of intensity.

Anderson (2008) presented an alternative to this stereotypical fraternity climate; he studied a chapter of a fraternity that was notable in the lack of behaviors related to hegemonic masculinity observed in that setting. However, the men in the chapter still held an ideal of being a gentleman, which was narrowly defined by the chapter and, while it emphasized respect for women, still treated women as though they were less capable than men. Kimmel and Davis (2011) declared that fraternity men participate in a culture of silence; though some men may not personally agree with the behaviors of their peers,

such as fighting, hazing, binge drinking, or denigrating women, they do not speak up out of fear of having their own masculinity questioned.

### **Gay Men in Fraternities**

There is very little literature on gay men in fraternities. Case et al. (2005) advanced one reason for this, stating, “By choice or perceived necessity, most GLB fraternity and sorority members keep their sexual orientation hidden from their fellow members. The invisibility of the GLB population helps explain the dearth of research” (p. 15). The few studies that exist revolve around membership experiences and reasons for joining. Case (1998) developed the first detailed survey of LGBTQ fraternity and sorority alumni. The results of the survey revealed that nearly all respondents joined “for similar reasons as heterosexual members, namely, to find friendship and camaraderie, as a social outlet, and to have a support group and sense of belonging. With few exceptions, sexual attraction was not a motivation for joining” (Case, 1998, p. 68). Additionally, gay men in fraternities tended to be high achieving; 80% of the men who responded to the survey had served as an executive officer during their collegiate experience. Most of the respondents chose not to reveal their sexual identity while involved in their undergraduate chapter. For those who did, most received positive reactions from heterosexual peers, but still faced discrimination and homophobia from chapter members and the greater fraternity and sorority community. At a chapter level, even when individual organizations sought to be supportive of their LGB members, they were fearful of being labeled as a gay fraternity and the effects that would have on campus standing and recruitment (Case, 1998). Laird (2013) confirmed this finding, where even the gay men in fraternity chapters were intent on avoiding this label.

Case et al. (2005) revisited Case's original survey and found similar results. While respondents described pervasive experiences of heteronormality, 89% reported being "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their fraternity and sorority experiences. At the same time, they indicated their sexual orientation detracted from their overall experience. The factors that limited their quality of experience included social events geared exclusively for heterosexual couples, fear and intimidation related to other members' homophobic attitudes and remarks, and feeling as if personal relationships were limited due to having to hide a part of their identity (Case et al., 2005).

Rankin et al. (2007) administered a similar survey to both alumni/ae and current undergraduate members of fraternities and sororities. In this study, 10% of alumni/ae respondents and 0% of undergraduate respondents cited passing as heterosexual as a reason for joining. The findings also indicated that it was becoming more acceptable for undergraduate students to come out while still participating in the chapter, with 83% of undergraduate students reporting that they were out to their chapters and 47% of alumni/ae coming out after graduation. Regional differences were still a large factor, with 100% of undergraduate respondents from the northeastern United States being out to their chapters contrasted with 27% of respondents from the Southeast. Once again, while most respondents reported harassment, derogatory remarks, or a generally unfavorable climate for LGB individuals in their fraternities or sororities, the overwhelming majority indicated satisfaction with their experiences (Rankin et al., 2007).

### **Masculinities in Similar Contexts**

Because there is little research on gay men in fraternities, especially in relation to the expression of hegemonic masculinity, it is important to examine similar contexts.

Intercollegiate athletics and the military are two environments where men can experience the strict enforcement of masculine identities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). College military service, in the form of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), may be analogous to fraternity involvement, even when women are present.

**Gay men and hegemonic masculinities in the military.** Due to the recently repealed “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT),” the government policy forbidding LGBT individuals from participating in military service, there is little research on gay men in the military (Burks, 2011). However, several studies reference overt homophobia and denigration of femininity within military contexts. Zurbriggen (2010) contended that certain behaviors related to hegemonic masculinity are rewarding for individual soldiers. These actions, such as aggression, sexual encounters without emotional attachment, restriction of emotions, and violent homophobia are magnified in times of war because they correspond to high levels of performance in the field and, ultimately, survival. Silva’s (2008) study on female Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) members asserted that this hypermasculinity served to “other” women and gay men in the military and encouraged those who are less masculine to conform to the standards in place. Participants in Silva’s study described their desire to perform at the highest level possible for physical tasks such as push-ups, sit-ups, and running, so that they could appear less feminine (Silva, 2008). Burks (2011) reported that the tenuous position of LGB individuals in the military made these service members more likely to experience verbal, physical, or sexual assault and less likely to report such assaults for fear of discharge and loss of benefits. These studies offer a harsh picture of daily life for gay men in the military.

**Gay men and hegemonic masculinities in intercollegiate athletics.** While intercollegiate sports teams encourage an atmosphere of intimacy, community, and acceptance in areas such as race or socioeconomic status, they also promote hegemonic masculinity. Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morpew (2000) explored this concept by interviewing athletes, coaches, and administrators regarding gay and lesbian athletes. The participants insisted that there were no gay or lesbian athletes on their teams, often pointing out other sports where such identities were more common. The male athletes, by virtue of their participation in sports that featured violent contact and extraordinary feats of athleticism, were exalted as manly ideals (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). These men often displayed behaviors that were incongruent with hegemonic masculinity, such as hugging or touching on the buttocks. However, to engage in such behaviors, one had to be adamantly masculine; gay men were not perceived to fit into such a standard of masculinity (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2000).

Locke and Mahalik (2005) portrayed intercollegiate athletics in terms of hostile masculinity. This means that male athletes participated in a culture where heavy drinking, sexual violence, emotional detachment from romantic relationships, and anger or disdain for gay men were the norms. Steinfeldt and Steinfeldt (2012) conducted a study on college football players, finding a connection between a strong athletic identity and conformity to masculine gender norms. Additionally, players reported the use of misogynistic and homophobic stories to motivate players to act aggressively or violently on the field of play. McLeod (2009) drew a connection between athletics and the military, describing both as “visibly patriarchal spaces” (p. 207). He argued that the proliferation of sports in American society is tied to military domination; during the Cold

War, American men showcased their power through athletic prowess, including professional sports and Olympic competition. These competitions continue to be an important arena for masculine gender performance (McLeod, 2009).

### **Summary**

Based in the above literature, this study will seek to deconstruct the messages received by gay men in fraternities in order to make the process of masculine socialization more visible. Understandings of masculine socialization and feminist thought are important for informing this collective memory work study on gay fraternity men. By understanding previous research on the overlapping societal structures that influence college men, gay men, and fraternity men, one can begin to dissect the experiences of gay men in fraternities and recognize the overarching forces at play.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

Humans have long used stories to synthesize individual experiences into a meaningful whole. That is, individuals create stories out of their personal experiences and imbue them with meaning in the process (Kramp, 2004). The use of storytelling as a meaning-making strategy (Bailey & Tilley, 2002) can also provide a window into the process of identity development. The ways in which people select and re-order events to provide a story's structure to create a narrative reveals the story of how they got to where they are now and the construction of their identity (Polkinghorne, 1988). This study seeks to illuminate the patterns of masculine socialization in fraternities and the ways in which gay men incorporate those patterns into their own identities through the use of stories.

As gay men participate in fraternities, they receive many messages about what it means to be a man within the context of their own organization as well as within the larger fraternity system on a single campus (Rhoads, 2010; Torbenson, 2009). These messages are often based in hegemonic masculinity (Anderson, 2008) and relate a very strict interpretation of what a man should be (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This may include the interrelated effects of heterosexism, homophobia, and discrimination (Anderson, 2008; Case, 1998; Hesp, 2006; Hesp & Brooks, 2009; Kimmel, 2008). Gay men do not need to feel that these actions are directed at them to experience negative

effects on their self-esteem and mental health; witnessing discrimination against others and understanding that it could be turned on them is equally harmful (Plummer, 1999).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand what messages gay fraternity men receive through their participation in these organizations, how those messages are transmitted, and how those messages are used to construct their identities as gay men. Using narrative inquiry, through the collection and analysis of participants' stories, allowed me to gain a new understanding of the patterns of socialization gay men experience in fraternities. The influence of stories about these experiences on identity construction (Polkinghorne, 1988) were an important component in exploring the following research questions:

1. What messages do gay men in fraternities receive about what it means to be a man?
2. How do gay men negotiate these messages in the maintenance of their own identities?

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Storytelling is present in a variety of cultures and cultural forces guide the act of creating a narrative. For example, in the United States, students learn how to structure a written narrative in order to make it interesting and convey desired themes or lessons in elementary school (Reissman, 2008). Therefore, stories provide a natural entry point to understanding individual and common experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Patton (2002) asserted narrative inquiry is useful in answering the questions, "What does this narrative or story reveal about the person and world from which it came? How can this

narrative be interpreted to understand and illuminate the life and culture that created it?" (p. 133).

Narrative inquiry arose from the use of hermeneutic philosophy in analyzing written text. Hermeneutics stresses historical and cultural context in order to understand the meaning of written text. Rather than focus on literary texts, however, narrative inquiry incorporated research products such as in-depth interview transcripts, oral histories, historical memoirs, and creative nonfiction (Patton, 2002). The 1980s and 1990s bore witness to the "narrative turn" in social sciences research; the accelerated development of narrative inquiry led to greater adoption of the methodology (Bochner, 2014). Bochner (2001) described the "narrative turn" in the social sciences as a way to honor personal narratives as data. Narrative inquiry is now used in a variety of disciplines, including education, psychology, literature, history, and anthropology (Kramp, 2004).

Narrative inquiry elevates personal stories to the status of legitimate research product (Koch, 1998). Storytellers select the details of their experiences and order them in the manner that best conveys their intended meaning to the listener (Bailey & Tilley, 2002). Therefore, the researcher's role is to interrogate the process of a story's construction. Riessman (2008) described the importance of understanding "how and why a particular event is storied, perhaps, or what a narrator accomplishes by developing the story *that way*, and effects on the reader or listener" (p. 13). The storyteller's social standing may also dictate the type of stories that can be shared, the details that can be included in a story, or whether a story can be told at all (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006).

Clandennin & Connolley (2000) described the exploration of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. The first dimension of this space is inward and outward. Both the personal meaning for the storyteller as well as the social context of the story must be understood. The second dimension is forward and backward in time. The shared narrative does not stand alone; the storyteller incorporates events that happened both before and after the action described when making meaning and creating the narrative. The final dimension is place. Each narrative occurs in a physical space or series of spaces. It is important to understand how the spatial context of the narrative may color the storyteller's experience. In narrative inquiry, the researcher must probe these three dimensions during the data collection process (Clandennin & Connolley, 2000).

### **Narrative Inquiry and Identity**

Polkinghorne (1988) asserted that individuals create narratives in service of identity construction. They may highlight certain details while eliminating others, re-order events, and compose stories that demonstrate their current condition in life. Narrative inquiry can be useful in examining these stories (Polkinghorne, 1988). Narrative inquiry can also be useful when attempting to "reveal cultural and social patterns through the lens of individual experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 478).

Narrative inquiry can be particularly useful in giving voice to marginalized populations (Koch, 1998). Kramp (2004) stated, "Narrative privileges the storyteller" (p. 111). In traditional field research, it is the researcher who serves as the authority on a participant's actions. In narrative inquiry, the researcher gives authority to the storyteller to describe lived experience. In this way, narrative reveals a richness and complexity that observation alone does not (Kramp, 2004). However, the researcher cannot ignore that

all stories are mediated by the teller; the participant's identity, social standing, and connection to society must be interrogated in order to understand how they might influence the story (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006).

### **Narrative Inquiry and Ways of Knowing**

Narrative inquiry is not intended to define an "absolute" or "historical" truth (Bailey & Tilley, 2002). Atkinson and Delamont (2006) stated, "Autobiographical accounts are no more 'authentic' than other modes of representation: a narrative of a personal experience is not a clear route into 'the truth', either about the reported events, or of the teller's private experience. It is one of the key lessons of narrative analysis that 'experience' is constructed through the various forms of narrative" (p. 166). By listening to and analyzing the stories participants construct, the researcher can discover how the participant made sense of an experience (Bailey & Tilley, 2002). Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) cautioned that "narrative truth" and "historical truth" can be very similar to one another or quite different, depending on the participant's experience. Even if the "narrative truth" is far from the "historical truth," it provides insight into the participant's identity and its construction (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber, 1998). Cattel & Climo (2002) asserted that the meaning a person makes of a memory is prioritized over the objective truth because it may reveal how the memory has been incorporated into a participant's identity. Making broad generalizations is not the desired outcome of narrative inquiry; it is more important to explore how the patterns of dominant culture and participants' counterstories intersect as the men construct and maintain their identities (Bell, 2010; Koch, 1998).

### **Considerations for Using Narrative Inquiry**

When using narrative inquiry, it is important to understand the various ways in which participants' stories can be distorted. Authenticity of stories collected as a part of a narrative inquiry study is not guaranteed. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) warned, "stories are usually constructed around a core of facts of life events, yet allow a wide periphery for freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these 'remembered facts'" (p. 8). These stories are often incomplete because they are mediated by language, which may not be able to capture the full essence of a visual or action-oriented narrative (Patterson, 2008). Stories are also mediated by the teller, who may have a variety of reasons for structuring the narrative in a certain manner (Atkinson and Delamont, 2006). The participant in this narrative inquiry study will have expectations of the interviewer and the topic or he may try to conform to the perceived expectations of the researcher (Phoenix, 2008). Participants are also influenced by their personal experiences (Phoenix, 2008) and by the cultural context of their upbringing. Therefore, it is necessary to interrogate the factors, such as identity and personal history, surrounding the narrative (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006).

In this study, participants were asked to write a memory story, take part in an individual interview with the researcher, and submit an optional reflection on the process and the researcher's preliminary findings as a member checking exercise. The interview was used to explore the "silences, hesitations, strong or unusual patterns of emotion" in the participants' memory stories (Squire, 2008, p. 49). As the participants composed their memory stories and discussed them in the interview, they made both conscious and

unconscious decisions to order events and highlight details in a way that conveyed the meaning they intended audiences to take from the story (Riessman, 2008).

It is also necessary to consider the role of the researcher in the construction of the narrative. The prompt for the memory story as well as the questions asked in the interview shaped the narratives (Riessman, 2008). The demeanor of the researcher may have also influenced what the participants choose to share (Riessman, 2008). For example, because I am not a fraternity man, participants may have presented an overall positive experience in order to protect the fraternity community or disrupt the expected narratives about fraternity experiences.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

In order to collect a variety of narratives related to the experience of gay men in fraternities, I identified eight participants. These participants were men who identified as gay or Queer, were between the ages of 23 and 50, and participated in a social fraternity for at least two years during their undergraduate education. Participants represented a variety of demographic characteristics. Seven of the eight participants belonged to Interfraternity Council (IFC) fraternities; one participant belonged to a Multicultural Greek Council (MGC) organization. At the time I designed this study, I was concerned about asking too many intrusive questions about participants' demographic information; therefore, I did not explicitly ask about their race. I also erroneously assumed that their race would be consistent with the council affiliation for their fraternity. However, that was not the case. Two participants self-identified as Black, one self-identified as Latino, and one self-identified as white. The other four participants did not disclose their race.

The men participated in their undergraduate fraternity for two to five years and one of the eight disaffiliated from his fraternity prior to graduation. The men's undergraduate experiences ended through graduation or disaffiliation from one to 23 years prior to the interview. Seven of the eight men were employed in student affairs. Participants' individual demographic qualities are outlined in Table 1. Information related to participants' fraternity experiences is included in Table 2.

**Table 1: Participant Demographic Information**

| <b>Participant Name</b> | <b>Race</b>   | <b>Worked in Student Affairs</b> |
|-------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|
| Anthony                 | Latino        | Yes                              |
| Chip                    | Not disclosed | Yes                              |
| Jordan                  | Black         | Yes                              |
| Brett                   | Black         | Yes                              |
| Peter                   | Not disclosed | Yes                              |
| Paul                    | Not disclosed | Yes                              |
| Allen                   | White         | Yes                              |
| Ethan                   | Not disclosed | No                               |

**Table 2: Participant Fraternity Experience**

| <b>Participant Name</b> | <b>Years of Undergraduate Participation</b> | <b>Years Since Undergraduate Participation</b> | <b>Disaffiliated Prior to Graduation?</b> | <b>Council Affiliation of Chapter</b> |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Anthony                 | 4                                           | 3                                              | No                                        | Multicultural Greek Council (MGC)     |
| Chip                    | 5                                           | 23                                             | No                                        | Interfraternity Council (IFC)         |
| Jordan                  | 4                                           | 11                                             | No                                        | Interfraternity Council (IFC)         |
| Brett                   | 3                                           | 9                                              | No                                        | Interfraternity Council (IFC)         |
| Peter                   | 4                                           | 7                                              | No                                        | Interfraternity Council (IFC)         |
| Paul                    | 2                                           | 4                                              | Yes                                       | Interfraternity Council (IFC)         |
| Allen                   | 3.5                                         | 3                                              | No                                        | Interfraternity Council (IFC)         |
| Ethan                   | 4                                           | 1                                              | No                                        | Interfraternity Council (IFC)         |

Initially, recruitment was accomplished via network selection; I sent recruitment emails (APPENDIX A) to colleagues who are established and well-connected members of the fraternity and sorority advising profession, asking them to share the invitation through their networks. After difficulty recruiting enough participants for the study, I developed social media posts for Facebook (APPENDIX B) and Instagram (APPENDIX C) as well as recruitment flyers to be posted in coffee shops and community centers (APPENDIX D). When potential participants responded to the recruitment attempts, I conducted a phone screening (APPENDIX E), beginning with verbal informed consent as required by the Institutional Review Board, to confirm eligibility and explain the research process.

## **Data Collection**

Data was collected in three phases. In phase one, men selected for the study completed a demographic survey (APPENDIX F) and submitted a written narrative. I obtained the participants' informed consent, as required by the Institutional Review Board, as a part of the demographic survey. Each narrative consisted of a one to three page writing sample in response to a prompt (APPENDIX H). The prompt instructed men to think about a time when, in a fraternity setting, they were sent a particular message about what it meant to be a man in their particular organization, how they understood the event at the time, and how they felt about what it meant when the event occurred. Participants were cautioned against including explanation for or interpretation of this memory; the point of this exercise was to share the story of this experience (Onyx & Small, 2001).

Phase two was the individual interview. I arranged an interview via telephone or Skype, dependent upon the participant's geographical location, scheduled availability, and access to or comfort with technology. Prior to beginning the interview, participants were sent Informed Consent form, as required by the Institutional Review Board (APPENDIX I) and indicated their consent by answering the phone or Skype call for the interview. The interview protocol (APPENDIX J) was structured to explore the missing pieces and incongruent spaces in the participant's narrative. What might these silences and breaks mean? How might they speak to the position of the author within society as a whole as well as his individual organization? What clichés of the fraternity experience are present, and how do those signal the "taken for granted" ideals of masculinity and gender performance (Haug, 1987)? I also sought to explore what Clandinin and Connelly

(2000) describe as “three-dimensional narrative inquiry space”: inward and outward, backward and forward, and in place. These interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription.

The third phase of the study involved a member-checking process and was optional for the participants. After analyzing all of the memory stories and the transcripts from the interviews, I sent each participant a summary of the themes I discovered through the study. I asked each man to respond with any thoughts, disagreements, or personal revelations that occurred during the course of his participation in the study (Onyx & Small, 2001).

