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Beyond June: (Re)Visiting Sorority/Fraternity Messages About LGBTQ+ Identities and Issues from 2020 - 2021

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Goodman et al.: Beyond June: (Re)Visiting Sorority/Fraternity Messages About LGBT
BEYOND JUNE: (RE)VISITING SORORITY/FRATERNITY MESSAGES ABOUT
LGBTQ+ IDENTITIES AND ISSUES FROM 2020-2021

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In this critical discourse analysis (CDA), we examine 140 inter/national social sorority and fraternity organizations and their messages—and lack thereof—regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) identities and issues. Just 1.24% (507) of total posts (40,778) during 2020-2021 were about LGBTQ+ identities and issues. Despite the immense increase in LGBTQ+ recognition for most sororities and fraternities during Pride Month (June), CDA allowed us a criticality of these messages, both within and outside of Pride Month. Recommendations include being explicit about “LGBTQ+” framing, and also call for continued research to understand how organizations and members engage online.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, social media, Pride, critical discourse analysis

Over time, sororities and fraternities have grappled with membership inclusion as it relates to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people (e.g., see Duran & Garcia, 2020; Garcia & Duran, 2021; Garcia & Duran, 2020; Goodman & Garcia, 2021; Litterte & Hodge, 2011; Rhoads, 1995). Further, the climate of inclusion for LGBTQ+ people in the United States is fraught, and as of September 2022, dozens of state legislatures introduced and passed bills that target queer and transgender individuals, limit protections, and allow the use of religion to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people (ACLU, 2022). As issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) continue to permeate through U.S. society, institutions of higher education have taken to social media and messaging as a way to declare espoused values, or to (re)commit to elements of (social and racial) justice (e.g., see Briscoe, 2021; Squire, 2017). This, too, is the case for sororities and fraternities, and many enlist social media as a way to describe (or omit) their values,

commitments (Goodman & Garcia, 2021), and organizational activities (Taylor & McArdle, 2018; Yan et al., 2022).

Perhaps most related to this research, Goodman and Garcia (2021) published an article about inter/national sorority and fraternity organizations and social media posts containing notions involving LGBTQ+ identities and issues. Across 37 organizations, and in looking at nearly 30,000 posts pertaining to DEI and justice, only 154 posts (0.53%) were about LGBTQ+ identities and issues specifically (Goodman & Garcia, 2021). Furthermore, 13 of the 37 groups had zero posts about LGBTQ+ identities or issues (Goodman & Garcia, 2021). With this in mind, we wondered if and how results would change when considering a larger sample size of organizations, and as sororities and fraternities seek, continue, or evolve to become more inclusive spaces for LGBTQ+ members (Ballinger et al., 2020; Hesp & Brooks, 2009; Rankin et al., 2013; Worthen, 2014). In this study we examined the most popular social media platform (between Facebook,

Instagram, and Twitter) of 140 organizations across 7 umbrella¹ groups/communities. We sought to examine the following questions: In what ways does Goodman and Garcia's (2021) sample of 37 groups compare/expand when considering data from 140 groups? Further:

1. What messages do inter/national sorority and fraternity organizations communicate regarding LGBTQ+ identities and issues to members via social media?
2. What is the nature of these messages in relation to dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression? More specifically, how do they push against and/or reinforce heteronormativity and the oppression of transgender and nonbinary people?

As (Queer) scholars who value how discourse shapes social movements (e.g., see Johnston, 2009), we look to social media as a way to capture organizational approaches in sorority and fraternity life (SFL). With these research questions as a foundation, we explore relevant scholarship involving LGBTQ+ identities and issues in SFL. In particular, there has been an evolution in the literature from understanding SFL through the lens of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and white identities to a more nuanced and intersectional lens through which sexuality, gender, and race/ethnicity are viewed in these organizations and communities.

Relevant Literature

Personal identities are intertwined with any conversation related to understanding the discourse around who is and who is not a member of a sorority or fraternity. As private single-sex organizations that are allowed to operate on college campuses, they have the power and ability to selectively choose who they allow to be

associated with them (e.g., Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972). Further, the discourse on race in SFL has revealed sorority and fraternity communities to be one of the most racially segregated spaces on campus (Park, 2014; Park & Kim, 2013). While race is a socially constructed identity that often involves discourse on phenotypic appearance, the sexuality of a person is not so readily seen. Over time, sexuality-specific sororities, fraternities, and societies have emerged on college campuses (e.g., Delta Lambda Phi, Gamma Rho Lambda), though, there are still relatively few in comparison to single-sex-based social organizations that tend to dominate space and attention. To explore LGBTQ+ messages in the context of this research study, this review of literature explores SFL and LGBTQ+ identities and issues over time.