### **Data Analysis**

Narrative analysis is a natural extension of narrative inquiry. First, the use of language and the way that meaning is made of experiences is important in narrative analysis (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Additionally, narrative analysis employs the hermeneutic circle—a process by which the whole story is considered and used to illuminate the parts; then the parts in turn illuminate the whole, leading to further analysis (Josselson, 2011). That is, using comparative analysis, each story will be compared to others to find similar segments and construct themes that are interconnected and inform each other (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The analytic procedure I used begins with reading each narrative and interview transcript several times. I also listened to each interview repeatedly in order to analyze the hesitations and intonations that are inherent in the storytelling. I read the memory stories and interview transcripts aloud in order to attend to the language used (Kramp, 2004). Over the course of multiple readings, I marked segments and passages that were

noteworthy both in terms of the individual narrative and in the overall grouping of narratives (Patton, 2002). This resulted in 47 codes that were further collapsed into 17 categories. These segments were grouped into broad categories, which reinforced the findings of the collective group and drew out new themes in order to increase the understanding of the data. The categories or themes from both levels of analysis were intertwined, because this reflects reality. As Josselson (2011) noted about her own narrative analysis work, “categories that are too separate are artificial. Human life is of a piece, multilayered, contradictory, and multivalent, to be sure, but the strands are interconnected” (p. 252). The themes from individual stories and the themes found across the stories combined to create a matrix that is helpful for understanding the data as a whole (Kramp, 2004). As one of the participants described his socialization as a series of “mixed messages,” sets of contradictory and competing categories emerged. These categories included three contradictory themes: (1) performing masculinity versus being your authentic self, (2) enacted versus espoused organizational values, and (3) organizational reputation versus individual reputation. There were also two themes that featured competing components: (1) compulsive heterosexuality and the role of women and (2) vulnerability, intimacy, and sex. After conversations about the data and further analysis, I determined that “the role of women” was not an effective way to describe that category, as women were not allowed agency in most of the men’s stories, and therefore they were seen more as objects than as actors who could have a role. Because of the overlapping and intertwined themes that emerged (Josselson, 2011), in the end, I identified two overarching conceptual categories: (1) performing masculinity and authenticity and (2) organization and individual. Each overarching conceptual category

is further illustrated by a set of contradictory discourses, or interrelated categories that inform the overarching category. Performing masculinity and authenticity is supported by five contradictory discourses: (1) reinforcing standards of masculinity, (2) distancing self from stereotypes about gay men, (3) compulsive heterosexuality, (4) personal authenticity, and (5) vulnerability, intimacy, and sex. Organizational and individual is supported by two: (1) organizational values: espoused and enacted and (2) enhancing personal reputation through organizational affiliation.

### **Qualitative Rigor**

Though narrative inquiry is not concerned with “objective” or “historical” truth, it is important to ensure trustworthiness of the research findings. Atkinson (2010) cautioned researchers against “narrative exceptionalism” or the exaltation of the story and storyteller without critical analysis. He advocated for a methodical collection and analysis of stories and other data (Atkinson, 2010). Bochner (2010) disputed this anthropological approach to social sciences research and advocated for a more measured approach to narrative inquiry. The analyst must walk a fine line between giving voice to the storyteller and analyzing the stories for meaning the teller might not be able to see (Bochner, 2010). The dichotomy between formal, objective analysis and appreciative reproduction of narratives is a false one; without appreciation for the storyteller’s truth, his meaning can be lost in the process of analysis (Frank, 2010).

Through the collection and analysis of stories, the researcher may become part of the narrative (Thomas, 2010). Therefore, this type of analysis requires attention to researcher reflexivity (Koch, 1998). I kept a researcher journal to interrogate my own preconceived notions, biases, and assumptions. In order to do justice to the voices of my

participants as well as maintain credibility, I provided faithful descriptions of the participants and their experiences and detailed the decisions I made throughout the analytic process; I created a record of how the final narrative emerged from the research product (Koch, 1998).

However, it is not possible for a researcher to ever be completely reflexive. There will always be parts of the story a researcher cannot access or will get wrong, which highlights the necessity of member-checking (Squire, 2008). This gave my participants the opportunity to comment upon and check the accuracy of any conclusions I drew from the data as a whole (Creswell, 2009). I gave participants the opportunity to read a description of the themes and respond to them. Two participants responded and their critiques were incorporated into the final analysis. I also immersed myself in the data and spent a great deal of time reading and re-reading the narratives and interview transcripts. Andrews (2008) stated, “meaning is variable not only because it is always in the eyes of the beholder, but equally, the beholder never occupies a static position” (p. 94). Therefore, as I spent more time with the data and my understanding of my participants’ experiences deepened, I discovered even more layers within the data (Andrews, 2008). I also used the participants’ own words to illustrate findings and provided thick, rich descriptions from the memory stories and interview transcripts. This helped situate the findings within the shared experiences of my participants (Kramp, 2004). Finally, I presented the negative cases, or the stories that contradicted the themes discovered in the data. This made the findings more realistic (Creswell, 2009).

As the primary researcher in a narrative inquiry study on gay men in fraternities, I interrogated my own preconceived notions and prior experiences with gay men and the

fraternity experience. I am a woman, I am heterosexual, and I have never been a member of a fraternity. While I have spent a great deal of time working alongside gay men in LGBT advocacy organizations and I have served as a fraternity advisor and consultant for a variety of fraternal organizations, I can never truly know what it is like to be a gay fraternity man. It was necessary for me to attend to the positional power inherent in the process. In some instances, I had the power; in others, my participants did (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). These differences represented a variety of challenges in the narrative inquiry process. By necessity, my participants functioned more in the role of informant, shedding light on a population of which I am not a part (Creswell, 2009). I paid strict attention to my participants' stories and feelings in an attempt to avoid taking an anthropological stance, exoticizing or othering my participants (Bochner, 2010). I also avoided focusing on the negative experiences to the exclusion of positive ones (Hyden, 2008). I gave equal weight to the counter-stories my participants shared (Bell, 2010), both those that were revealed during interviews as well as those shared during the member-checking process.

### Researcher Reflexivity

When I began this study, I utilized a constructivist epistemology. The concept of multiple pathways to truth (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) and the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2009) were very appealing to me. Especially as I conscientiously avoided taking an anthropological stance, adhering to a constructivist epistemology appeared to be one way to do this, as it involves ceding power to the participants in the research relationship. Because I was exploring social construction of identities, especially in relation to gender, a feminist theoretical

framework was appropriate (Prasad, 2005). These philosophies may seem to be at odds, however, because constructivism is concerned with power in the researcher-participant relationship, while a feminist theoretical framework, as a part of the critical theoretical traditions, is focused on upending power structures on a societal and institutional level (Abes, 2009).

Yet Kincheloe (2001) argued for the utilization of epistemological bricolage to address the complexity of current research. While some researchers may see the use of bricolage as a failure to commit to a discipline or epistemology, Kincheloe (2005) encouraged scholars to “expose the various structures that covertly shape one’s own and other scholars’ research narratives” (p. 324). This perspective that power is inherent in the research process is important when using a theoretical framework descended from the critical tradition, as it illuminates the ways power functions at all levels of the research process. While the use of bricolage is not common in student affairs research, Tillapaugh and Nicolazzo (2015) utilized a critical theoretical framework to analyze data collected as part of constructivist-conceptualized study on gay college men and gender transgressions. Abes (2009) successfully combined constructivism and queer theory in her longitudinal study of lesbian college students, in which she describes creating new space in the borderlands between two theoretical orientations.

Like Abes (2009), I was socialized as a constructivist because of the time in which I was educated and worked as a student affairs practitioner. Though my personal and scholarly development has pushed me toward critical theories and bold activism and advocacy for a variety of justice issues, I still find constructivism to be an important epistemological standpoint because of my outsider status in this study. Abes (2009)

argued that constructivism was useful for bringing participants' stories to life in a way that they would be able to recognize themselves, while use of a critical theoretical tradition created a tension that allows researchers to more accurately represent student development. I agree with this statement and believe it exemplifies my own approach to this study. The tension between my status as a woman researcher, inhabiting both an oppressed identity and a dominant position, working to understand and accurately represent gay men who hold multiple oppressed and dominant identities, necessitates the use of this seemingly contradictory philosophy.

## CHAPTER 4

### PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

The following narratives capture the experiences of the eight participants in this study: Anthony, Chip, Jordan, Brett, Peter, Paul, Allen, and Ethan. Each narrative begins with the demographic information for the participant, followed by the “About Participant” section for each man, which is constructed using portions of the participant’s memory story and interview to provide context about his life and fraternity experience leading up to the action of the memory story. The next section, “Participant’s Story,” is again composed of portions of the memory story and interview, which are interwoven to provide clarity, detail, and depth to the action of the story. Finally, the participant’s ideas about masculinity and identity are included. Analysis of the themes across narratives is included in Chapter Five.

#### **Anthony**

Anthony was the first participant I interviewed for this study. He participated in a historically Latino fraternity, which was associated with the Multicultural Greek Council (MGC) on his campus, for four years and graduated from his undergraduate institution approximate three years prior to our interview. During his undergraduate years, he served in an executive board role with his fraternity as Chapter Secretary and also served as the MGC President and Chief Justice. At the time of his interview, he was working in

student affairs in a role that had involvement with fraternities on his campus. He self-disclosed during his interview that he identified as Latino.

### **About Anthony**

Prior to attending college, Anthony did not think about joining a fraternity. Because of the stereotypes about fraternities he saw in the media, he did not feel that it matched his interests. “I just was not interested in, um, in being a part of something that I felt was not conducive to me being or learning about myself or who I am,” he said. One of his primary concerns before coming to college was to have the opportunity to explore his identities, both as a Latino man and a gay man, though he was not out at the time. As a first-generation citizen of the United States, he felt separated from his heritage, so he became more interested in joining his fraternity:

Once [the brothers] were telling me about the, um the intake process I was like, well, you know, you’re learning all about history and Latin American history and a lot about yourself and who you are and where you come from and all that, and so I was like, oh, you know that might be kind of interesting for me.

The chapter had also been founded just prior to his arrival at the institution, and Anthony felt it was a good match because:

They were about being that different voice and being that that new organization that was kind of reinventing what it means, meant to be in that in well in the MGC and all of that so um, so for me it was, I think that was what they were looking for. They were just looking for people that were gonna be um, go-getters and really make sure that the things that they were doing were in line with what they

wanted to see in the future after they left or you know, or during that time that we were working together in the chapter.

Anthony stressed that he was very interested in making an impact and being known as a leader during his time on campus.

Anthony also did not immediately feel comfortable publicly exploring his identity as a gay man on campus because of some environmental barriers at his institution.

So um, for me, it was another, there was like another component of this, so environmentally, the culture of the university wasn't one that was very welcoming or very inclusive to that. Don't get me wrong, there was a group and a club for it. Or like Pride, or Pride Alliance, and so that, but that wasn't where I wanted to be.

I didn't really align with the values of that organization. It was a very loud approach to activism and to what they wanted to do and that wasn't really me.

Because of this, Anthony chose to focus his energy in other areas. "I kind of turned to leadership, I think and more my academics because I was like I can really focus on those and really make an impact and not think so much about that identity in particular."

### **Anthony's Story**

Anthony chose to focus on a moment when a brother asked him an uncomfortable question. He related, "During the time I was undergoing my intake process I remember walking to my residence hall with my line brother" who Anthony described as a "very tall, masculine man" who was interested in sports and had a type-A personality. Anthony had only known this man for a few weeks, but because they were joining the same fraternity, he expected them to be friends and care for each other for the rest of their lives. He continued:

During our walk he stopped me and told me he wanted to ask me a question that was burning deep down inside but he needed to ask. At the time of this event I was still closeted about my sexuality and I was very uncomfortable talking about sexuality in general. As we stood there he came closer and told me that there would not be any judgment but that he wanted context. He leaned over to me and asked, “Are you gay?”

This was the first time that anyone had ever questioned Anthony’s sexual orientation. He described himself at that point in his life, saying, “I perceived myself very masculine. Before I was asked that question. Or, or that I could front the front.” Upon being asked the question, however, he continued:

I just didn’t think that that’s how I presented. But, learning, I think that was also part of after the question was like, it was very apparent that I *was* presenting in a certain way, that there *were* things that I was doing that, were triggering him to ask.

Because he had never considered that others might question his sexuality, Anthony wasn’t sure how to answer, saying, “At that point my mind started to wander and I did not know if that was a good time to tell him that I was not sure, because in reality that was the truth.” However, because this would have been the first person Anthony had ever come out to, he hesitated to answer:

I also thought about how that might change my relationship with the brothers and with the men that were going through the process with me. I ended up saying no and I regretted it since I knew I was lying and not being truthful to myself.

Anthony made the decision to say no because he was concerned it would negatively impact the new relationships he was building with his brothers:

This was a man that I was going to be you know best friends with, and get to know, and we were going to have like a lifelong *bond* and so I was like, I don't know if this is appropriate for me to tell you because I think it might impact what you think about me and how we're going to interact [in the context of the chapter].

Anthony still needed time to understand his own identity, because he was “just figuring out what I'm doing and can I trust these ideas and these things that are coming up for me.” He felt very defensive and insecure about his identity at the time this story took place. Eventually, he began to feel comfortable enough with his brothers that he could come out:

It took me almost over 4 years to be able to come clean to them and tell my chapter and my line brothers who I really was and not be scared of the implications or what they might think. As I learned that didn't and never was a factor in determining my candidacy but rather it was my personality and my character that made them believe in me.

Anthony also learned that, though he was attempting to hide his identity as a gay man, his brothers still believed he was gay. “From what I from what I understand, is that even though I said no, ha, because I said no, people still knew that it was a yes.” Because of this, realized that he had been isolating himself unnecessarily, and wished he had spoken up sooner, saying, “I think it would have been easier just because that I know that they would have been more supportive when, um, I could have talked about some of the things

that I've been, that I was feeling." In the end, Anthony continues to experience inclusive behaviors and attitudes from his brothers, describing their post-graduation interactions:

Now, like if I'm on the phone with someone. . . they're very aware of who I am and like, and they, and so the questions I would be getting asked if I wasn't gay I'm still getting asked, you know, if I'm in a relationship or if I'm not like how's that going and you know like, things that still matter to them.

### **Anthony's Ideas About Masculinity and Identity**

Anthony's participation in a culturally-based fraternity certainly impacted his ideas about masculinity and identity:

The cultural part of joining the organization also was a little bit nerve-wracking for me because, I know that growing up in a you know Latino culture, there's a lot of aspects of machismo, and you know, things that wouldn't necessarily also agree with being a gay man and sometimes having those, those effeminate characteristics.

Anthony also revealed his ideas about masculinity when he described his line brother as tall, hypermasculine, stoic, having Type A personality, and being into sports. Anthony's ideas about masculinity and the way that men can build relationships with each other shifted after he learned that this brother, and indeed his whole chapter, was supportive of him in his identity as a gay man. "In that particular instance that he was going to be what I would have considered to be like, you know, very heteronormative, and just like, not be open to that those ideas." Instead, Anthony realized that his brothers who performed a hegemonic version of masculinity could surprise him and that shaped "a lot about the

interactions that I have with other people that might not necessarily be the ones that I think how they would react, and so I tried to be open.”

### **Chip**

Chip was the second participant I interviewed for this study. He participated in a fraternity that is associated with the Interfraternity Council (IFC) for five years during his undergraduate experience and graduated approximately 23 years prior to the interview. During that experience, he served in several executive board roles with his fraternity as President, Secretary, House Manager, Homecoming Chair, and Fundraising Chair. Chip had worked in student affairs for much of his career in a position that was responsible for fraternity and sorority life on his campus.

### **About Chip**

In high school, Chip was very involved and focused on his very competitive academic program. He described himself as, “Vice president of everything, president of nothing.” When Chip arrived at college, he said, “I initially had no intention of joining a fraternity, in fact my parents had pretty much flat-out forbidden me from joining one.” He intended to major in architecture, which was a very difficult and time-consuming major at his institution. However, when formal fraternity recruitment began in January, he decided to take part:

My first couple of months of college, it was just like, I expected it to be fun. And I wasn't having a lot of fun. And so, that was one of the reasons why I wanted to join a fraternity because I thought ok, I'm not making, I'm not meeting people, I'm not making a lot of friends. It's like I'm not doing anything. And this would be a good opportunity.

When he found a chapter that he really connected with, Chip said, “I wanted to be a part of it and so I basically begged and whined and pleaded with my parents to let me do it. And so they said as long as your grades don’t drop, yes, you can.”

Chip also described another reason he joined his fraternity:

I think, deep down, part of me, one of the reasons why I joined was in an effort to be more normal. To be more like a, you know, a regular guy, and this might, you know “man me up.” Kind of thing. And it didn’t. In fact, far from it. I found out that, I didn’t find out until much much later, but I found out that, you know I was fooling *no one*.

Though Chip recognized he was gay at an early age, he was very afraid of coming out. He described his fears:

Everybody else that I knew, had known at least by reputation, who was gay, were kind of like, I always thought was kind of weird. That they were very, you know, flamboyant. Or effeminate. Or you know, they were the you know, super Goth. Or something that, you know, was not me. And was not something that I could identify with. And so, I was kind of just really afraid of becoming, you know, that I was gay. That I was going to be this, I don’t know, just outcast, kinda weird. I don’t know. It’s hard to explain, but it’s like, between that and the fact that like, my coming of age totally coincided with the AIDS crisis, and that, you know, I grew up, I think, I think pretty well into high school, fearful that, you know, if you have sex you’re going to die. And so, I think for me, a big coping thing was, I think my instinct for survival was stronger than my instinct for... ha... sex.

During his undergraduate experience, Chip served in several leadership roles and always seemed to be the responsible brother. He took pride in serving his brothers and helping them out when they were in trouble. Chip told several stories about helping his brothers out of extreme situations, including this one:

I was always the brother that whenever, I never got to go on spring break. I was always the brother that when everyone went off on spring break and disaster struck, I'm the one that had to fix it. So, like, I had a brother who, went to South Padre with some of the others on spring break one year. And he of course didn't have the money for a hotel room, or anything like that. Had made no arrangements for beforehand. His whole plan was, and usually this worked, he would hook up with somebody down there and he would just spend the night with her the whole time over break. Well, the first day that he was down there, he didn't find anybody that took him up on it, and so he was sleeping on the beach and got arrested for vagrancy. So, who got the phone call to wire bail money? That would be me.

Though Chip identified himself as the responsible brother, he also told stories about his brothers being there for him in times of trouble, including when his father passed away. This strong sense of brotherhood and the act of supporting each other is a recurring theme in Chip's fraternity experience.

### **Chip's Story**

Chip's story focused on a deep and long-lasting friendship with another brother. "I joined my fraternity primarily because of Greg. He was the chapter rush chair the year I joined, and Greg was bound and determined that I was going to join Gamma," Chip

said. After participating in the beginning of “rush week,” Chip got so violently ill, that he said, “my roommate was terrified to come near me. So he slept someplace else. And the next morning, my next door neighbor drove me to the uh, to the health center on campus.” It turned out that Chip had a highly contagious form of stomach flu and ended up missing the remainder of the formal recruitment process:

I hadn’t been able to notify the fraternity, so I assumed they would drop me for failing to show up for rush. When I was able to return to my dorm, my roommate and neighbors informed me that Greg called every day asking how I was.

Chip described what Greg said when he called back:

“Do you still want to rush?” And I was like, “Well, isn’t it too late?” And he was like, “Oh no, we’re still really interested in you.” So he said, “You know, we’re having a something tonight, I’ll, I’ll come and get you.” I guess that kind of clinched it for me because at that point, I’m like oh my gosh, these guys are actually like really interested in me. And there was, you know, they must have seen something.

After Chip joined the chapter, the two men built a strong and lasting relationship, “Greg was and still is one of my best friends. He taught me a lot and really encouraged me to pursue a leadership position in the chapter and what it truly meant to be a Gamma.” Chip served in several leadership roles within the chapter as well as the fraternity community at large. He served as president after Greg graduated. Chip discussed their relationship after Greg’s graduation:

[He] was three years older than me, so when he graduated in 1989, he joined the Peace Corps and was sent to Tanzania. I wrote Greg and kept him abreast of what

was going on with the chapter and the brothers, and every once in a while, Greg's parents would pay for us to call him at a pre-arranged time in the wee hours of the morning to a pay phone in Dar-es-Salaam so we could talk for 15 minutes or so. When the Gulf War broke out, the US government evacuated all of the Peace Corps volunteers in Tanzania, and Greg came home.

Greg's parents lived in [a nearby town], so for the first few months or so, Greg was around all the time. Everyone was excited he was back, because Greg was one of the most fun people to be around, and knew tons of people. I was chapter president at this time, and trying to live up to the example that Greg had set when he was chapter president, and struggling to get a handle on my courses in architecture. I'm not sure how long Greg had been home when we had "the talk."

Chip identified one conversation with Greg that stood out as one way he learned about what it meant to be a man in the context of his fraternity:

We were driving in my car, most likely going to or from somewhere to eat, when Greg said, "There's something I need to tell you. I'm gay." I think I actually swerved the car a little bit I was so shocked.

Chip was completely taken aback by this information because:

Part of it was I thought I was in such a minority. The other thing was, I had known of girls that, at least by reputation, that Greg had hooked up with. It was kind of a joke. Um, and, I don't know whether actually, to this day I don't know whether he actually really did or not. But people would say he did.

He described the culmination of their conversation this way:

I'm not sure exactly what I said in response, but probably something along the lines of "really?" The next thing I do remember for certain was that Greg asked "You are too aren't you?" I panicked and blurted out a flustered "No, I'm straight." It was a complete lie.

Thinking back on this conversation, Chip said, "I think I kind of reacted the way that he feared I would react. Which was, is disappointing to me now." However, at the time, Chip was too afraid of the unknown to come out.

Chip and Greg's relationship didn't end there:

Greg didn't push the question any farther. Eventually, everyone in the chapter knew. A few people made jokes, but it really didn't turn out to be a big deal, especially among the circle of brothers we were closest with. A few months later he got a job and moved to [another city]. I would visit him frequently, and got exposed a lot more to what it was like to be living as out and gay, but I remained closeted.

I went to visit Greg over New Year's a few weeks before my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. This time Greg confronted me, "Everyone in the fraternity has known you were gay for years, they figured it out years ago. And no one cares. You can stop tormenting yourself and start living your own life." For the first time in my life, I admitted to someone that I was gay. It was like a weight was lifted off my shoulders, and it started the process of me coming to live as an out gay man. It hasn't always been easy, but the absence of the dread, the self-loathing, the fear of exposure is gone and it is the most freeing feeling I've ever had.

After Chip came out to Greg, he slowly came out to family, friends, coworkers, and other fraternity brothers. He continued to build his relationship with Greg and developed more authentic relationships with other brothers. He described why his friendship with Greg remains so important:

I learned a lot from Greg over the years, but I guess the most important thing I learned is that I could be a part of a brotherhood and be a gay man. That I wasn't broken, that my experience was as valid as any straight brother, and that the challenges had made me tougher and probably a better leader of other men because of my struggle.

### **Chip's Ideas About Masculinity and Identity**

Greg was a truly inspirational figure for Chip and inspired many of Chip's ideas about what it means to be a man:

Greg was somebody that he was just like, all charisma. He still is. He has this incredibly high-powered job with [a major city]. And he's really super successful. And he knows like everybody. And he's one of those people that once you meet him you never forget him.

During their undergraduate experience, Greg helped Chip learn to be a leader:

I didn't even know a lot of the stuff at the time that he was grooming me to be kind of be a leader. Like he would drag me along on meetings with, like university officials and stuff that he would have when he was chapter president.

Once Chip came out, he followed Greg's example as well, becoming an active and out gay man. "Then I came out and I started getting involved in stuff on campus, with our

campus Safe Zone and things like that and I was much more open about it after that.” He also used his position in fraternity and sorority life to mentor other young gay men.

The fraternity’s focus on being there for each other also informs Chip’s ideas about masculinity. He described a brother who was gay but distanced himself from the fraternity after graduation. No one knew he was out and all the members lost touch with him. However, Chip found out that this brother passed away due to complications from HIV and the fraternity did what they could:

His family didn’t really have any money for the funeral or anything like that. And it was the fraternity that basically paid up the difference. For his funeral service. And I mean you know, and cause they had a GoFundMe, and that’s like, when you looked at the list, it was like half the people that had donated were his fraternity brothers. You know, and it was one of those things that it’s like, it’s too damn little, too damn late. I wish he would have known we would have been ok with it.

Chip acknowledged, “Yes, there were lots of conflicting things of masculinity” present in the way the chapter functioned:

Some of it, some of the brothers, yes, could be very um, misogynist might be a little too strong a word, but, could be veering that way sometimes in their attitudes, but I would say it was the minority, not majority. Um, you know, it’s very heteronormative. But the assumption was, you know, hey, everybody likes girls here. Everybody’s having sex with girls.

Yet Chip credited the fraternity with making him a better leader and a better man.

I think I'm better able to empathize with people, for one thing. Um, but I think, I think challenge and struggle always, you know, if you face it, it makes you stronger. And you know, I fought my demons, and I've overcome them. And I think I'm able to look at problems and, and look at how I deal with people from that knowledge of, ok, you don't know everything that's going on behind the scenes with somebody. You know, so don't make the assumptions.

Chip felt that these experiences were integral to the way he functioned as a leader and mentor. "I think that's just my experience with just, that I've been able to draw on to help other people understand."

### **Jordan**

Jordan was the third participant I interviewed for this study, and the only one I knew personally prior to our interview. He participated in a fraternity that is associated with the Interfraternity Council (IFC) for four years during his undergraduate experience and graduated approximately 11 years prior to his interview. During that experience, he served in an executive board role with his fraternity as Chapter Secretary. He also served as the Vice President of IFC. Jordan worked in student affairs and, early in his career, held a position that was responsible for fraternity and sorority life on his campus. He self-disclosed during his interview that he identified as Black.

### **About Jordan**

Prior to attending college, Jordan had no intention of joining a fraternity. "Universally, I saw fraternities before I joined, as places where people were hypermasculine and where they were spaces where people were treated poorly. Um, some refer to that as hazing," he commented. When the formal recruitment process

happened during fall of his first year on campus, he abstained because he didn't see those organizations as a good fit for him:

My fraternity, um, was traditionally, was traditionally a white fraternity, and so I didn't see myself, as a Black man, in that organization. The organization, we had one chapter of an NPHC organization on campus, and I, I didn't fully connect with that organization either.

By second semester of his first year, Jordan had become a well-known leader on campus. An administrator approached him during the informal recruitment period for his fraternity:

We had a Dean of Students who said, Jordan, have you ever thought of joining a fraternity, and I said NO. And he said, well there is an organization on campus that really has strong interest. I was like tell them no thank you, but thank you for thinking of me. And then anyway, so the next day, our Dean of Students, he came back to me again and said Jordan, you know, again, I was approach by this organization. And I said no thank you. And then the recruitment chair of the organization, on the last day of informal recruitment, uh, said, Jordan, we're going to come pick you up this evening, no questions asked. Um, and in my first year place of intimidation didn't want to make them mad at me and I said okey dokey and I went. Uh, to the recruitment event and then the rest is history.

Even though he enjoyed the first recruitment event, Jordan was still not convinced about joining a fraternity. He had attended the first event only because he felt intimidated and was afraid to say no to the older students who were recruiting him. However, he

found that he liked the men in the chapter and enjoyed spending time with them. He decided to participate in the recruitment, but did not intend to join the organization:

Initially, my first week in it, I was like, well, I'm just going to do this for a week, and then I'm going to quit. And we had to do this thing called interviews, where you had to go interview members of the chapter. And I started to interview people, and I liked people I was interviewing so much that I was like, this just seems like a good place to be. And it went from initial intimidation, to I'm going to say yes and then I'm going to quit after a week, to authentically really enjoying a number of people who I was getting a chance to meet or going through that new member pledge process.

Though Jordan was closeted throughout his undergraduate experience in his fraternity, he tried to be the most authentic person he could be at that time in his life. As he went through the recruitment process, he wondered about the other men going through the process:

I just was like I wonder if the people who are going through recruitment with me, I was like I wonder if these people are acting really nice or acting in a way, posturing if you will, to get an invitation for membership. And I was like that's just corny. Why would you do that? And I don't know if they were or not, but that was certainly an internal dialogue that I was like, are these people posturing? And um, and so that was in my mind, um, but I was not going to do that. Because I kind of didn't really want an invitation for membership because then I could say, "Well, see, you invited me, you don't really like me." Um, so... Um. That's kind of what my feelings were on recruitment, which is basically, you know,

questioning all of the process, and then wondering would I get an invitation for membership. Um, because of who I was on the inside.

### **Jordan's Story**

During his interview, Jordan described this story by saying it “is about belonging. About the deep desire to be accepted. About intimidation. And about the ways we hijack connection by putting people in adverse experiences to build connection.” He talked about his pledging process:

My understanding of what it means to be a man stems back to my days as a new member within my fraternity. In those days, we were called ‘pledges.’ Our period of pledging was filled with many experiences that many would say are counter to the genesis of fraternity.

The men running the pledge process were the “Pledge Eds,” older members who were charged with teaching new members about the values of the organization. Jordan described a process where these men “would yell and taunt us in an effort to move us to a place of subordination, and intimidate us with their greater standing in the fraternity.” He further described the Pledge Eds, “They were intimidating. They were hard people. They were not warm and cuddly and fuzzy.” Throughout this process, the Pledge Eds had orchestrated many pledge events:

I’d get a phone call and it wasn’t on your planned calendar. You know you plan out your day, so you’re like ok, 7 o’clock, I’m done, I can go to the rec center, and then I’m gonna be done done done. Well, 10 o’clock at night, you would get a phone call and be like, you got a pledge event. And I’m like, oh, god. A pledge event was just like, let me get a root canal with no novacaine. I mean it was like

what is this gonna be... Um, because you knew it was going to be something potentially that was going to get you yelled at. And so there was a constant state of anxiety and fear that I was living in.

Jordan's story focused on the culminating event of pledging:

One in particular was an event called, 'lock in.' Lock in was a two-day overnight experience, where the pledges in the fraternity stayed two nights in the basement of the fraternity house – not able to leave, a 'lock in' in the truest sense of the word. Over those two days, we were asked to recite pieces from our fraternity history, to perform calisthenics to demonstrate that we were tough enough 'man' enough to be part of the fraternity.

He described it further:

The lock in itself was a weekend of fear. You didn't know who was going to come down those stairs at whatever time of the night. And I remember one night, it was like 4 in the morning. And these people came down the stairs and they were like get up. They used some adjectives to describe us to help us realize the importance of us getting up. And so I just stayed in a constant state of fear during those two days... It was like a pledge event times ten. Because a pledge event, they called and you'd be like, be here in an hour. And you would have an hour to get yourself emotionally prepared. But in a house, it was like, 30 seconds and they're down the stairs, so if you're trying to get yourself psyched. Or prepared to handle whatever they were going to bring.

Jordan described one of the final and most brutal activities:

On the second night of lock in, we were asked to do an activity called, Ice Cube Trays. The brothers (initiated members) of the chapter had taken ice cube trays and filled the with ketchup, mayonnaise, vinegar, oil, and eggs; blending this mixture together, the brothers then poured the substance into ice cube trays and each of us was told to drink the filled ice cube trays with a straw.

Jordan then described his personal experience with the activity:

So, I got the straw, I started sucking it down. You know, you're being yelled at. Do it! Whatever, and I threw up in the trash can. And my straw went into my vomit. I got the straw out of the vomit, and I finished up those ice cube trays.

Though he was disgusted by the Ice Cube Trays event, Jordan continued:

What I wanted to show the brothers was that I was "tough" I could handle this, and I was the "man" that was worthy to be a part of their chapter. Looking back now, I see so much of how I compromised myself in efforts to suppress my own authentic ways of being; I suppose it was the price I paid to build community in however inauthentic it might have been.

When asked if he believed that the price of connection was too high, Jordan said, "In retrospect, I feel like my self-worth was too low. So the price wasn't too high, my self-worth was too low." He also talked about the mixed reactions of the Pledge Eds that kept him moving forward through the pledge process:

They were mad. They were frustrated. At times they were proud. And that's the complex dance of it, right? I mean if it was all hateful, no one would do it. But it was... This level of... emotional, sometimes physical, hazing. Coupled with... Really genuine moments of pride and care. For us as pledges. Annnnd... And

there was sincerity in that care, and those glimmers, those moments of that sincerity and care, uh, is what carried us and what made it, for me, at that time, feel like it was permissible all the crazy things we were experiencing.

Yet at the same time, once he was finally initiated into the chapter, Jordan described his feelings about one of the Pledge Eds:

He was like Jordan, welcome to the brotherhood. And all I wanted to do was kick him in his kneecaps. I was like, you're not my friend. And by that point, I was so in the mindset of I was going to finish, and I was going to look cute at the finish, that more caught up in did I look cute at the finish than I'm so excited to be in this organization.

### **Jordan's Ideas About Masculinity and Identity**

Jordan did feel he had been sent some specific messages about what it meant to be a man through his experience in the fraternity:

That ideal man was a great dresser. He was well-groomed. He, uhhhhhm, he had a swagger with women. He was straight. This isn't what was told to me explicitly, these are things that I heard. And part of them were based in my own biases so I need to acknowledge that. He was middle to upper middle class. He was... He was resilient. But really just tough. Moreso than resilient. Because I think resilient, authentically, experiences the experience and then moves through it. Tough is just, I'm gonna bulldoze through it. And this is more tough than resilient. Because all of the men of the chapter were white at the time, all the initiated men were white, probably that the man was white too. I didn't see anyone who looked like me in the chapter.

Jordan worked to represent that toughness in his own actions:

I'll never forget that Friday we were getting initiated. That Friday I went to class... got there early, had on my cute outfit. I was like, this was nothing. So I was like OH! And people would ask me, how was pledging? I was like, it's just a little bit of work.

After initiation, he described his feelings, "At that moment I could give 2 flips that I got initiated. I was like I got through it, and I smiled today in class. Which means that this did not get me."

Despite his need to put up a tough front during pledging, Jordan was able to be vulnerable and form very deep relationships with his brothers:

Because, you know, some of my... Family, really. Came from my time as a new member. In my fraternity. And I'm sure, for those people who I now call family, I'm sure they troubled a lot of notions that they had, you know? I have a fraternity brother, boy, let me tell you. He gave major support, and major coins, to George Bush. Um, yet he has one of his closest friends who's black and gay. And when I went to his wedding, his mom, she was like Jordan, you are one of the most important people in his life. And he's one of mine. So we couldn't be more politically different. And he's helped me to understand people, uh, and the experiences of people who grow up with political and socioeconomic differences than me and vice versa. So I think that there was a mutual um, transformation that happened from our time together. For me, him, and several others.

### **Brett**

Brett was the fourth participant I interviewed for this study. He participated in a fraternity that is associated with the Interfraternity Council (IFC) for three years during his undergraduate experience and graduated approximately nine years prior to the interview. During that experience, he served in an executive board role with his fraternity as Vice President and Historian. He also served as the Student Government President on his campus for two years. Brett had worked in student affairs in the past and, during his master's program, held an internship that involved fraternity and sorority life. He self-disclosed during his interview that he identified as Black.

#### **About Brett**

Brett came to college with the idea that he would be very involved, just not in a fraternity:

I never thought that I would join a social fraternity because of the negative stereotypes related to hazing, racism, and homophobia. As an African American, gay, male from the South, my pre-college experiences were wrought with societal and hegemonic expectations that were projected on me. I assumed that these same fears would be realized in college fraternities.

He also described his pre-college experience, saying,

I wasn't out in high school, even though I came out my first semester. Just six months before that I was not out and uh, being from a rural community in [the South], there just weren't any other people, gay people out.

However, Brett found wide acceptance at his institution as well as a strong pathway to involvement through the Student Government Association.

It was through his SGA involvement that Brett learned about his future fraternity. He began to change his mind about fraternities because of that involvement:

Between 10 and 15 percent of the entire organization are just in this one fraternity alone. Out of all the hundred plus organizations. So even though you're talking around any where between, you know, up to 10 people, 10 people out of a 60 person organization is a lot. Right? So, I really got my exposure to my fraternity through that opportunity in SGA. And it was those interactions and experiences, not in a fraternity context, but in my role as freshman class VP, um, that really exposed me to the organization I ultimately chose, um, which made me feel like, you know, all the things I thought about. The stereotypes, the concerns, the myths about joining fraternity life, particularly as a Black gay man, really started to deteriorate and fall away because of the interactions that I had with people.

Brett remained cautious, however, and did not join the organization at the first opportunity. He waited an additional semester to be sure he wanted to join. He talked about his considerations for joining:

I didn't think like, oh my gosh, they're gonna like, you know beat me and threaten me and I'm gonna starve or be forced to drink stuff. Which I didn't have to do any of those things. So that was one piece. I felt like I would be safe, and taken care of, and protected. Um, and respected as a human being. And then really then, I think the identity piece. You know, being a Black gay man, who's joining an IFC who at the time there was only one other African American person. There were, to my knowledge, no other gay men in that organization. There were some in the past, but they had all graduated. And so I was really entering, uh, unique

territory. And this wasn't a small organization of like 15-20, 30, that you see on some campus organizations, only have, you know recruitment in the spring for their biggest class, we were almost 100 men strong. So at any point we were at least 70. At minimum, 70 men. Um, this was by no means a small fraternity. So I felt like given all the numbers and demographics I just stated, and my identities, I felt safe, um, and I also knew that this was going to be an organization where I could make a difference and make an impact.

Brett described his fraternity's reputation as a factor in him joining, as well:

You know, there are a lot of people that were, uh, SGA members, SGA presidents. Who were RAs. Who were Orientation Leaders. Who were Admissions Tour Guides. Who were, um, involved in programming board. Who were doing really great work across campus.

After joining his organization, Brett was immediately encouraged to take on leadership roles. "I had been in there for less than a year. Elections happened that November and by summer I was already being, you know, encouraged, and some of the brothers were tossing around the idea of me running as president," he said. However, in conjunction with his other leadership roles on campus, including being a Resident Assistant and student government president, Brett felt taking on chapter president would be too much. He also felt the Vice President role was a better fit for him personally:

I ultimately decided to run for vice president because it was focused on recruitment in our chapter and that's what I really was excited about. I wasn't excited about financial reports, budgets, you know, communicating with Nationals, operations, you know, really all the things that a president needs to

worry about. External relations, greek life office, all the things that a chapter president concerns himself or herself uh with. I wanted to really do recruitment. I think my, my, skill set is meeting new people and making connections and convincing them to join.

### **Brett's Story**

Brett focused on an incident that happened while he was vice president as something that was influential to his understanding of what it meant to be a man in his chapter:

As vice president, I was responsible for recruitment for the fraternity. For several weeks, I met with potential new brothers, trying to convince them that my fraternity was the best organization to join. That spring, with the assistance of my brothers, we recruited 22 “new boys” into the chapter. Given all of the time that I had invested in recruiting most of these guys, I had developed genuine and substantive relationships with the majority of the pledge class. As an upperclassman, leader in the fraternity, chair of recruitment, and the student body president on campus, I took great pleasure in guiding these young men not just through the recruitment process, but during the new member education period and life post-initiation.

During my senior year, I was confronted with shocking news by one of the “new guys,” “Jake,” who told me that he had been sexually assaulted by an older fraternity brother (“Jesse”). This brother shared that he was at an off campus party the weekend before, where he was intoxicated. Jake stated that he Jesse escorted him back to his residence hall room and began to take both of their clothes off and

perform sexual acts. Jake reciprocated these sexual acts, but did not give consent. Furthermore, Jake did not identify as gay.

Just a few days later, a different sophomore fraternity brother, “Mark,” approached me and a sorority girlfriend of mine in one of the campus dining halls. Mark told me that another older brother, “Matt,” had engaged in unwanted sexual activity following a party where both were intoxicated. It became clear within days, that two different recruits had been allegedly assaulted by two older brothers.

Brett was extremely upset about these revelations:

Particularly because, you know, I was, I was recruitment chair, and vice president over both of these boys, that recruitment process, they were part of the same class. And so I felt really a special connection to both of them, the class, and what we sold to them in terms of their fraternity experience. What they would get out of it. And so, even though I wasn’t directly responsible for some of the things they experienced negatively, I felt ownership and um, being able to help them resolve the situation, whatever that looked like, and granted at the time I was, you know, 20, or 20 going into 21. Without one lick of a kind of higher ed class or course, not the experience that I had today. So I was also very young and inexperienced but also just trying to help and protect uh, little brothers that I, that I felt like, uh, we had potentially bamboozled.