SFL and LGBTQ+ Identities

There is a range of literature on SFL and LGBTQ+ identities and issues. Early literature on this intersection contained research about gay men, lesbian women, and people who identified as bisexual (Windmeyer & Freeman, 1998, 2001; Rhoads, 1995). Literature on gay men, for example, described the experience of fraternity life to be hostile and rooted in unhealthy masculine standards (Rhoads, 1995). Hall and La France (2007) found that fraternity members desired cohesive male-male relationships (e.g., brotherhood), and held negative attitudes about gay fraternity brothers. Further, the authors found that while some members were accepting of gay members, there was still hostility from other members (Hall & La France, 2007). While some members came out in the fraternity context, and others saw having a gay member as a valuable exposure to diversity, there was still resistance to gay membership found in the data (Hall &

¹ Historically Native American Fraternities and Sororities (HNAFS); organizations within National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO), National APIDA Panhellenic Association (NAPA), National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGC), National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), and North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC); several organizations formerly part of the NIC

La France, 2007). Similarly, Literte and Hodge (2011) found that members of historically Black sororities were either completely or somewhat accepting of gay and lesbian people, yet, they posited that LGBTQ+ people still had difficult membership experiences. Membership was often predicated on concealing one's sexual orientation, and Black-identified individuals struggled for full acceptance in historically Black organizations (Literte & Hodge, 2011). Worthen (2014) found that identifying as female was positively related to supportive attitudes toward LGBT people, however sorority/fraternity membership related to negative attitudes toward LGBT individuals.

More recently, scholars have captured a better view of experiences and issues of LGBTQ+ people and organizations. For example, Balingier et al. (2020) suggested that physical space was an important element toward LGBTQ+ inclusion. The authors mentioned specifically gender-inclusive restrooms and being mindful of the imagery of membership (e.g., not having opposite gender people/couples on dated-event apparel) (Balingier et al., 2020). According to Goodman and Garcia (2021), it was clear inter/national organizations paid less attention to issues involving LGBTQ+ people, at least as evidenced in social media posts. However, this was not the case for all organizations, as Goodman and Garcia (2021) found many posts from one LGBTQ+-based NIC fraternity that frequently posted about events such as Pride Month, Transgender Day of Visibility and Remembrance, and National Coming Out Day.

Individual member experiences are also of note, and several scholars have sought to unearth a deeper understanding across membership type. For example, Queer Women of Color perceived both heterosexist and gendered norms in their organizations, which prompted them to make decisions regarding joining and the negation, or minimizing, of their identity

(Garcia & Duran, 2021). Members had to “choose [their] battles” with others, including the choice to perform identity in a way that would be healthy for oneself (Garcia & Duran, 2021, p. 199). Queer Men of Color had similar concerns in culturally-based fraternities, and Duran and Garcia (2021) found post-undergraduate narratives to reveal hypermasculine and heterosexist behaviors across an organization, from local to national levels. Importantly, the authors found a resistance within culturally-based organizations, wherein members separated themselves from their organizations after college, and worked to “reshape the system” (Duran & Garcia, 2021, p. 290). Moreover, the concept of resistance, racial uplift, or general activism has been a foundational tenet of culturally based organizations for their member experiences (Gillon et al., 2019; Kimbrough, 2003).

Methodology and Framework

Our methodology builds off Goodman and Garcia's (2021) study which illuminated not only a concern related to the discourse on LGBTQ+ messaging through written and visual posts from inter/national sororities and fraternities, but also an issue involving the absence of messaging from some organizations altogether. We engaged in critical discourse analysis (CDA) with the understanding that there is a relationship between ideology and language and the ways they further problematize and institute systems of power (Fairclough, 2010). Analysis in this way shows how “forms of social life can damage people unnecessarily, but also how they can be changed” (Fairclough, 2017, p. 35). Therefore, it is important to also understand CDA through the lens of sexuality studies. Motschenbacher (2017) writes about “the juxtaposition of traditional sexual norms and partly clashing social realities” (p. 521), in that wider social discourses shift focus from individual interactions to

sexual performativity—in this case, how organizations “perform” sexuality through social media discourse.

Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA has been a method used in educational research that is focused on addressing social problems and highlighting the way power is transcribed and positioned via discourse (Rogers, 2011), which this study aims to do. Wodak and Meyer (2009) described discourse as “relatively stable uses of language serving the organization and structuring of social life” (p. 6). Sororities and fraternities are social and values-based organizations and the use of CDA allows us “to gain proper understanding of how language functions in constituting and transmitting knowledge in organizational social institutions” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 7). Furthermore, the absence, lack of, or singular-focused message(s) from particular organizations contributes to a silence within the discourse among SFL communities. As Wodak and Meyer (2009) highlight the ways “language can be used to challenge power” (p. 10), we value CDA as a mechanism to understand the ways SFL negate to challenge power, but rather demonstrate their own systems of power to only keep posting when it is convenient to performative efforts to remain in alignment with bare minimal messaging; perhaps, even, to maintain an image that brings the appearance of their efforts. This form of negotiation requires the capacity to critically understand their own positionality within the power structures around them, which, purposeful or not, are better understood under CDA.