Brett surmised that the younger members came to him with this information for several reasons:

I imagine part of the reason why they came to me was because, yes, I recruited them, yes I was a leader in the fraternity, yes we had a personal connection. But also D, probably because I was the only gay person. And so they were trying to discern what happened to them, first of all, what this means for their sexuality, and I'm using their quotes here, was it their fault? But of course it wasn't.

He went on to describe the ways Mark and Jake reacted to these assaults:

They were incredibly young. So was I. They were scared, I don't think they had had a same-sex um, sexual experience before. And, it was under alcohol, and it wasn't under their consent. Um, So like anyone in that situation, they were just, scared, um, questioning themselves, questioning their masculinity, questioning their decision making, questioning you know, whether they wanted to be in the fraternity any more. Uhh, scared about it getting out to other people. Not knowing what to do next. Not knowing who else to tell beyond me.

Brett knew the chapter had to take action:

I took this issue to the leadership council, a group consisting of primarily heterosexual men, who were even more baffled as to what to do than I was. We never spoke openly about the issue to the rest of the chapter out of respect for the parties involved (and in reflection, probably to minimize negative PR among other fraternities). Ultimately, we took our concerns to the national fraternity. The older brothers (who ultimately admitted to the behaviors which they were accused of) were stripped of their leadership roles. Jesse was socially alienated from the chapter as it became clear that Jake was not the only younger brother who had

been assaulted by him. Matt remained a member of the chapter though never served in a leadership role again.

Bret went on to talk about how this experience affected him:

The sexual assault incidents which occurred during my senior year is one of the most profound times in my life, not to mention my undergraduate and fraternity experiences. As the only out gay man in the entire 100 man organization at the time of these incidents, they affected me on a personal level. As the only openly gay male, I also felt called to lead in this situation. With the primary concern of protecting my younger brothers, I also wanted to refute the notion that gay men are sexual predators. I felt compelled to be a positive role model and example for not just Mark and Jake, but to others who were aware of the situation.

He further described his drive to be a role model:

As well as the only openly gay man that year, um, yeah, I, I felt a sense of duty to protect and refute any sort of notions that, that's the way gay men behave. And not that I felt like, after 2 years of being in the fraternity that my brothers saw ME as that, but for those who again, had limited interactions with LGBT people prior to college, which was most. And I would imagine most students even today, considering their upbringing and their geographic location. Again, I sort of felt like this isn't right, what's happening, but this is not, this is not what being gay means. This is not what being a brother, uh, means. Um, and so, just wanting to be able to help those guys out while also being somewhat of a symbol, that's probably a strong word, but being a symbol of what it means to be like, a positive, effective, good, gay person that could still be in a fraternity without the whole

sexual interactions and relationships. And that's not to say that, I I I couldn't say, um, don't think that gay men should not in fraternities, should not, um, be romantic or intimate, but the example that I provided to you in the text of course, those were not consensual.

Brett also talked about his concerns for these men, fearing that they would leave the chapter:

I knew that, and which is why I tried to recruit them in the first place because these were the guys that would go on to do really amazing things in our fraternity, really amazing things at the institution broadly, and potentially really great things after graduation. And they both have.

Therefore, despite the assaults, the younger brothers were able to have an overall good fraternity experience and build strong relationships with their other brothers:

Today, I maintain strong relationships with both Mark and Jake, and I feel confident in knowing that despite the crazy weeks in the fall of [that year], it is our fraternity values and love for one another that binds us as friends and brothers forever.

### **Brett's Ideas About Masculinity and Identity**

Brett talked about several main points in his experience that shaped his ideas about masculinity:

As an African American gay man, I knew that I would stand out in my fraternity. But I had no idea that I would be faced with this complex situation my senior year. My fraternity shaped my masculinity at several points throughout my undergraduate career. The first was when I was invited to join the organization.

The second point was my first weeks in the organization as I was trying to navigate fraternity culture. The third was when I was elected as vice president, trusted with coordinating recruitment efforts as the external face of the fraternity. These points indicated clearly in overt ways that my race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation did not matter in terms of being accepted. However, it was true friendship, loyalty, and living the fraternity's values that garnered me respect and support.

Brett also discussed his personal feelings about masculinity, from both his experience in his fraternity and society at large:

I think at the end of the day you just have to be yourself. Right? I think that's the trouble with defining masculinity and what it means to be a man in any context, whether we're talking fraternity or otherwise. That we get into this box and then we feel like we have to meet those standards and these societal standards.

He also recognized that this was very personal and might be different for others:

I don't think I felt the pressure or need to fill up, or had to fit a box, because my peers in the fraternity were so supportive of me and I recognize that that's not the common situation, and particularly not just the gay thing but also the race thing, too. That's certainly not the case. But I feel like I was one of the sort of lucky, lucky extreme cases where I was able to do my thing, figure out on my own, but not necessarily figure out with the pressure of how does Sigma think about this. What does this mean for Sigma. I was able to think about masculinity, being a man, in the context of where I was at that place and time. Not because of, what my organization, fraternity organization, felt like I had to be.

### **Peter**

Peter was the fifth participant I interviewed for this study. He participated in a fraternity that is associated with the Interfraternity Council (IFC) for four years during his undergraduate experience and graduated approximately seven years prior to the interview. During that experience, he served in several executive board roles with his fraternity as Vice President of Recruitment, New Member Educator, and Corresponding Secretary. Peter worked in student affairs in a position that was responsible for fraternity and sorority life on his campus.

#### **About Peter**

Peter was raised in the Catholic church, though his family was not very religious. He knew that he was gay at a very early age:

I knew in kindergarten when I was sitting at the purple table uh, that I should be more into Kelsey to my left than Ryan across, across, from from me at the other side of the table. And I had no concept of right or wrong, I just knew that it wasn't right. And the reason how I was framing that was because I had a mommy and a daddy. Every story that I'd ever been told was mommy and daddy.

Cinderella gets Prince Charming. And I just said to myself, well that can't be right. And it literally, I I this is one of my earliest memories is that internal dialogue that I had with myself in kindergarten.

Though he had gay family members, Peter still felt the need to hide his sexuality: I'd honestly grown up hiding myself sexually, um, you know, I had a girlfriend all through high school, and uh, her best friend, he, had a boyfriend and and we

would double date a lot but then he and I had a secret fling on the side, and it was kind of like we're not gay, it's just a phase, right?

After engaging in same-sex experimentation in high school, Peter resisted acknowledging his sexual identity when he got to college.

I kind of rationed with myself, like, keep giving girls a chance until you find the one. If you find the one and you actually cry over a girl, and you still have these feelings, or you're still watching men on man porn, then at that point we can then, go back to the drawing board and decide, ok, are we gonna embrace this lifestyle or not. That's the internal dialogue that I dealt with all throughout college until I actually came out.

When it came to fraternity life on campus, Peter said, "I was pretty much planning in my head that I was gonna go Greek. Before I even set foot on campus." His older sister had attended a different college and had a great experience in her sorority, so Peter's parents encouraged him to join a fraternity. "I was pretty much told I had to," he remarked. He looked at a few different organizations, but had a bad experience at one chapter's recruitment event. He told the story of looking at the chapter's composite photograph:

I was in their house and I pointed to a member and I said, Oh, I went to high school with him. Um, and they called him "poop dick" and um, I kind of was like, oh? And they were like, yeah, he's, he's a faggot and you know. He's quitting. And um, we found out that he's a queer bag and da da da. And I was kind of like, oh, ok then.

While the organization still offered him a bid for membership, Peter said, “I think they realized that they turned me off at that point, but I’m not so sure that they actually cared.”

On the other hand, the chapter Peter eventually joined was a much better fit. He enjoyed participating in their recruitment events:

I went to the rush events and you know, the rush events were, things that I figure like pool night, I don’t really play pool but I still went and you know, we went bowling and went and had pizza and watched sports, and I don’t watch sports, and that’s ok but I went anyway, and there was enough good conversation, um, you know, and brothers that didn’t watch sports, you know, I, that were just kind of like, well this is boring, anybody wanna go play foosball or something, and we’d go off and have a little talk and stuff at the rush events. So, it was pretty good.

Peter’s one hesitation about joining a fraternity was his fear of hazing, but the brothers reassured him:

I vocalized my concern about being hazed and they were just like no, we don’t do that. We we, that’s not something that we’re about. Um, and I’m not so sure how true that statement was, I’m not sure if it was true, but it wasn’t anything that was, degrading as a human being. It was just, you know, why are you being mean to me right now? Why are you getting so upset that I didn’t get your interview. Things like that, but the disappointment act. But I certainly wasn’t harmed, or you know, touched or anything. It was just, um, they can, they made it seem like they were saints, and uh, they weren’t.

The most compelling reason to join the chapter, however, was its reputation on campus.

“I think what was probably most significant was, I saw their fall pledge class. I saw them

at dinner hours, I'd see them in the library together, I'd see them doing activities and the sporting events." He loved that the chapter was so visible and popular on campus. He continued, "Everyone really hated our organization, um, because we were all the student leaders and we were really pretentious and we would tell people how much better than them that we were."

### **Peter's Story**

Peter's story focused on an opportunity he had shortly after he was initiated:

The summer of 2006 was an interesting time for me. I just completed my freshman year at college, and I was serving as a summer resident assistant for the University. One day, while hanging my head in boredom from being on duty and trapped in my dorm room, I received a call from the chapter president.

"Hey, [Peter], hope you're well, man. We need someone to step up and go to Convention. It's next week."

Being newly initiated, I was excited to be given the opportunity. Of course, what I didn't realize was that literally no one else in the chapter wanted to give up a week of their summer vacation to spend with a bunch of old guys talking policy.

I agreed and off I went. An older brother picked me up from campus a few days later, and ROADTRIP!

Before he arrived at the convention, Peter imagined what the event would be like: I thought, especially because headquarters was doing it, that it was gonna be hand holding, song singing, like, ritual, like, it, I had like this romanticized version, you know vision of, I'm gonna learn great things, I'm gonna be part of the

organization, and because we're brothers there's not going to be dirty politics, and you know. I'm going to see people from other chapters, and I realize that every chapter is different, but you embrace people for who they are regardless of whether you fit into their chapter or not.

Upon arriving, Peter was impressed at first. "I was so starry eyed and excited to get there and see people with letters on, because I was only able to wear mine for just a few months before this happened, you know." He was almost overwhelmed by the new experience:

I was really just like WOW. And there was just like tables of merchandise and stuff everywhere. Upsilon stuff everywhere. And then, you know, then here come some alumni from our chapter that I knew and it was like hey, and you know, I was 19 and and, just sort of like a puppy.

Slowly, though, Peter's perspective on the convention began to shift:

I'll spare the reader the details of the educational sessions, mainly because I didn't go to many. We were usually too hungover to wake up and go. Plus, I was a little uncomfortable.

For the first time, I saw how much of a gentleman's club my fraternity actually was. I heard these old men talking about "busty co-eds" and how they used to get drunk and beat up the [Psi's] because they were "wimpy nerds." I remember looking at my chapter brother who was—in all fairness—one of the kindest guys I've ever met—laughing at their stories and saying how he "wished our chapter was like that!"

Peter elaborated about this incident and how it affected him:

I think what bothered me was, it's not like we were out drinking and people were talking about what they're into. This is like, right, like before session there was cocktail hour. You know what I mean? Like there was still business to be done. And it was just like, people were, weren't in the let me let my hair down, I'm not in work mode anymore. They were in work mode and they still were talking like that.

While it bothered him that his chapter brother played along, Peter didn't feel anger toward him:

I think there was just this kind of condition that we've all, the sort of hyper-masculinity, not that I knew what that word meant back then... I just think that this is what we were accustomed to. It's what we were trained for. I think that the only reason why I was stepping out of my boun, my boundaries there is that I was trying to come out, and I was trying to latch onto a reason to come out.

After witnessing the gentlemen's club atmosphere at the national event, Peter grappled with his feelings about his sexuality:

Admittedly, I was still closeted at this point in my journey. I knew in my heart that I was gay, but I prayed that it was a phase and that by joining this organization, I would "man up." The [Upsilon]s at my Catholic university were the military men. They were the student leaders. There weren't any gay members, but they really didn't seem to have an issue if this guy or that guy was one way or another. It just never came up.

So there I was. Underage. A bit drunk. Disappointed. But mostly internally dialoguing with myself that I was to continue to hide from the truth.

That pretty ritual I saw a few weeks ago that talked about justice and brotherly love? Might as well forget about it. These old ass alumni sure have.

There's no way you can be a [Upsilon] and talk about such filth. A woman's breast size and someone's physical strength aren't the ideals in which we judge a person. How can these old alumni (who were highly decorated in terms of the fraternity) be so crass? The closet was clearly the safest place for me. I didn't fit in.

But the convention wasn't over yet, and Peter's experience was about to change: The next morning started our second general session for amendments to [Upsilon Law]. I phased in and out because some of the changes people were proposing were frivolous. "A comma needs to be added!" is something I distinctly remember being shouted during the 3 hour nightmare.

Then. Something interesting was brought up. I heard the following and immediately lifted my head from the table: "We, the [Large Research Intensive University in the Northeast] Chapter move that 'sexual orientation' is added into [Upsilon's] anti-discrimination policy."

Silence.

I looked over at my fellow delegate. He looked over at me, shrugged, and said "Second."

The chairman looked back at the old ass alumni sitting in the front delegation. They shrugged with confusion.

"There's a motion on the floor to add 'sexual orientation' into our anti-discrimination clause. It has been seconded. Is there any discussion?"

Peter was excited by the drama of the situation, his chapter brother's reaction, and the fact that the motion passed with very little opposition. Only one chapter reacted negatively:

“BULLSHIT!” cried out members of the [Large, Research Intensive State University in the South] Chapter. And out they walked. What I didn't know then that I know now is that when they walked out of that room, they walked out of the Convention and went home. These are undergraduates, mind you.

“Can you believe them? That's nonsense. Who cares whether someone is in to dudes or not?” My chapter brother said. I shrugged back at him and thought “Yeah, ok, Mr. Giggles When Old Men Say ‘Busty Co-eds,’” but I dropped it and let him have his moment.

At that moment, I realized something pretty significant. Yes, there is a sense of “beers, bitches and brotherhood” in my organization at the national level, it would seem. And yes, I wanted so badly to like all three of those things (though I actually only liked two). But my reality was that I had chapter members who didn't feel as if those things were required to be a great member of the organization.

We left when the Convention was over, and a few weeks later, when school started, my chapter brother gave a report of Convention at the first chapter meeting. He snarled when retold the story about the one chapter walking out.

“What tools!” a chapter member shouted from the back. “Yeah, we should like, get a gay brother or two. Our Greek Sing show would be awesome!” another declared.

I rolled my eyes, but I laughed inside. If only they knew how bad I was at dancing.

I continued to live my life, trying to be something that I wasn't. But, my chapter members didn't pressure me to do that. I did.

As Peter tried to reconcile his identity with his fraternity experience, he struggled with the fraternity ritual:

The ritual started bothering me when I was in the closet. And I started to embrace it more when I came out. Because I was constantly doing things that I was getting called out for because of passive aggressive stuff that was happening because I was in the closet. I would, you know, speak against people who were a little bit more effeminate in bid meetings. Not that I would vote against them, but I would be like, do we really want him? He's not really a dude. And people would look at me and be like, wow, that's, that's an interesting judgment. And they'd always cite something that would always be our way of saying go back to the ritual. And so it annoyed me with that, with that.

When Peter decided to come out, his experience was positive:

Two years later, when I came out as a Junior, the [Upsilon's] huddled around me. They asked if my family knew and if I needed one of them to go with me to tell my parents. There wasn't a need. My family did know and I was embraced with open arms when I told them just one day prior to my coming out to the chapter. I knew I was a lucky one. Looking back, coming out was uncomfortable, but it

wasn't hard. I had a pretty great support system in place with my fraternity brothers.

### **Peter's Ideas About Masculinity and Identity**

Peter discussed the role of fraternity ritual in his developing understanding of masculinity:

My concept of manhood was shaped indirectly from my time as an undergraduate in the chapter. We never talked about it in an existential way; we never studied development theory. We actually just drank a lot of beer and held deep conversations about our ritual. Justice is the element that guides everything I do. I worry not just about equality, but about equity. I make decisions keeping both of those things in mind. Am I being fair? Am I being a good friend? A good son? A good uncle? A good educator? Being an [Upsilon] at [Catholic University in the North East] taught me that. Today, I know what it means to be an open minded person—the least of which has anything to do with the level of my masculinity.”

Once he came out, Peter wavered between being a self-described “drama queen” who participated in a powerful segment of the fraternity and as someone who defined himself in opposition to other gay men on campus:

I started referring to myself as the Rosa Parks of the gays for my chapter.

Because when I finally stood up and said this is who I am, people started to follow. People who were already in the chapter. Who some of them I didn't even know.

Once several other members came out, the men formed a group they jokingly called the “Fagtion.” Though the group started as a joke, it grew to be influential:

We were like a special interest group within the chapter. Um, and we would meet and we would, uh, talk about how we were voting on things... We realized during election time, people would politic, and they would want to meet with, um, the head of the Fagtion and things like that. Uh, so we did a joke, it started, but then it started to become a little bit, you know, more real.

At the same time, the group pushed back against the idea that they were the “gay fraternity” on campus:

We were a chapter of like 70, but we had like, 7 gay brothers. And so, because we were relevant, people called us “the gay fraternity”... We would always fight that and go whoa whoa whoa whoa, uh, let’s say, Psi fraternity has only 10 people and 3 of them are gay, so statistically [they are] the gay fraternity, not us.

Peter also relished being considered different from other gay men on campus:

When I came out, I was established. I was a junior, I was popular. I was a student leader everyone knew me. All the priests knew me, everything. You, you know. The university president knew me on a first name basis. Um, I was, really really involved. So when I came out, some of the priests would vent to me and say like, “Why can’t they all be like you?”

And I was like, “What do you mean?”

“Well, you know, you’re not wearing tight white capris. You’re not floating around and being flamboyant. Why can’t they be like men?”

And at that time, I loved the attention. So I was like, “Yeah, why can’t they? Right?”

This approach, however, made it difficult for Peter to find true community:

So the gay community and me at the institution wanted nothing to do with me, because I was, for lack of a better term, an Uncle Tom to them. And the straight community really, you know, I was still gay. So, there was really no place for me to fit in, so I forced myself to fit in with both.

### **Paul**

Paul was the sixth participant I interviewed for this study. He participated in a fraternity that is associated with the Interfraternity Council (IFC) for two years during his undergraduate experience and disaffiliated from his chapter at the beginning of his junior year. Paul's disaffiliation took place 4 years prior to our interview. During his two years in the fraternity, he served an executive board role with his fraternity as Chair of Risk Management. Paul worked in student affairs in a position that was partially responsible for fraternity and sorority life on his campus.

### **About Paul**

Paul described his first few weeks in college:

As a pretty shy, quiet little kid, who didn't like know, um, didn't know what I wanted to do in college, to be involved. And luckily, I became friends with girls who were all freshman who kind of encouraged me because they were all rushing sororities and so I kind of ended up signing up, too. And I went to one house the first night that I just liked personally.

Paul had initially not been interested in participating in a fraternity because of stereotypes he had seen in media prior to attending college:

So I had that in the back of my mind a lot, kind of very bro type situations, you know what I'm saying. You know, just men who were only after a couple things

in life and that wasn't really what I was interested in. I went to high school in a small town. So I got to college and about 18% of our college population was Greek. And most of the friends I made initially were female. I didn't want to participate in Greek Life just for studying and drinking. And they were interested in Greek Life, and so I said ok, well, I'm happy with this group but maybe there's an opportunity, there, too. So then, when I actually met some of, um, the brothers at my fraternity, I didn't get the sense that they were like that either.

He described why he was convinced to join his fraternity:

I was just not a fraternity guy. I never saw myself meshing with that. And then I went to visit the house my fraternity, and there were a lot of different types of guys there. Yeah, you had those typical guys, but also students who were like me, who acted like me, who might be interested in business, who might be interested in video games. There were just a wide range of people who were drawn to the fraternity, and what drew me in was that, um, they all seemed welcome and appreciated.

After he joined his chapter, Paul was immediately encouraged to run for a leadership position:

Some brothers saw potential in me, and I was already holding a leadership role in another organization. Um, so I think they saw, you know, someone who has done this before, and thought I could do this leadership role. So they convinced me to run.

He was elected to the position of Risk Management Chair, a position he enjoyed and took very seriously:

I just had to kind of make sure everything was ok if we were going to have a party or have people at the house. Um, just making sure that we were protected for our chapter. And, um, it would be, you know, if we were having a party, whether or not it was an official fraternity function, we were checking IDs, we were at the door. If the function was at a bar, is everything going well. And we had people back at the house. And I was on the executive board and was a part of, you know, these kinds of bigger decisions that are being made. Um, you know, what do we want to do for homecoming, and is it abiding by, you know, our bylaws. What is the process that needs to occur? I really enjoyed it and I had a position I felt would really help the leadership in our organization.

### **Paul's Story**

Paul focused his story on a conversation that stood out for him, though he had had many other conversations like this one:

Each year in the Spring, my undergraduate institution held our Greek Week.

Greek Week was filled with various competitions; some were physical and others were mental. I've never been someone who has excelled at physical competitions, so I decided to sign up for one of the more mental competitions.

Paul was not out at the time of this story, so he had other considerations when he signed up for Greek week activities:

If I completely fully participated in the Greek week games, people might question my sexuality. But if I would participate and fail, at whatever, tug of war, or whatever it may be, and our team lost, it might be unnecessary drama, and I didn't want to be open to that.

Despite his careful planning to engage in a way that made him feel comfortable, Paul was approached to sign up for other events:

My fraternity was struggling to come up with enough volunteers for the other events so our president was having face-to-face interactions to generate some sign-ups. He approached me and asked me to participate and I declined. I gave him my decision and he said something to the effect of: “C’mon, Paul. Man up!”

Paul described his feelings about the chapter president using this phrase against him:

At the time this happened I was closeted pretending to put up the façade of being straight. Any hint of someone not believing my perceived sexuality increased my anxiety and gave me great stress. When someone tells me to “man up,” they’re stating that I’m not man enough which I perceived as them saying I was feminine. It was a major threat to me at the time, but what I thought was an even greater threat was attempting to prove my masculinity and failing. Therefore, I would decide to hide away from situations that would essentially call out my masculinity, i.e. Greek Week games.

At the same time, Paul knew that the chapter president probably didn’t understand how that phrase would be taken:

He didn’t definitely know how his words would be received by me. I didn’t necessarily expect him to. And it was almost like praise, because he was using this to encourage me to sign up using that language. But what it actually did was kind of distance me from, you know, from the situation and it made me feel really awkward.

Eventually, Paul left his fraternity. “At the beginning of my junior year, after serving as Risk Manager for one year on the executive committee, I decided to disaffiliate from the chapter. Situations like [this were] not the sole reason for leaving.” He described his ambitions for college engagement, and how those were at odds with his chapter’s level of motivation:

I was involved in 3 other fairly demanding organizations in addition to this fraternity. And one was a professional fraternity, so we talked about things that would help me in the future. And I had leadership roles in these organizations throughout my four years in college. And I was attracted to the passions of the other members in these organizations. And the brothers in my social fraternity, um, tended to be sort of, um, disinterested in um, proving ourselves on campus and doing community based service. And I was feeling like they were, for lack of a better word, lazy. And um, these other organizations I’m a part of, and I’m putting in the effort and the time, and I felt others were motivated, and it was so much more fruitful.

### **Paul’s Ideas About Masculinity and Identity**

Paul talked about genuine relationships with other men and leadership development as reasons he was drawn to his fraternity:

I really wanted male friendship. When I got to school, I didn’t know a single person there. Or I didn’t before I got there. I was four hours from my parents. I just didn’t have anyone to go to about it, I didn’t have an ally. So I was just still thinking about, do I finish, do I make it all the way through college. And remember, I was terribly shy when I first started, and the experiences that I had

helped me, I changed so much, and I totally credit that to my fraternity. And I think I really just made connections with a lot of people I wouldn't have otherwise. And in terms of leadership roles, I certainly can appreciate now that I had the opportunity to expand those skills.

Even though he was seeking male friendships, he was eventually driven to leave the organization, in part, because of the culture of hypermasculinity, such as when he was told to "Man up" in the story.

This happened all the time. And this is just one instance that I recall. Throughout my time in college and in life, it has happened thousands of times. This is just one time that I remember because it was a difficult time for me personally. Um, I knew, I hadn't come out and I wanted to come out and I knew I was gay at the time but no one else did.

Eventually, Paul felt that leaving the fraternity was the best way for him to be more comfortable with himself. "I was trying to figure out how to be a complete person. I didn't come out until my senior year of college." He talked about his feelings prior to coming out:

I was isolated and I would make decisions that weren't the best to change their perception of me because, you know, and I think each time I responded it was like a regression or something like that. And it's not good to be living like that. And I knew that at the time as well.

After leaving the fraternity and coming out, though, Paul was able to reflect on his well being during his fraternity participation:

I was hiding who I truly was. And I don't think I ever really got the chance to show the fraternity who I really am. I don't know how I would have survived because I was hiding these emotions. But I was doing so much to hide who I was truly inside that I wasn't living. I enjoyed that time in the fraternity, but I enjoy my life now so much more. But I think that at the time, I thought it was pretty good then.

### **Allen**

Allen was the seventh participant I interviewed for this study. He participated in a fraternity that is associated with the Interfraternity Council (IFC) for three and a half years during his undergraduate experience and graduated approximately three years prior to the interview. During that experience, he served in executive board roles with his fraternity as New Member Educator and Treasurer. Allen worked in student affairs in a position that was responsible for fraternity and sorority life on his campus.

### **About Allen**

Allen was a first-generation student who didn't really know what to expect from college. "I grew up in a somewhat smaller town, and so, um, it, outside of that, like college, I mean college wasn't even a blip in the, the social circles that I was in," he said. He never thought about joining a fraternity, because he had very little exposure to them. "I think as a first-generation student, I, I didn't really even think I saw Animal House, right? Like the kind of iconic movie, before I went to school, and so it wasn't even on my radar."

Allen was involved in other ways on campus, and that involvement connected him with the fraternity and sorority life community. "I really found my connection

through my residence hall and through the living learning community that I was a part of,” he said, and his floor mates encouraged him to attend fraternity recruitment with them. After his experience in fraternity recruitment, however, Allen decided not to join any chapter:

I wasn’t finding what I was, uh, what I wanted. Um, I also noticed that there was um, whenever I uh, would kind of imply that I was gay, um, in those conversations, a lot of people, a lot the time the, the conversation um, shifted a little bit? Um, and so, um, uh, I ended up ultimately kind of backing away from the process and not joining during that first semester.

Allen ended up getting very involved in the Pride center, which was forming on his campus:

The campus president had um, said, we’re starting a Pride center. And kind of like gave us a space. Um, and then the the president at the time just left. Um, school. And so, uh, my advisor, who was overseeing the project, was like hey, you should do this awesome thing as a first year student!

Allen enjoyed this opportunity and put a lot of effort into it. Then he started getting to know some members of one fraternity.

One of the people that I met through the recruitment process was in my own, in my own organization, had a class right before me and really just um, started getting to know me and um, it was, there wasn’t a lot of pressure. Um, and then one day, it was, hey, I just wanted to talk to you about, um, something that uh, that I want you to consider, which was to just take our new member education manual, read through it, and see if it aligns, um, and so, the organization really

aligned with my um, uh, some of my values, specifically around social justice.

Um, and uh, I I was appreciative that, um, they kind of took the initiative to get to know me at a deeper level, which, the formal recruitment process at the time on my campus didn't really allow.

### **Allen's Story**

Allen shared a story that he often shared as a part of fraternity recruitment at his old chapter and called it his "fondest memory" from his time in the fraternity. The event involved a camping trip that was, "the first thing that we got as like a benefit of membership, um that we were invited to this kind of brothers-only event," which made it more significant:

It was the first large event I attended following my initiation into my chapter and at the time it seemed like such a privileged event to be invited to. The weekend included camping on a lake over Memorial Day weekend, sunbathing, drinking, and hanging out with fraternity brothers and a date that every member was encouraged to bring. Thinking back, and even though I was out of the closet at this point, I was pushed to bring a girl by fellow brothers as a date for the weekend. I'm not sure that my own identity, or my brothers' acceptance of my full self, was ready at that point for me to bring a guy with me as a date.

As an active student in the Pride center, Allen was publicly out prior to joining his fraternity. His brothers supported his efforts there, even attending Pride week events. Yet, Allen still felt pressure to bring a woman as his date to this event. "I think if I would have probably been like dating somebody at the time, like it would have looked a little different... I probably would have pushed back a little bit more," he said. Additionally,

“I wasn’t trying to like, remind my brothers every 5 seconds that I was gay, right?” The woman Allen ended up bringing to the event was friends with another brother’s date and was casually dating another brother who had already committed to bringing another date to the event. Allen surmised, “it was basically them pushing me to have another girl that would be um, added to the experience of the weekend, so. . . they could probably attempt to hook up at some point.”

Allen continued:

During the same weekend, during the midst of the drinking and fraternal bonding, our group made friends with another group of campers. The group initially was a lot of fun and the two large groups shared laughs and beverages. At some point during the fun, and I can’t remember exactly why, one of my brothers mentioned that I was gay. In an instant the environment flipped to a couple of the men from the other party yelling multiple homophobic remarks at me, getting up in my face and calling me a “faggot”. I didn’t move and just stood there in shock at the words that were berating me. As someone that grew up in a rather liberal area, I had never experienced such blatant homophobia. At that point, I didn’t know what to do; I didn’t move I just stood there scared.

Allen went on to describe his internal dialogue during the incident:

There was um, a lot of uncertainty, uh, I think that that, it was, it was a lot of being kind of scared of what was happening. And um, not really um, processing fully kind of um, the new experience of somebody being angry at me about something that I felt really comfortable at the time.

At almost the exact same time, one of my fraternity brothers stepped in and pushed the person from in front of me and a group of my fraternity brothers grabbed me and pulled me back to our campsite. While the smaller group checked in with me to make sure I was okay and attempted to get me to refocus out of the trance like state I was in, the majority of my fraternity brothers had left to confront the other group about what had just happened. My understanding is that the incident was just a bunch of yelling and that no physical altercation occurred, but this was the point I felt truly supported by my organization and my brothers.

Allen described his interactions with his brothers immediately after the incident:

After we got back and things kind of died down, like everyone was kind of being like, yeah, we like, we were worried about you, right? We don't care about like the rest of the issues, right? It was the fact that like, the next day we got kicked out of the campsite because of the, because of the incident... But they weren't that upset about it. So getting a lot of, like, support, from uh, the organization, and so it was really validating.

He conveyed his relief and surprise, saying "I had a group of people who were willing to stand up for my because of an identity that I felt would be seen as less than by the hypermasculine brotherhood that I had joined."

Though he had told this story many times before, participating in this study caused Allen to look at this experience with a new lens:

As I reflect back on this weekend, I received multiple mixed messages from my brothers about their expectations of me as a brother in their brotherhood. On the one hand I had been pushed to not bring a guy with me as my date to the formal.

But at the same time, they were willing to take a stand against a group of people who could have easily hurt me physically because of my sexual orientation.

### **Allen's Ideas About Masculinity and Identity**

Allen experienced these mixed messages throughout his time in the fraternity:

These mixed messages played out over the next few years of my membership through the development of my identity as a gay man. I found myself working to live up to a hypermasculine standard of what it meant to be a man, for instance being able to drink in excess, treat women negatively, etc.

Allen talked about a tension among the members of his chapter when attempting to define what masculinity looked like within their group:

We were trying to live up to kind of what the... frat lifestyle was. Um, of like, you know drinking and partying, and um, you know, there was the kind of group that really always was pushing the organization to go to the gym and like that was how we were going to succeed, and then there was like a small group of us that was like, no we just need to be like true to ourselves. Like we don't have to meet what the, kind of the expectation of the broader community is.

Allen also described the way hypermasculinity was ever-present in his chapter: Really I think the hypermasculinity just was kind of, um, it permeated everything, right? Like it was, you know, the excess drinking... We knew that we needed to have like a ratio of like X number of women to men at our events, and then not identifying that, um, that what that does is you know, that really is, is sexist in a lot of ways. Or, um, or party themes we had that were sexist.

Allen recognized his own role in reinforcing this culture. He talked about the expectations the chapter had for him as a gay man, saying “At the beginning of my experience. . . it was somewhat my job, as like, to be the wingman.” He felt caught in the middle at times:

Even though I wasn’t dating them and treating them in that way directly, I was kind of part of the system that was supporting that. Um, uh, I think very much unintentionally, because those people were nice, many of them I still consider really close friends. Um, and I think that a lot of like, the uh, I was on both ends. Like I was getting the upset from the, from the girls. Um, as their close friend. And more of the like celebration from the, my fraternity brothers. And it was, um, while I don’t, I mean, necessarily, as I look back, like I wasn’t realizing at the time that that was a bad thing, right? Um, that, I could have been doing a better job at um, really you know, um, holding my organization and my brothers to a higher standard.

Allen acknowledged that this “attempt to fit in, is why over future years I perpetuated many of the hypermasculine traits, which I now work to dismantle in my professional job.” Allen has engaged in research about hypermasculinity in fraternities and uses his position as a fraternity and sorority life professional to challenge and disrupt hypermasculine behaviors in fraternities.

### **Ethan**

Ethan was the eighth participant I interviewed for this study. He participated in a fraternity that is associated with the Interfraternity Council (IFC) for four years during his undergraduate experience and graduated approximately one year prior to his interview.

During that experience, he served in several executive board roles with his fraternity as President, Vice President of Programming, and New Member Development Officer. Ethan did not work in student affairs, but still volunteered actively with his national fraternity.

### **About Ethan**

Ethan described a desire for more masculine socialization when he was younger: I grew up in a Christian family and moved from a small farm town in Texas to go to a religiously affiliated college on the West Coast—mainly hoping that attending the school would help me get rid of any sort of “sinful” (read: gay) thoughts that I’d had for the past few years. Growing up, I never had a father figure. My biological father was in prison for most of my adolescence, and my stepfather, while he was kind and provided for my mother and I, was never someone I formed a solid bond with. I honestly didn’t have much experience with what it meant to “be a (proverbial) man,” and deep down it was something I craved.

Even before he got to college, Ethan decided he wanted to join a fraternity:

My assumption was that if I did seek out a fraternity, which you know, stereotypically, when you see movies and that sort of thing, it’s kind of the pinnacle of, you know, I guess, young men at that age, what they would think of, what it is to be a man. And, and, the good ways and the ones that are more stereotypical in a negative way I guess you could say. Um, but that was something that I was kind of seeking out because I never really had that before.

So I knew, when I went to college, even before I went, I knew that I wanted to join a fraternity. Even though I didn't really know what that meant.

His ideas about fraternities came from media and movies:

I think a lot of what drew me to that wasn't, it definitely wasn't the kind of animal house stereotypical partying things. It wasn't that. It was more, and I can't think of a particular movie, but it was more, you know, you see the guys that are dressed up and going to nice events and having big kind of communal dinners in their house, that kind of thing. I think being from the South, kind of that appeal of, the decorum and the ritual of it all was very appealing to me.

Upon getting to college, I quickly decided that joining a fraternity would be the best way to go about this, and I quickly made a lot of great friends in my brothers. The fraternity seemed to have solid values and creeds, which was something that had always attracted me to social groups.

Ethan was drawn to the diversity in his fraternity, as well:

In my fraternity, what attracted me was, there was a really good mixture um, of all different, uh, types of people from different cultures. Also, and that was something that was very appealing to me because, growing up in Texas, I mean honestly, I don't think I'd ever met in person, an Asian person at all until I went out to California, for example. So, my fraternity was, um, it just happened to be that year the group was very diverse.

He also liked that the fraternity fit some of his stereotypical ideas about what a fraternity was:

I went around to a few different ones, and this one, I think it kind of fit into my, uh, perception of what, uh, stereotypical type of fraternity was that I wanted to go in for. There were a lot of athletic events, which were something that I was not really prone to or attracted to necessarily, but I thought that it's what I wanted to be. So, I would go out to those and try to be athletic and all that, even though, really, I didn't seem, it never really had been that way. Um, and then another event, for example, going out to a hookah bar, which from the South I didn't even know what hookah was, but it was kind of the equivalent of a lot of guys sitting around, you know smoking cigars, in a dimly lit room, and I was like, oh, this is, this is kind of, you know, the old boys, old boys club, type thing, that I'm looking for.

Ethan got involved in leadership roles soon after he was initiated:

I did get voted in to positions of leadership because, you know, I really respected everybody who was in the group with me and the organization with me. And I really had kind of their best interests at heart. I wanted to um, you know, put forth my best effort to make sure that the fraternity was as good as it could be and that everybody was having the best experience possible.

He described his first executive board role, "My junior year in college, I was VP of Programming and very involved in the social scene. It was my job to set up mixers and events with sororities and to coordinate with my female counterparts in those groups." He felt he was very successful in this role because he was conscientious and his hidden sexual identity may have assisted him:

I listened to what everybody else in the group was saying, because I wouldn't have necessarily have had the inclination to go with, you know, the group that all the straight guys wanted to go with for whatever reason. Um, so, yeah, I mean it wasn't, it wasn't very, difficult, uh, to socialize with the other, with the sororities, uh programming chairs. That was pretty, uh, pretty simple. Uh, and if anything, I think I got along better with them possibly for being closeted and gay because, you know, I could communicate with them on more of an even, even level it seemed like, than maybe someone who was, straight could.

Because he was still closeted at the time, Ethan took pride in the fact that his brothers thought highly of his ability to work with women in other chapters:

I don't know why, but when I first got to campus, um, even as a freshman, I was kind of seen as a guy who, could pull a lot of girls. And, for me, a lot of it was because I could just get along with them very well and there was no romantic or sexual attraction but these people were my friends that, um, you know that liked to be around me. So I usually did have a lot of girls around me that were just friends. And a lot of the guys in the fraternity usually saw that as girls just wanting to be around me, you know, as in like a romantic interest, which was not typically the case.

### **Ethan's Story**

Though Ethan joined a fraternity seeking non-romantic relationships with other men, he formed a deeper relationship with one brother:

Soon after, during rush of my junior year, I met an incoming freshman that would go on to become my "little bro" in the fraternity. We had a lot in common, and we

just clicked for some reason. After hanging out for a few months, with our other fraternity brothers and alone, our relationship began to evolve into something that was romantic, more than just a friendship. Though neither of us expressed our feelings aloud at the time and there was no physical romantic/sexual interaction—probably since we were both still closeted—the more-than-friendly chemistry was definitely apparent to us both.

At this point, I'd established myself on my college campus as someone that my high school self would have only dreamed of: I was a man-about-town, well-liked, made good grades, and had a great group of friends. Though I had not pursued any girls romantically or sexually in any sense, I was still seen by my peers as someone who "pulled girls," which I suppose was attractive to the idea of myself I was trying to project. However, when I met this new guy, my "little bro," I eventually had an identity crisis. I was really starting to form strong feelings for this person, stronger than any romantic feelings I'd ever experienced. One night, after an encounter with him, I went for a drive and had a bit of an emotional meltdown. I was crying and had to pull over, and remember praying and saying, "God, if this is the wrong thing for me to do, if this is the wrong way for me to feel, please give me a sign now! Because I don't want to do something I shouldn't." I was never really a particularly religious or spiritual person... but my family was, and I did not want to disappoint them. But something that night triggered in me, and I thought that I knew my feelings were right—how could feeling love for someone be bad?

I soon began a physical relationship with my fraternity brother, and we dated – secretly – for nearly two years. I became president of the fraternity soon after we'd decided to try and make things work, and I decided that coming out at that time would probably be bad for my chapter. I didn't want to be the gay fraternity president, because I didn't want to stigma that that would bring on the other brothers. Rumors were already starting to go around about us on campus, and while they weren't particularly malicious, I didn't want to fan the flames or validate something that I'd been so afraid of for so long.

Part of Ethan's fear about coming out stemmed from his ideas about what a fraternity should be:

I think in my own mind I was going back to that ideal um, like I said old boys club. You know, um, idea of what a fraternity was. And I did not see you know, a gay leader being a part of that. So, in that way, I kind of stifled that part of myself as much as I could while I was in positions of leadership publically. Um, privately, you know, I still had a boyfriend, a guy who was in the fraternity with me.

Eventually, things didn't work out between my boyfriend and I, and we parted ways. It was a first love for both of us, so that was a bit rough, but as soon as we broke up and I came out to my other fraternity brothers, I was very surprised at the amount of support I received! Even the guys who were viewed as the stereotypical jocks and man's men were extremely understanding, and ended up being there for me when I needed them the most."

Ethan discussed why he chose to come out after the breakup:

I had been my true self with this person that I was dating for so long, while I was happy, uh, with, with him. But when we broke up, I really didn't have anybody to go to to talk about, to talk about it with. Even though I had a lot of these really really great friends, but they were uh, unaware of this entire you know, huge side of my life that I held as such a big part of my identity. So, when we broke up, I came out, really because I needed to. It was unhealthy for me not to.

### **Ethan's Ideas About Masculinity and Identity**

Even though Ethan sought out a fraternity that held up stereotypical ideals of masculinity, he later found out that the chapter was very inclusive:

My fraternity on the national level has been very LGBT-inclusive, and was one of the first national fraternities to openly accept gay members. Knowing that has helped in my coming-out experience, and allowed me to hold on to a group of people who meant a lot to me, as well as an organization that I respect and hold dear.

There were also several popular brothers, including Ethan's "big bro," who were openly gay. Because of his ideas about masculinity and fraternities prior to joining, Ethan mused:

I wonder if before I formed these relationships with these guys, if I'd known, for example, that my big bro was so openly gay, if I would have joined. Because that was something I was trying to get away from. You know. That was something that, you know, I moved uh, out of my state and went to a Christian school and everything because I thought that doing that would make me, basically, "pray the gay away," you know.

Ethan credits his fraternity with helping him live a more authentic life and develop more open ideas about masculinity and his identity:

It was really the relationships with guys that I formed within the group first, that let me realize that there were, you know, a lot of people who were gay who were extremely happy and who were loved and who had the ability to love others, and it wasn't kind of the taboo, um, uh, negative stigma that I'd always heard about.

He also felt that the fraternity “really did foster growth and self-discovery in the healthiest of ways.” He believed that his continued involvement in the fraternity gave him the opportunity for continued growth:

My fraternity really does a good job at pushing you to be your best possible self.

It's not about being the best man possible, it's about, uh, evolving throughout every stage of your life and not really ever just settling for whatever you have.

Ultimately, he believed that his fraternity experience was, “really just trying to um, bring someone to um, a level of humility and kind of generosity, to be their best possible self.”

### **Summary**

Though the eight participants varied widely in age and experience, there were some common threads running through these narratives. Each participant's ideas about masculinity and their identities were formed from their experiences in fraternities but also stem from their acceptance of or resistance to societal ideas about masculinity. Chapter Five will explore themes that emerge across the eight narratives.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data from eight memory stories and eight interviews, two overarching conceptual categories emerged. The first is performing masculinity and authenticity. The two components of this category are juxtaposed; they may run counter to one another in some instances and compete with one another in different circumstances. This conceptual category is further fleshed out via five contradictory discourses: (1) reinforcing standards of masculinity, (2) distancing self from stereotypes about gay men, (3) compulsive heterosexuality, (4) personal authenticity, and (5) vulnerability, intimacy, and sex. The second overarching conceptual category is organization and individual. Two contradictory discourses inform this conceptual category: (1) organizational values: espoused and enacted and (2) enhancing personal reputation through organizational affiliation. Each overarching conceptual category contains a pair of messages that, while they may not be diametrically opposed, do run counter to each other, resulting in mixed messages the participants had to learn to negotiate in order to understand masculinity in the context of their organizations and incorporate those messages into their identities.

#### **Performing Masculinity and Authenticity**

The first major theme from this study is performing masculinity and authenticity. Butler (1990) wrote about the concept of gender performance and the supremacy of

masculinity in society. Because femininity is “marked” or seen as less than in a patriarchal culture, men perform a certain set of characteristics or behaviors based on the geographical, historical, and cultural context of the moment. This performance of masculinity is aimed at gaining and maintaining power in society (Butler, 1990). Edwards (2007) compared men’s identity development to putting on, wearing, and removing a mask. In this model, men observe others performing masculinity and feel pressured to put on a mask as well. They spend time “wearing the mask” or performing masculinity, and finally, they recognize the ways in which the mask doesn’t fit, or is not congruent with their authentic selves, so they take it off (Edwards, 2007). Throughout the study, the men discussed ways in which they were encouraged, in both subtle and non-subtle ways, to conform to hegemonic standards of masculinity. These standards often include toughness, aggressiveness, compulsory heterosexuality, and the denigration of femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). At the same time, the men were encouraged to build genuine relationships with each other and to be true to themselves. Kimmel (2010) described how many men feel they do not live up to hegemonic standards of masculinity and fear revealing their true selves lest they be judged unmanly; this made the pursuit of authenticity risky for the men in this study.

When discussing his experience with hazing, Jordan referred to the “complex dance” of fraternity relationships; Allen described receiving “mixed messages” about how he should behave in the context of his fraternity. This illustrates the complexity of the messages the participants received in the course of their fraternity experience. The following five contradictory discourses represent different facets of the overarching conceptual category of performing masculinity and authenticity.

### **Reinforcing Standards of Masculinity**

Prior to attending college, both the participants in this study and their brothers spent years being socialized by people of all genders in their lives (Robinson, 2002). At times, this socialization takes the form of gender-role harassment, when men are sanctioned for not appearing to be “man enough” in the eyes of their peers (Funk & Werhun, 2011). Even very young boys participate in this behavior (Pascoe, 2007). Fraternities, as sites where men spend vast amounts of time in same-gender environments, can elicit particular behaviors related to reinforcing standards of masculinity (Brod, 2002).

In this study, one form of reinforcing these standards of masculinity took the form of questioning another man’s masculinity. Anthony and Chip both told stories of being asked about their sexual orientation by brothers. Though these brothers did not intend to hurt Chip and Anthony, each man was impacted negatively, at least in the short term, by the question. Because these two men who were not fully comfortable with their sexual identity at the time of their stories, the question upset them and caused them to question the effectiveness of their gender performance.

Jordan’s story focused on a hazing incident that showcased this gender-role harassment in a different format. Prior to being allowed to join the chapter, Jordan and his peers were subject to physical and mental tasks to assess their toughness. Humiliation, degradation, and threats of violence were used to enforce a strict standard of masculinity within the chapter (Kimmel, 2008), and new members had to prove that they could meet those standards prior to being initiated. In contrast to Chip and Anthony being singled out as individuals, Jordan and his new member class experienced the

reinforcement of masculinity standards as a group. In the moment, Jordan wasn't able to articulate that feeling, but after reflecting on the experience, he understood that toughness was a piece of masculine performance (Edwards, 2007).

In his story, Paul talked about a phrase that is often used in fraternity contexts: "man up." He had carefully planned his participation in Greek Week activities to avoid gender-role harassment (Funk & Werhun, 2011). However, fraternity men are often expected to demonstrate their physical prowess through athletic competition (Rhoads, 2010), so the president of Paul's fraternity pressured him to participate in athletic events at Greek Week by engaging in gender-role harassment (Funk & Werhun, 2011). Because the chapter president didn't know Paul was gay at the time, he did not know how that phrase would affect him. In that moment, Paul felt a complex set of emotions: fear that his masculine performance would be questioned and pride that his chapter president felt he could contribute.

As someone who was very visibly out on campus before he joined a fraternity, Allen talked about the "mixed messages" he received from brothers who supported and encouraged him in many ways, yet subtly encouraged him to bring women as dates. He surmised, "I think my brothers at some levels didn't um, uh, they wanted me to be as much like them as possible." The brothers attempted to minimize the difference between them by encouraging Allen to participate in the culture of heteronormativity and compulsive heterosexism (Pascoe, 2007). This placed Allen in the position of performing complicit masculinity, which functions as a mechanism to hold hegemonic standards of masculinity in place (Connell, 2005).

Prior to coming out, Peter participated in the reinforcement of standards of masculinity themselves. During the recruitment process, Peter questioned the masculine performances of potential new members. This exaggerated performance of masculinity was driven by Peter's fear of being "unmasked" and having the armor of his gender performance pierced by his brothers. By questioning a potential member's masculinity, Peter hoped to distract from his own perceived shortcomings in relation to his own performance of masculinity (Kimmel, 2010).

### **Distancing Self from Stereotypes about Gay Men**

In media and popular culture, gay men have long been stereotyped as flamboyantly effeminate (Layland, 1990). As the culture shifted and being an out gay man became more accepted, gay men took on more traditionally masculine gender roles (Levine, 1998). In this process, some gay men seek to distance themselves from their peers who engage in a more feminine gender performance (Reid, 1998). This can result in their attempts to denigrate men who do not work to uphold the masculine ideal (Layland, 1990). Several of the participants in this study displayed this behavior. Anthony associated being an out gay man with "loud activism." Chip used the words "effeminate," "flamboyant," and "weird" to refer to the gay men he knew of before Greg came out to him. Allen was out on campus, but said, "At the time, I don't think I was pushy, um, for lack of a better word? I wasn't trying to like, remind my brothers every 5 seconds that I was gay, right?" All three men defined themselves in opposition to these stereotypes as a way to preserve their masculine gender performance (Reid, 1998). Especially for Chip, this seemed to be rooted in a sense of shame about his sexual identity, which he was eventually able to move past later in his life (Downs, 2012).

Peter described being very proud when others, including priests on his campus, commented on how he was different from other out gay men on campus. He put a great deal of effort into being “the best little boy in the world” for these authority figures in order to maintain his reputation on campus (Johnson, 1996). Downs (2012) described gay men compensating for shame about their identities. While Peter often performed pride in his identity publicly, this act of distancing himself from more stereotypical gay men on his campus could have stemmed from residual shame about his sexual identity as well as his fear of being rejected by his brothers. Peter and Ethan also feared having their chapters labeled as “the gay fraternity.” Therefore, they attempted to direct attention away from their identities and toward organizations that had members who presented themselves in a more stereotypical way. This was likely because they were fearful of being blamed for any effects this label could have on their campus reputation (Case, 1998) and recruitment efforts (Laird, 2013).

During the interview, Brett talked about his commitment to representing gay men well, since he was likely the first out gay man many of his brothers had ever met. Especially when two of his new brothers were sexually assaulted by older members, Brett felt it was important to dispel any ideas that gay men are sexual predators. However, during the member checking process, Brett agreed that he was very thoughtful about how he represented himself, but he also shared:

I definitely didn't try to assimilate into a type of gay man that would make them feel more comfortable, or shy away from talking about gay interests, topics, the "hook up" culture in the gay community, or being gay as a whole.

Because of this, Brett seemed to have been more motivated by moving toward authenticity (Downs, 2012) than perfectionism to make up for an identity he perceived as detrimental (Johnson, 1996) or protecting his organization's reputation (Case, 1998).

### **Compulsive Heterosexuality**

Pascoe (2007) described a culture of compulsive heterosexuality in high schools, where teen boys constantly talked about sex and used their stories of sexual prowess to exert their dominance over less experienced boys. Rhoads (2010) described fraternity environments where men encouraged each other to have sex with as many women as possible and eschewed exclusive relationships. Chip acknowledged that his fraternity brothers talked often about sex, specifically with women, and the fact that he felt pressured to make up stories in order to maintain his standing within the fraternity. Allen discussed the concept of sexual contact as an accomplishment. He acknowledged that his brothers considered it a goal to have sex with as many women as possible and talk about it with brothers afterwards. Peter remarked that even the fraternity songs were focused on finding women with whom they could have sexual relationships.

Anderson (2008) described a chapter that did not display overt representations of hegemonic masculinity, but did advance a very narrow conception of being a gentleman, which included treating women as if they were less capable and solely as sexual objects. Anthony shared that these attitudes were a part of his fraternity's ritual. The organization stressed that members should be gentlemen and treat women with respect, but it was never in relation to mothers, sisters, or colleagues; it only referred to women involved in romantic relationships with the brothers.

Rhoads (2010) discussed the use of alcohol in fraternity environments to encourage women to have sex with brothers. Boswell and Spade (1996) described how chapters promoted rape culture by inviting women in to fraternity events but ensuring there was still a gender imbalance, with far more men than women present. Allen and Ethan both discussed their roles as “wingmen” for the chapter. Ethan served as Vice President of Programming, so his official role on the executive board was to set up fraternity events where the men could socialize with women from sororities. Allen was encouraged to bring a date on a camping trip so that another brother would have the option of engaging in sexual behaviors with her.

Alternatively, Brett felt that he did not witness compulsive heterosexuality during his time in the chapter. He reiterated this during the member checking process, saying, “I was heavily involved in my chapter and formed friendships across the organization, and was never part of, nor observed, or heard of, brothers speaking of sexual relationships with women. Although that may have occurred, that wasn't my experience.” Because Brett was out as a Black, gay man on campus prior to joining his fraternity and served as student government president, his presence may have mediated some of the effects of compulsive heterosexuality (Anderson, 2008).

### **Personal Authenticity**

Bird (1996) noted that emotional detachment was a hallmark of hegemonic masculinity. Edwards (2007) likened men’s gender performance to wearing a mask and noted that when men began to realize how that mask disrupted their personal relationships, they began to remove the mask. Kimmel (2010) discussed the fact that many men are not able to reveal their “true selves” because they are afraid that it will not

live up to the standards of masculinity they aspire to reach. Though fraternities are often places where hypermasculine gender performance and homophobia are rampant (Harris, 2008), many of the participants in this study talked about their desire to show their true selves and build authentic relationships, even in a context where they were constantly being expected to perform a specific version of masculinity.

Jordan initially came to the fraternity recruitment process as a result of members of his chapter exerting authority and dominance over him (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, he attempted to present himself as authentically as he could at the time, considering he was not out as a gay man. He wondered if the other men seeking to join his organization were being authentic or if they were performing in order to be selected as members, which he considered to be “corny.” Over the course of the recruitment period, however, he discovered he genuinely liked the brothers in his fraternity, and therefore accepted a bid to join when it was offered.

Paul was impressed by the diversity of the men in his chapter when he met them during recruitment. Paul decided to join his fraternity because it appeared to accept a variety of men. He anticipated that he would be able to be his authentic self in the fraternity because he would not have to perform a narrow interpretation of masculinity. Brett, who was out prior to joining his fraternity, admitted that he probably attempted to fit a certain mold during recruitment, but once he joined, he felt comfortable being himself. Alternatively, Anthony described how he wanted to engage authentically once his line brother asked him if he was gay, but he didn’t know how. Once he came out, he was more comfortable expressing his true self with his brothers.

Kimmel (2010) called the fear of being “unmasked” and the behaviors associated with perpetuating a specific type of gender performance “a central organizing principle of our culture of manhood” (p. 24). While the men in this study did engage in some behaviors aimed at performing masculinity, they were also able to engage authentically with their brothers. This act of taking off the mask likely aided them in developing deep and lasting friendships with other members of their fraternities (Edwards, 2007).

### **Vulnerability, Intimacy, and Sex**

Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morpew (2000) found that, while collegiate athletic teams promote intimacy, personal connection, and acceptance of others, they still often promoted hegemonic views of masculinity. Because of the similarities to collegiate athletics, this may be true in fraternities as well. Case (1998) noted that most gay men do not join fraternities as a means to find sexual partners. Participants in this study described their desire to develop intimate, non-sexual relationships with their fraternity brothers. In the course of participating in their fraternities, some participants allowed themselves to be vulnerable, be seen, and be their complete selves in the fraternity. Sometimes, these conditions led to intimate sexual relationships as well.

Edwards (2007) found that men began to remove the mask of their performance of masculinity once they determined it was disrupting their ability to build relationships with others. Davis (2002) described a code of communication caveats, which dictated how men spoke about themselves and their personal feelings. While there were restrictions placed on expressing affection to other men, they were able to engage non-verbally or while standing side-by-side (Davis, 2002). Additionally, many fraternities’

values involve the development of long-lasting friendships among their members (Torbenson, 2009).

Chip, Ethan, and Brett described their desires to have strong friendships with other men and noted that they had not had the opportunity to develop these types of relationships prior to starting college. Anthony, Paul, and Allen talked about their search for connection on campus prior to joining their fraternities. Even though some of the men felt their experiences were hindered by hiding their sexual identity from their brothers (Case et al., 2005), they still felt they were able to find a sense of belonging and social support through their organizations (Case, 1998).

Though it was not a focus of this study, some participants discussed how being vulnerable and building intimate relationships lead to romantic relationships and sexual contact with brothers. When Ethan met his “little bro” in the fraternity, neither of them was out. As they got to know each other, they experienced a strong romantic attraction and decided to date in secret. Ethan was concerned about how his brothers would interpret their relationship if they knew, but when their relationship ended, Ethan came out to his brothers because he needed their emotional support to heal. They rallied around him and their relationships grew even stronger.

Ethan and Peter described how their relationships with straight brothers changed after they came out. Ethan remarked that his straight brothers were more willing to talk openly about same-gender sexual experimentation. Peter was approached by his brothers who identified as straight and asked to engage in sexual experimentation. At the time, he was proud to take on the role of teacher. In retrospect, Peter felt that his low self-worth was a factor in his decision to engage in sexual contact with his brothers. However, he

considered this to be an important part of his fraternity experience because it demonstrated the level of intimacy that was cultivated among brothers in his chapter. It is difficult to know what motivated these straight men to engage with their brothers in this manner after they revealed their sexual identities. Peter and Ethan may have appeared to be safe havens for men who were attempting to remove the mask of masculine gender performance (Edwards, 2007), or it may have been an extension of the sexual risk-taking that is often found among fraternity members (Boswell & Spade, 1996).

The components of performing masculinity and authenticity seem at odds with one another, but the behaviors associated with each interlock to promote a certain vision of brotherhood. Participants described being encouraged to develop deep personal relationships with their brothers by revealing their authentic selves, while at the same time being expected to live up to hegemonic standards of masculinity. This led to participants distancing themselves from stereotypes about gay men in order to maintain their standing within the fraternity.

### **Organization and Individual**

From an organizational standpoint, fraternities offer brotherhood and social connection while encouraging devotion to the group and its values. On a personal level, many fraternity members receive leadership training and development. Fraternities also promote connection with alumni for professional advancement (Torbenson, 2009). Participants in this study talked about the tension between espoused and enacted organizational values when understanding what it meant to be a man in the context of their fraternities. Participants also described leveraging the personal opportunities for

leadership and learning to incorporate their own understanding of masculinity and to have an impact on their organization and campus.

### **Organizational Values: Espoused and Enacted**

Many fraternities were founded as organizations where men could build deep friendships based on shared values (Torbensohn, 2009). Therefore, it is not surprising that organizational values were important to most of the participants in this study. Chip and Ethan, in particular, were proud of how their organizations upheld their values. Their fraternities, while social organizations at heart, also engaged in the community and provided social space to a wide variety of people. Ethan also felt that his chapter's values helped him expand his understanding of what it means to be a man and he was able to feel more comfortable with himself as a result. Peter and Jordan, on the other hand, were disappointed soon after joining their organizations when they realized that the values described during the recruitment process were not enacted consistently within the organization. Consistent with stereotypes about fraternities (Rhoads, 2011), hazing, violence, misogyny, and heterosexism, while counter to their organization's espoused values, were perfectly acceptable within their fraternities.

Allen described how his fraternity values were enacted in both positive and negative ways. The value of justice, which was very important to Allen, was one of the main reasons he joined and he saw it enacted positively through members on campus. At the same time, similar to Anderson's (2008) account, gentlemanly behavior was expected of the brothers. Because the chapter encouraged Allen to serve as a "wingman" to the chapter and entice women to come to chapter events so that they could become sexual

conquests for the straight brothers, he saw that the chapter failed to live up to this particular value.

### **Enhancing Personal Reputation Through Organizational Affiliation**

Previous studies revealed that African American men place a strong emphasis on responsibility as a masculine ideal (Harris et al., 2011). Leadership and community advancement are important components responsibility (Harper, 2004). Johnson (1996) described gay men who excelled in leadership and academics in order to compensate for their sexual identity, which they saw as a detriment. Every participant in this study took on leadership roles and served on the executive boards of their organizations during their undergraduate experiences. Many of them stressed that they were looking to make an impact, either on the chapter or on the community at large.

Anthony joined a small chapter that had just been founded on his campus, so he was expected to take on leadership roles in that context. He also served as president of the Multicultural Greek Council, which governed culturally-based organizations on his campus. Allen felt that there was a leadership vacuum when he joined his fraternity and envisioned his role in the chapter as a change agent. Jordan became chapter secretary soon after joining his fraternity. He chose to run for the position because he knew he could excel in the role and receive positive recognition. He acknowledged that he was probably attempting to overcompensate for his undisclosed sexual identity. In this way, Jordan confirmed Johnson's (1996) observations about gay men taking on leadership roles.

Brett joined his organization because he felt he could make an impact on campus and in the chapter through leadership. Like Jordan, Brett saw leadership roles as a way to

both impact the chapter and maintain his own reputation as a leader on campus. Ethan and Paul saw leadership opportunities in their fraternities as a way not just to impact their chapters but also to enhance their own skills and abilities. Ultimately, however, Paul was not able to make the impact he desired through his fraternity, which factored into his decision to disaffiliate. Paul's narrative runs counter to the other participants' accounts in that he was not able to achieve the impact he wanted in his fraternity, and instead achieved it after leaving the organization. As in Laird's (2013) study, all of these men wanted to be seen as driven, organized, and competent, which made engaging in leadership within their fraternities an attractive option for enhancing their personal reputations.

### **Development of Intersecting Identities**

Most identity development theories are focused on one identity; they do not take intersectionality into account. However, most gay men are developing their masculine identity and LGB identity simultaneously. Because the men in this study were immersed in an environment of heightened masculine socialization (Kimmel, 2010), their stories hint at the intertwined and intersecting identity development. Anthony, for example, talked about his conscious decision to delay his LGB identity development. While he was able to develop his personal sense of identity, he did not interact with other members of the LGB community on campus, and therefore was not able to develop a support system of other LGB people, which D'Augelli (1994) included as an important part of LGB identity development. From an early age, Chip had engaged in what Cass (1979) described as identity comparison. However, until Greg, the man he considered to be a paragon of masculinity, came out to him, he was not able to begin accepting that identity.

Interestingly, he and Greg engaged in this conversation in a manner consistent with Davis's (2002) code of communication caveats, performing masculinity even in the context of the coming out process.

While Jordan described feeling as if the mask of his gender performance, as described by Edwards (2007), did not fit for quite some time, he still had difficulty removing it until long after his undergraduate experience. He was very committed to looking tough and being seen as someone who had everything together, similar to Reid's (1973) description of his own identity development. Peter relished wearing the mask of gender performance for quite some time, especially because it gained him praise from authority figures (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This prevented him from entering the LGB community until much later in his life, delaying this marker of development noted by D'Augelli (1994). Ethan entered the fraternity with a very specific idea of what masculinity should look like and attempted to distance himself from gay stereotypes due to behavior Davis (2002) named fear of femininity. However, his time in the chapter served to broaden his personal understanding of what it meant to be a man and allowed him to live more authentically, which Edwards (2007) described as taking off the mask. While it is difficult to get a clear picture of these men's development as both men and gay men from this study as it was designed, it does provide some insight into how men may prioritize one identity over the other or how development in one identity may push them to develop in another identity as well.

### **Summary**

Consistent with previous studies (Case, et al., 2005; Rankin, et al., 2007), the participants in this study all felt they had positive experiences in their fraternities. They

learned to be their authentic selves; were able to be vulnerable with other men; built strong, intimate friendships with their brothers; identified with a values based organization; and enhanced their leadership skills. At the same time, they received other messages about performing masculinity, distancing themselves from stereotypes about gay men, participating in a culture of compulsive heterosexuality, and witnessing enacted values that ran counter to the organization's espoused values. These mixed messages were confusing at times but contributed to each participant's ability to develop his own definition of masculinity, incorporating self-knowledge and masculine ideals to achieve a gender performance that best fit each man.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

#### **Research Study Review**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to better understand what messages gay men in fraternities receive about masculinity and how they negotiate those messages in the construction and maintenance of their own identities. Eight gay or queer men between the ages of 23 and 50 who participated in a fraternity for at least two years during their undergraduate experience took part in this study. The men provided a written memory story of three pages or fewer in response to a prompt, as well as responses to a demographic survey. They also participated in a semi-structured interview based on the information provided in the memory story. The data collected from the participants were analyzed and formulated into narratives, which included formative information about their high school and early college experiences, the crux of the memory story, and their personal understanding of what it meant to be a man in the context of their organization.

#### **Assumptions**

Prior to conducting this study, I assumed that the men would experience enacted forms of hegemonic masculinity in their fraternities, likely in the form of aggression, competition, and compulsive heterosexuality. While some men did experience compulsive heterosexuality, none of them experienced aggression or competition with

their brothers. I further assumed that the men would experience gender-role harassment from their brothers. Most experienced this in the form of their brothers reinforcing masculine stereotypes and questioning masculine performance. Brett did not feel he had experienced any gender role harassment during his time in the chapter. Surprisingly, Peter admitted to participating in these behaviors himself.

At the same time, I assumed that the men would have had a good experience in their organizations on the whole and that they would have engaged in leadership roles during their time in the fraternity. Each of the eight men in the study served in at least one executive board leadership position during their time in the chapter. Several remained involved with their fraternities on a local or national level for years after graduation. Even Paul, who disaffiliated from his chapter after two years of participation, considered his experience in the fraternity as a positive one.

Additionally, I made the assumption that all of the men would be able to identify something from their ritual, motto, or other often quoted materials that described what it meant to be a man in their organization. While Jordan quoted his organization's motto as an example of a message sent in the course of his participation, no other participants identified a specific phrase that described what it meant to be a man in their chapters. Most participants felt the messages were sent in much more subtle ways.

### **Findings**

Upon analysis of the data, two overarching conceptual categories emerged: (1) performing masculinity versus authenticity and (2) organization versus individual. Each of the categories consists of a pair of messages that may not be diametrically opposed, but are at odds with one another. There were also five contradictory discourses that

informed the first category of performing masculinity versus authenticity: (1) reinforcing standards of masculinity; (2) distancing self from stereotypes about gay men; (3) compulsive heterosexuality; (4) personal authenticity; and (5) vulnerability, intimacy, and sex. There were also contradictory discourses for the overarching conceptual category, organization versus individual: (1) organizational values: espoused and enacted, and (2) enhancing personal reputation through organizational affiliation.

Participants described the delicate balance between performing masculinity and being their authentic selves. The men were encouraged to be tough, perform athletically, and have sex with as many women as possible. At the same time, they were expected to form deep, life-long relationships with their brothers, which often required revealing their authentic selves. These expectations were especially at odds when the men in the study perceived a threat to their masculinity. Both Chip and Anthony were asked about their sexuality by brothers who just wanted to be kind and helpful, but because they were in an environment where they were expected to perform to a hegemonic standard of masculinity, it felt like a threat. Even though they wanted to engage authentically, they were not able to do so out of fear that they would be punished for failing to perform masculinity to the level expected by their organizations. Additionally, Paul experienced gender role harassment when his chapter president told him to “man up” and sign up for sports activities during Greek Week. Though Paul was able to tell that his brother meant it as a kind of praise, he still felt alienated and less able to engage in an authentic relationship with that brother.

Several participants were not just complicit in a culture of compulsive heterosexuality within their chapters, they helped perpetuate it. These men participated

in distancing themselves from stereotypes about gay men; Peter and Ethan in particular expressed concerns about gay men being perceived as sexual deviants. Yet many of the participants in this study were comfortable with playing the “wingman” role for their brothers and bringing women to chapter events specifically to be potential sexual conquests for their brothers. At the same time, the close relationships built among brothers led to vulnerability and non-sexual intimacy among brothers. While the men were surrounded by messages encouraging them to have sex with as many women as possible, the non-sexual relationships they built led to sexual exploration and relationships among brothers.

Participants also described a dichotomy between the organizational and the personal aspects of their fraternity involvement. Participants often described instances when the organization’s espoused values did not match the actions of the members. At the same time, many of the men in this study were drawn to their organizations and remained involved because of the values their organizations were built upon. The men also described ways in which they leveraged the organizations’ reputations to build their own, such as by participating in visible leadership roles and creating change within their organizations. Making an impact was of great importance to many of the participants. Often, the men made an impact through enhancing the organization’s reputation on campus, participating in a strong recruitment period for their chapter, or leading the organization in community service and philanthropy. In Paul’s case, he disaffiliated from his chapter when it did not afford him the opportunity to make the impact he desired. These contradictory discourses represent the ways in which masculine socialization

occurs within fraternities and the ways in which the men in this study negotiated these messages can provide a better understanding of how these messages can be disrupted.

### **Study Limitations**

There are several limitations for this study. First, this study examined the experiences of eight gay men who participated in fraternities. Though qualitative research studies are not intended to be generalizable, this study may not represent the experiences of many gay men in fraternities. Additionally, the participants in this study came from similar types of fraternities. Seven of the participants belong to fraternities that are affiliated with the Interfraternity Council (IFC). One participant joined a fraternity that is affiliated with the Multicultural Greek Council (MGC), which represents a variety of multicultural and multiethnic social fraternities and sororities. None of the participants in this study were affiliated with groups from the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), which represents historically African American fraternities and sororities. Men in NPHC and MGC organizations may receive different messages about masculinity within their organizations.

Additionally, seven of the eight participants were currently or had previously been employed in a student affairs role that had some responsibility for fraternity and sorority life on a college campus. The remaining participant had never worked in student affairs, but he volunteered for his national fraternity and remained involved. Chip, however, described brothers from his undergraduate chapter who disconnected from the fraternity when they came out after graduation. It is possible men who no longer remain involved in their organizations negotiated the messages they received during their experience differently than the men who participated in the study. Because all of the participants in

this study had a positive experience, it may have driven them to join the field of student affairs. Because many of the participants are still heavily involved in their national organizations as well as the fraternity and sorority life profession in general, they may be very invested in portraying a positive view of fraternities. Additionally, several of the participants had studied or written about masculinity, so they likely had the language, understanding, and perspective to describe their experiences in ways that other gay men who participated in fraternities may not have been able to do.

### **Implications for Practice**

A survey administered by Rankin et al. (2007) indicated that it is becoming more acceptable over time to be an out gay member of a fraternity, and some participants felt this was true as well. Because all of the participants worked in student affairs, volunteered for their national fraternities, or engaged in both activities, they may be heavily invested in this viewpoint. However, fraternity and sorority life professionals on campus should be aware that gay men are receiving a variety of messages to reinforce their performance of masculinity throughout their experience. Some participants, like Brett, felt comfortable pushing back on those messages and holding brothers to a higher standard regarding heterosexism, compulsive heterosexuality, and hypermasculine gender performance. Others, like Peter, allowed brothers to tell homophobic jokes and use slurs as a way to maintain his safety and standing within the organization. In order to alleviate the pressure to address these kinds of issues within their own organizations, fraternity and sorority professionals can aid gay or queer men in fraternities by providing programming where men can better understand masculinity and use those experiences to negotiate their own identities with respect to masculine ideals. These types of programs could include

men's retreats, where participants are encouraged to reflect on their own definitions of masculinity and the messages they receive within a fraternity context about their identity and gender performance. Mentoring programs that involve fraternity men connecting with faculty and staff on their campus who have a strong understanding of their own masculine identity and gender performance could also assist all fraternity men in understanding how they perform masculinity and how it affects their brothers, both queer and non-queer, as well as the women with whom they interact. Finally, bystander intervention programs are a popular new addition to fraternity and sorority life. These programs encourage college students to disrupt inappropriate or dangerous behaviors among their peers. Because bystander intervention programs encourage college students to push back against peer actions that are often rooted in standards of hegemonic masculinity, they should be designed with a strong sense of how men are socialized around masculinity prior to college and within their organizations in order to be effective. By incorporating current understandings of how masculine socialization occurs in fraternities, student affairs professionals can help men in fraternities expand their understanding of what it means to be a man. When men feel more comfortable performing a broader version of masculinity, we can reduce rape culture, making college safer for all students.

### **Considerations for Further Research**

This study was conceptualized as a way to discover the subtle ways men are socialized to perform masculinity. Fraternities are often identified as organizations that promote hegemonic masculinity standards (Kimmel, 2008). Because gay men cannot reach that strict interpretation of masculinity (Connell, 2005), they may be more able to

identify the mechanisms of masculine socialization than their straight peers (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Studying gay men in similarly hegemonic environments, such as the military or collegiate athletics, may reveal more information about masculine socialization. It may also be effective to study populations who were not initially socialized as men but perform masculinity, such as trans men and drag kings.

Though it is a kind of “open secret” in student affairs that many fraternity and sorority life professionals are themselves gay men who participated in a fraternity during their undergraduate experience, few people who identify with this community are producing research on this topic. This in and of itself warrants further investigation. Some topics related to this are the role of research in fraternity and sorority life, institutional barriers to research in national organizations and umbrella organizations, the meaning of secrecy and ritual in fraternities and sororities, and how the definition of brotherhood and gender performance are intertwined in these organizations.

When proposing research with fraternities, however, there is more to consider. This study was initially conceived as a collective memory work (CMW) study, which required each participant to write a memory story and participate in a group discussion about each participant’s memory story. After a year and a half, when I was not able to secure enough participants for this type of study, I reconfigured it as a narrative study with a written memory story and a semi-structured individual interview. Still, participants for the study remained elusive. Many potential subjects agreed to participate and failed to follow through. It took nearly a year to complete data collection after the study was reconceptualized.

As a sorority woman who works in student affairs and is connected to many interfraternal peers who were eligible for this study, I did not anticipate this level of hardship in recruiting participants. However, as a researcher who was not a man, not a member of the Queer community, and not a member of a fraternity, my status as an outsider may have contributed to this difficulty.. At the same time, Davis (2002) found that men were more willing to talk one-on-one about topics like this with women and as a woman, I may have been able to more easily identify the mechanisms of masculine socialization in my participants' stories because I have not spent my life immersed in these messages. Though the challenges associated with this study seemed insurmountable at times, I have successfully completed this study when there is so little literature available on this topic.

Additionally, even men who match the participants' demographic qualities may experience obstacles when engaging in similar research. One eventual participant, Allen, even described his own difficulties in doing research on men in fraternities:

I've definitely had some more experiences of like trying to, like during my master's thesis, people um, like chapters like, uh, boycotted the survey or like, like did research to debunk it, or went to IRB and there was, lots of yelling and very, lots of profanity in email.

One can only speculate about the reasons for such resistance to research on fraternal organizations, though the secrecy around ritual may translate to secrecy around personal experiences within the organizations as well. Many of the men in this study described the way their chapters developed a strong sense of brotherhood; this series of interdependent relationships may ensure that members feel beholden to keep each other's secrets.

Therefore, when designing studies involving fraternities, researchers may consider forming partnerships with national organizations that can promote the study and lend legitimacy to participation in it.

### **Conclusion**

This study was conceptualized in order to uncover the hidden processes of masculine socialization. Because gay men by definition cannot achieve the highest standards of hegemonic masculinity, they are more able to identify these mechanisms than their heterosexual peers. The participants' stories reveal the complex dance between gender performance and authentic engagement in relationships with other men. That complexity is further illustrated by the themes, which form pairs that are juxtaposed yet reinforce each other.

Just as fish don't know they are in water, men often cannot recognize masculine socialization when it is happening. Therefore, it is difficult to disrupt. The stories presented in this study promote a deeper understanding of the ways in which men receive, interpret, and reinforce messages about masculine socialization. This understanding can be used to assist student affairs professionals as they design programs to broaden college men's definitions of masculinity. By enabling men to develop and enact their own personal definition of masculinity, both men and women will be able to engage more authentically with one another. This, in turn, could lead to reduction in some of the harmful behaviors associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as heavy drinking, sexual aggression, violence, and subordination of others (Rhoads, 2010). Over time, this deeper understanding of masculine socialization could benefit both men and women, leading to a stronger, safer, and more enjoyable collegiate experience.

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## APPENDIX A

### RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Colleague,

My name is Nikki Laird and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia. I am currently conducting a research study entitled, "Identity Construction in Gay Men in Fraternities." This project fulfills the academic requirements of my program and will be completed under the direction of Dr. Laura Dean. I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

I am studying men who:

- Identify as gay or Queer
- Are between the ages of 23 and 50.
- Participated in a fraternity for at least 2 years while attaining an undergraduate degree.

***The purpose of the study is to understand identity construction in gay men in fraternities.*** All interested men should contact me via phone at 404-308-4780 or via email at [fraternitystudy@gmail.com](mailto:fraternitystudy@gmail.com).

If you choose to take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in three activities:

- In the first activity, you will be asked to write about an experience related to your fraternity participation. The time commitment for this portion will vary by participant; story length should be no more than three double-spaced pages. This text will be submitted to me along with an online demographic survey and will be utilized during the second interview activity.
- During the second activity, participants will be interviewed by the researcher for approximately 90 minutes. During this interview, the researcher will reference the memory story written during the first activity. This meeting will be audio-recorded and written notes will be taken.
- The third activity is optional and will involve a reflection on the research process. After all interviews have been completed, you will be provided with a description of the themes the researcher identified in all of the participants' narratives and you will be given the opportunity to reflect upon this experience in writing.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation in this study will take approximately 90 minutes in person, plus a variable amount of time, depending on the participant, to create the memory story

(activity one) and process reflection (activity three). Two \$25 gift cards will be provided for your participation in the study, one for the memory story and one for the individual interview.

***If you would like to participate, please call or send an email to me as soon as possible.***

In order to protect your privacy, please adhere to the following procedures. If you choose to call, please leave your name and phone number with no other information in the message. If you choose to send email, please do not reply directly to this email. Instead, please send an email to [fraternitystudy@gmail.com](mailto:fraternitystudy@gmail.com) with the subject line, "Call Me" and include only your phone number in the body of the email. At that time, I will call you to further discuss the details of the study.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Nikki Laird

Department of Counseling and Human Development Services

404-308-4780 – [nlaird@uga.edu](mailto:nlaird@uga.edu)

Primary Investigator: Dr. Laura Dean, Ph.D.

706-542-6551– [ladean@uga.edu](mailto:ladean@uga.edu)

## APPENDIX B

### RECRUITMENT POST FOR FACEBOOK

Hi friends and colleagues! I am looking for participants for my dissertation research study. Please share the message below with any friends or colleagues you think might be interested. Thanks in advance for your help!

I'm conducting my dissertation research on identity construction in gay men in fraternities. I hope you'll consider participating if you are a man who identifies as gay or Queer, are between the ages of 23 and 50, and participated in a fraternity for at least 2 years while attaining an undergraduate degree.

This is a qualitative study consisting of one written memory story (no longer than 3 double-spaced pages) and one interview of 45 to 90 minutes, all of which can be conducted remotely. All participants will receive a \$25 gift card for each component of the study, for a total possible incentive of \$50. All data obtained will remain confidential.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Georgia. If you're interested or have any questions about my research, you may contact me via e-mail at [fraternitystudy@gmail.com](mailto:fraternitystudy@gmail.com).

## APPENDIX C

## RECRUITMENT POST FOR INSTAGRAM

The recruitment post is set against a background of overlapping, semi-transparent circles in various colors including pink, orange, green, and blue, creating a bokeh effect. The text is centered within a white rectangular area.

## Research Study on Gay Men in Fraternities

- Participants must be men who identify as gay or Queer, between the ages of 23 and 50, and participated in a fraternity for at least 2 years as an undergraduate.
- The study consists of 1 written memory story (no longer than 3 pages) and 1 interview (45-90 minutes).
- All participants will receive a \$25 gift card for each component of the study. All data obtained will remain confidential.
- This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Georgia.

Interested? Email me at  
[fraternitystudy@gmail.com](mailto:fraternitystudy@gmail.com)  
for more information!

## APPENDIX D

## RECRUITMENT FLYER



## Research Study on Gay Men in Fraternities

- Participants must be men who identify as gay or Queer, between the ages of 23 and 50, and participated in a fraternity for at least 2 years as an undergraduate.
- The study consists of 1 written memory story (no longer than 3 pages) and 1 interview (45-90 minutes).
- All participants will receive a \$25 gift card for each component of the study. All data obtained will remain confidential.
- This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Georgia.

Interested? Email me at  
[fraternitystudy@gmail.com](mailto:fraternitystudy@gmail.com)  
for more information!

## APPENDIX E

### PHONE SCREENING PROTOCOL

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. As the email indicated, my name is Nikki Laird and I am conducting research to fulfill the academic requirements of my program under the direction of Dr. Laura Dean in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services in the University of Georgia's College of Education. This research study explores identity construction in gay men in fraternities. The goal is to learn how to better support gay men in fraternities. Do you think you would be interested in participating in this study?

If no, thank them for their time.

If yes, continue with the screening.

I would like to ask you some question(s) to determine if you qualify for this study. This should take less than 5 minutes of your time.

Before enrolling participants in this study, I need to ask you some questions to determine if you are eligible to take part in it. I will now ask you three yes-or-no questions about your sexual orientation, age, and fraternity membership. Because some of these questions may be sensitive and I want to minimize any potential discomfort for you, I will ask that you do not respond aloud until I finish asking all three questions. After I ask you the questions, I will ask if you responded yes to all of the questions; therefore, you will not have to disclose specific sensitive information.

As a reminder, your involvement in this study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or stop this phone interview at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Do you understand these instructions?

If no, explain the process again.

If yes, proceed with the script.

Please remember not to answer aloud as I ask the questions, just remember the answers.

**Screening Questions:**

- Do you identify as a gay or Queer man?
- Are you between the ages of 23-50?
- Did you participate in a fraternity for at least two years as an undergraduate student?

Did you answer yes to all of these questions?

If no, thank you for your interest in this study, but unfortunately you are not eligible to participate in this study. Thank you so much for speaking with me today.

If yes, thank you. You are qualified to participate in this study. Are you still interested in doing so?

If no, thank the person for his time.

If yes, I would like to ask you some more questions regarding participation requirements of this study:

- This study consists of three parts:
  - In the first activity, you will be asked to write about an experience related to your fraternity participation. The time commitment for this portion will vary by participant; story length should be no more than three double-spaced pages. This text will be submitted to me along with an online demographic survey and will be utilized during the second interview activity.
  - During the second activity, participants will be interviewed by the researcher for approximately 90 minutes. During this interview, the researcher will reference the memory story written during the first activity. This meeting will be audio-recorded and written notes will be taken.
  - The third activity is optional and will involve a reflection on the research process. After all interviews have been completed, you will be provided with a description of the themes the researcher identified in all of the participants' narratives and you will be given the opportunity to reflect upon this experience in writing.
- Are you willing to participate in these three activities?

**Participant Information**

Thank you. I would like to now get a little more information about you in order to arrange your further participation in the study.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chosen Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interview Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interview Method (In person/Skype/Google Hangout): \_\_\_\_\_

Later today, I will send the prompt for the memory story and demographic survey via email. If you would prefer, I can send it via US Mail.

Again, thank you so much for speaking with me today. If you have any other questions regarding this study, please call me at 404-308-4780 or e-mail me at [fraternitystudy@gmail.com](mailto:fraternitystudy@gmail.com) [nlaird@uga.edu](mailto:nlaird@uga.edu). You may also contact Dr. Laura Dean at 706-542-6551 or [ladean@uga.edu](mailto:ladean@uga.edu).

If you have any questions or problems about your rights as a research participant, please call The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia at 706-542-3199.

## APPENDIX F

## DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

[The following information was entered into Qualtrics in order to collect the information via the web.]

By submitting information as a part of this survey, you agree to take part in a research study titled “Identity Construction in Gay Men in Fraternities,” which is being conducted by Nikki Laird from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services in the University of Georgia’s College of Education under the direction of Dr. Laura Dean, from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services in the University of Georgia’s College of Education (706- 542-6551).

Your participation is voluntary; you can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as a part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

This research study is about how identity construction takes place in gay men who participate in fraternities. The goal is to learn how to better serve gay men fraternities. Your participation in this study may advance the available literature that will allow institutions of higher education to provide better services to gay men who participate in fraternities and enhance the climate of fraternities for gay men.

As a reminder, this study consists of three activities:

- In the first activity, you will be asked to write about an experience related to your fraternity participation. This text will be submitted to me along with an online demographic survey and will be utilized during the second interview activity.
- During the second activity, participants will be interviewed by the researcher for approximately 90 minutes. During this interview, the researcher will reference the memory story written during the first activity. This meeting will be audio-recorded and written notes will be taken.
- The third activity is optional and will involve a reflection on the research process. After all interviews have been completed, you will be provided with a description of the themes the researcher identified in all of the participants’ narratives and you will be given the opportunity to reflect upon this experience in writing.

You can choose to participate in any or all of these activities and still be considered a participant in the study. You can decline to answer any questions at any point in the study without having to provide an explanation. Your participation in this study will take approximately two to three hours in person, plus a variable amount of time, depending on the participant, to create the memory story (activity one) and process reflection (activity three). Two \$25 gift cards will be provided for your participation in the study, one for the memory story and one for the individual interview.

At this time, you are being invited to participate in the first activity, submitting a narrative in response to the writing task prompt. You should have already received the prompt from the researcher and composed a one- to three-page narrative about your experience.

You will not benefit directly from this research outside of the opportunity to reflect on the research topic. The findings of this research may lead to educators having a greater awareness and understanding of the experiences of gay men in fraternities. It is the aim of this research that this greater understanding will create more affirming environments for gay men in fraternities.

There are minimal foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research, but participants will share stories on personal topics. There exists the possibility for emotional/psychological discomfort among participants and between participants and the study's readership, due to the content of the narratives and our discussion and analysis of them. Any discomforts will be minimized by the researcher being sensitive to your needs as a participant in the study and through her efforts to establish a supportive and confidential atmosphere. You may decline to answer any questions the researcher asks and you may stop participation in the study at any time. The researcher will not share individually identifiable information unless you provide written permission to do so.

Additionally, because of the nature of Internet communication, confidentiality cannot be ensured when email or other modes of Internet communication are used. For this reason, you have the option to communicate in this study completely through phone, U. S. Mail, or face-to-face communications. Any information received via Internet communication or other forms of collected data will be stored on a password-protected computer or a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher.

No individually identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, will be shared by the researcher with others, without your written permission unless required by law. Because this study is part of the researcher's dissertation work, results of the study will be disseminated and possibly published. These results will not be individually identifiable when published/presented. You will be given the opportunity to create a pseudonym, or will be assigned one, for the purposes of data collection and corresponding research reports. The pseudonym code will be maintained in a password protected electronic document in the researcher's computer files. This code and the recordings will be destroyed after the final report has been written, which will be no later than December 2016. Emails and other Internet communication will be deleted and

cleared from trash folders to ensure permanent deletion no later than December 2016.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (404) 308-4780.

By clicking “Proceed to survey” below, you indicate your willingness to participate in this study. You will then be taken to a short demographic survey and will have the opportunity to upload the narrative you created in response to the writing task prompt.

[Proceed to survey button]

1. Please enter the pseudonym you discussed using with the researcher during your screening call:
2. How many years did you participate in your fraternity during your undergraduate study?
3. Did you disaffiliate from your fraternity prior to graduation?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
4. Did you hold an executive board position during your undergraduate membership?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
5. [Skip logic: If yes to 4] What position(s) did you hold?
6. Please either cut and paste your narrative into the box below or use the button to upload your narrative in a Microsoft Word format.

## APPENDIX G

### WRITING TASK INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

[The following information was entered into Qualtrics in order to collect the information via the web.]

By submitting information as a part of this survey, you agree to take part in a research study titled “Identity Construction in Gay Men in Fraternities,” which is being conducted by Nikki Laird from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services in the University of Georgia’s College of Education under the direction of Dr. Laura Dean, from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services in the University of Georgia’s College of Education (706- 542-6551).

Your participation is voluntary; you can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as a part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

This research study is about how identity construction takes place in gay men who participate in fraternities. The goal is to learn how to better serve gay men fraternities. Your participation in this study may advance the available literature that will allow institutions of higher education to provide better services to gay men who participate in fraternities and enhance the climate of fraternities for gay men.

As a reminder, this study consists of three activities:

- In the first activity, you will be asked to write about an experience related to your fraternity participation. This text will be submitted to me along with an online demographic survey and will be utilized during the second interview activity.
- During the second activity, participants will be interviewed by the researcher for approximately 90 minutes. During this interview, the researcher will reference the memory story written during the first activity. This meeting will be audio-recorded and written notes will be taken.
- The third activity is optional and will involve a reflection on the research process. After all interviews have been completed, you will be provided with a description of the themes the researcher identified in all of the participants’ narratives and you will be given the opportunity to reflect upon this experience in writing.

You can choose to participate in any or all of these activities and still be considered a participant in the study. You can decline to answer any questions at any point in the study without having to provide an explanation. Your participation in this study will take approximately two to three hours in person, plus a variable amount of time, depending on the participant, to create the memory story (activity one) and process reflection (activity three). Two \$25 gift cards will be provided for your participation in the study, one for the memory story and one for the individual interview.

At this time, you are being invited to participate in the first activity, submitting a narrative in response to the writing task prompt. You should have already received the prompt from the researcher and composed a one- to three-page narrative about your experience.

You will not benefit directly from this research outside of the opportunity to reflect on the research topic. The findings of this research may lead to educators having a greater awareness and understanding of the experiences of gay men in fraternities. It is the aim of this research that this greater understanding will create more affirming environments for gay men in fraternities.

There are minimal foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research, but participants will share stories on personal topics. There exists the possibility for emotional/psychological discomfort among participants and between participants and the study's readership, due to the content of the narratives and our discussion and analysis of them. Any discomforts will be minimized by the researcher being sensitive to your needs as a participant in the study and through her efforts to establish a supportive and confidential atmosphere. You may decline to answer any questions the researcher asks and you may stop participation in the study at any time. The researcher will not share individually identifiable information unless you provide written permission to do so.

Additionally, because of the nature of Internet communication, confidentiality cannot be ensured when email or other modes of Internet communication are used. For this reason, you have the option to communicate in this study completely through phone, U. S. Mail, or face-to-face communications. Any information received via Internet communication or other forms of collected data will be stored on a password-protected computer or a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher.

No individually identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, will be shared by the researcher with others, without your written permission unless required by law. Because this study is part of the researcher's dissertation work, results of the study will be disseminated and possibly published. These results will not be individually identifiable when published/presented. You will be given the opportunity to create a pseudonym, or will be assigned one, for the purposes of data collection and corresponding research reports. The pseudonym code will be maintained in a password protected electronic document in the researcher's computer files. This code and the recordings will be destroyed after the final report has been written, which will be no later than December 2016. Emails and other Internet communication will be deleted and

cleared from trash folders to ensure permanent deletion no later than December 2016.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (404) 308-4780.

By clicking “Proceed to survey” below, you indicate your willingness to participate in this study. You will then be taken to a short demographic survey and will have the opportunity to upload the narrative you created in response to the writing task prompt.

[Proceed to survey button]

## APPENDIX H

### WRITING PROMPT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As we discussed on the phone, the first activity in this study is writing a narrative of a specific memory from your fraternity experience. Here are the guidelines for the memory story:

1. The writing sample should be 1-3 pages long, double spaced.
2. Choose a short conversation or a quick event that you can really hone in on to provide as much detail as possible. You'll want to describe the event in great detail, including your understanding of it at the time and how you felt about what it meant at the time. It could be a conversation with a chapter member, a headquarters staff member, a campus administrator, another fraternity man on campus, etc. You may also use a more action-oriented event or a performance you witnessed. It should be something that is directly related to being in a fraternity.
3. Use this as your writing prompt:
  - a. Think about times when, in the course of your fraternity membership, you received overt or covert messages about what it means to be a man. Write a short, anonymous narrative of this memory in as much detail as you can so that your readers come away with a deep understanding of your experience. This story might be about a time where you felt praised or privileged or a time when you felt diminished or disadvantaged in relation to your identity as a man. However it fits into your conception of your identity as a man in general, and in particular your identity as a gay or Queer man, is fine. Just ensure that it is clear to the reader how your conception of your identity as a man comes into play in the story.
4. Submit the story via (Qualtrics link goes here) by (date) at 5:00pm. I will read it and prepare questions based on the document for your interview.

Thanks again! If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call me at 404-308-4780 or email me at [fraternitystudy@gmail.com](mailto:fraternitystudy@gmail.com).

## APPENDIX I

### INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

By participating in this focus group, you agree to take part in a research study titled “Identity Construction in Gay Men in Fraternities,” which is being conducted by Nikki Laird from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services in the University of Georgia’s College of Education under the direction of Dr. Laura Dean, from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services in the University of Georgia’s College of Education (706- 542-1812). Your participation is voluntary; you can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as a part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

This research study is about how identity construction takes place in gay men who participate in fraternities. The goal is to learn how to better serve gay men fraternities. Your participation in this study may advance the available literature that will allow institutions of higher education to provide better services to gay men who participate in fraternities and enhance the climate of fraternities for gay men.

As a reminder, this study consists of three activities:

- In the first activity, you were asked to write about an experience related to your fraternity participation. This text was submitted to me along with an online demographic survey and will be utilized during the second interview activity.
- During the second activity, participants will be interviewed by the researcher for approximately 90 minutes. During this interview, the researcher will reference the memory story written during the first activity. This meeting will be audio-recorded and written notes will be taken.
- The third activity is optional and will involve a reflection on the research process. After all interviews have been completed, you will be provided with a description of the themes the researcher identified in all of the participants’ narratives and you will be given the opportunity to reflect upon this experience in writing.

You can choose to participate in any or all of these activities and still be considered a participant in the study. You can decline to answer any questions at any point in the study without having to provide an explanation. Your participation in this study will take approximately two to three hours in person, plus a variable amount of time, depending on the participant, to create the memory story (activity one) and process reflection (activity

three). Two \$25 gift cards will be provided for your participation in the study, one for the memory story and one for the individual interview.

At this time, you are being invited to participate in the second activity, an interview with the researcher. During this interview, we will discuss the memory story written during the first activity. This meeting will be audio-recorded and written notes will be taken, pending participant approval. Depending upon your geographic location, you may participate via an internet communication method, such as Skype or Google Hangout. If you choose to participate using this method, you may consider creating an account specifically for this study so that it will not be associated with any of your personal information.

You will not benefit directly from this research outside of the opportunity to reflect on the research topic. The findings of this research may lead to educators having a greater awareness and understanding of the experiences of gay men in fraternities. It is the aim of this research that this greater understanding will create more affirming environments for gay men in fraternities.

There are minimal foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research, but participants will share stories on personal topics. There exists the possibility for emotional/psychological discomfort among participants and between participants and the study's readership, due to the content of the narratives and our discussion and analysis of them. Any discomforts will be minimized by the researcher being sensitive to your needs as a participant in the study and through her efforts to establish a supportive and confidential atmosphere. You may decline to answer any questions the researcher asks and you may stop participation in the study at any time. The researcher will not share individually identifiable information unless you provide written permission to do so.

Additionally, because of the nature of Internet communication, confidentiality cannot be ensured when email or other modes of Internet communication are used. For this reason, you have the option to communicate in this study completely through phone, U. S. Mail, or face-to-face communications. Any information received via Internet communication or other forms of collected data will be stored on a password-protected computer or a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher.

No individually identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, will be shared by the researcher with others, without your written permission unless required by law. Even though the investigator will emphasize to all participants that comments made during the focus group session should be kept confidential, it is possible that participants may repeat comments outside of the group, over which the researchers have no control. Because this study is part of the researcher's dissertation work, results of the study will be disseminated and possibly published. These results will not be individually identifiable when published/presented. You will be given the opportunity to create a pseudonym, or will be assigned one, for the purposes of data collection and corresponding research reports. In order to avoid disclosing any personally-identifiable information about you, any information you submit will be linked

to your pseudonym, not your name. Audio recordings will be destroyed immediately upon the conclusion of data collection, and mirror transcripts of the interview will be created if necessary. Emails and other Internet communication will be deleted and cleared from trash folders to ensure permanent deletion at the conclusion of data collection.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (404) 308-4780.

My initials below indicate whether or not I give permission to be audio recorded during interviews. My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_ I **DO** give permission to have my interview audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I **DO NOT** give permission to have my interview audio recorded.

**Nikki Laird**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of Co-Investigator**

**Telephone: (336) 693-4177**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

**Email: nlaird@uga.edu**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.**

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address [IRB@uga.edu](mailto:IRB@uga.edu)

## APPENDIX J

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Hi! My name is Nikki Laird and I am a doctoral student in the College Student Affairs Administration Program at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a research project on identity construction in gay men who participate in fraternities. Specifically, I want to learn more about your experiences as a gay man in a fraternity, and how those experiences have influenced identity. I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me about that today.

Before we begin the interview session, I would like to remind you that the information you share during the session will be kept confidential as explained in the consent form. I will not use your name or any other identifying information about you that might allow someone to figure out who you are. Additionally, I will not identify your fraternity in any documents.

I have read the story you submitted via the online survey. I will be asking you general questions about your fraternity experience as well as specific questions related to your memory story. After reading your story, I may have made assumptions about the meaning of the story for you and I will be checking that understanding throughout our discussion. Please feel free to correct me if I have misunderstood your meaning at any time.

Throughout this interview, if there are any questions you do not want to answer, you can feel free to skip them without explanation. Though I will be asking you questions about your story, you can feel free to ask any questions you may have at any time during the process. At this point, do you have any questions for me?

As we begin, I want to learn more about your experience within your fraternity. In order to learn more about that, I have a list of questions to help guide our conversation. More may arise as we talk.

1. What made you want to join a fraternity?

*Possible probing questions:*

- Did you know you wanted to join a fraternity before you went to college?
- What were your ideas about fraternities before arriving at college?

2. Why did you choose to join your fraternity specifically?

*Possible probing questions:*

- What was the recruitment experience like?

3. [Use if the participant indicated leadership roles in the demographic survey.] Tell me about your leadership experiences in your fraternity.

*Possible probing questions:*

- How did you come into your leadership role?
- Were you encouraged to take on a leadership role? Tell me about that.
- What made you want to take on a leadership role?
- What kinds of things did you consider before taking on a leadership role?

*Transition:* Now I'd like to talk more specifically about the memory story you submitted.

4. In your mind, what is this story about? What does it mean?

5. Based on this story, what would you say is your theory on what it means to be a man?

6. Other than what you shared in this story, are there other ways you learned about what it means to be a man through your fraternity?

7. [I will develop questions based on the specific story. The following questions will be used to guide that process.]

- a. Could you talk more about the emotions you felt when this action took place?
- b. What emotions did you perceive that others felt during this action?
- c. What were your interests/wishes during this time?
- d. What do you think were the interests/wishes of others involved in this story?
- e. What do you think are the contradictions in this story?
- f. Where are the empty spaces? What is missing?

8. What does this story mean?

9. How can your understanding of what it means to be a man in the context of this fraternity be applied to how boys are taught to be men in our society?

10. How did you feel about your participation prior to the action described in your story? Did that change after this action occurred?

11. How did you feel about yourself prior to the action you described? Did that change after this action occurred?

12. How did you perceive that others felt about you prior to the action in the story? Did that change after this occurred?

13. Did the action you described change the ways you interacted with your brothers? Did you adjust the places you visited or the activities in which you participated?

*Final question:* I have asked a lot of questions of you today, but you may be thinking of an experience that I didn't address. I want to give you the opportunity to share with me any other details you would like me to know. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience?

*Wrap-up:* I want to thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me. I really appreciate your time and the insight you have shared. As we discussed earlier, once I have transcribed this interview, I will check in with you to see if the themes I have noticed accurately describe your experience.

Additionally, what address would you like me to mail your incentives to?