Social discourse as a poststructuralist theory allows us to interpret these silences, while at the same time, nuance socially constructed silences and the distinctions within (Rosiek & Heffernan, 2014). The social performances of symbols and vocabulary reflect a binary opposition of normal and deviant, and that part

of categorizing normal involves the pathologizing of what it means to be deviant; in other words silence can result “from the fear of being labeled deviant” (Rosiek & Heffernan, 2014, p. 731). In our research, we interpreted and drew from Rosiek and Heffernan’s (2014) work that suggested the interpretation of “socially produced silences,” and the effects of these silences. While the authors draw from qualitative interviews, we can make particular note of the silences from organizations in their written texts. Rosiek and Heffernan (2014) posited:

By providing the signifiers through which we come to understand persons as “normal” or “deviant,” social discourses bring particular aspects of our lives and behavior into focus. Conversely, they also leave other things unmarked and thus unnoticed. Without a shared discourse with which to describe some experiences, they become literally unnamable (p. 730).

Thus, we used these elements and sentiments as we examined the dataset. Further, we examined discourse with a mindfulness toward queer identities as displayed (or not) through cultural, historical, and institutional messages and images (e.g., see Denton, 2019). Further, we wonder(ed) about gender and sexuality, and what is or is not communicated through messages and images. We also wonder(ed) what “norms” are communicated or reinforced (e.g., heteronormativity and the history of these organizations).

Data Collection and Analyses

In July 2021, researchers collected data from 140 inter/national sorority and fraternity organizations who were affiliated with an umbrella² organization and had publicly-available social media posts. Through (critical) discourse analysis, we considered how written and spoken language enacted social/cultural identities

² We included HNAFS even though there is not an associated umbrella group for these organizations.

and perspectives and those related to social goods (Gee, 2010). We looked at social media posts between June 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021 from organizations' most followed platform. We chose the most followed platform with the understanding that Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were among the most popular non-video social media platforms (Pew Research Center, 2021; Sorensen et al., 2017). We counted the total number of posts and pulled the full content of any post that pertained to LGBTQ+ identities and issues, including the written content as-posted and associated images/videos. As a team, we decided not to examine Instagram stories, as they are not all saved to a main-profile. We included all re-posts/shares/tweets from the organization's main account.

Next, we reviewed data in two parts: for round 1, reviewers 1 and 3 reviewed data in rows 3-70 of the data sheet, and reviewers 2 and 4 reviewed data in rows 71-144. Then we switched, and reviewers 1 and 3 reviewed rows 71-144 and reviewers 2 and 4 reviewed rows 3-70. The analytical labor was divided so that each team reviewed approximately 50% of posts in each round. Following this, the reviewers conferred with one another based on our initial reviews and discussed initial interpretations. Similar to previous research, by enlisting axial coding (Saldaña, 2021) we examined interconnectedness and differences among organizations (Goodman & Garcia, 2021). To ensure intercoder reliability, we met frequently to discuss our findings and themes, as well as the CDA-aligned lenses through which we were reviewing. Based on the discussions during multiple researcher convenings, the lead author created a thematic memo of themes after the staggered review of data. Our researcher convenings were reflexive and increased trustworthiness (Jones et al., 2014), and we memoed and reflected on our positionalities and interpretations/experiences with the data. All researchers

were in alignment with the identification of posts as related to "LGBTQ+ issues or identities."

Positionality

We come to this topic and project with the understanding that sororities and fraternities maintain historical exclusion norms that have left many LGBTQ+ people fearful of disclosure or not joining at all (e.g., see Hesp & Brooks, 2009; Rhoads, 1995). Goodman, for example, experienced significant homophobia and heteronormativity during his collegiate experience, over fifteen years ago, which ultimately led him to remain "in the closet" until after graduation. Goodman is a scholar-practitioner and worked closely with the original study conducted by Goodman and Garcia (2021). George is a doctoral student who worked in student affairs for over a decade, some of which was as a campus-based sorority/fraternity professional and coordinator of LGBTQ+ initiatives. George is a member of a Latino-founded multicultural fraternity and did not come out as Queer until later in life. While their personal experience in their fraternity was inclusive of race and sexuality, acceptance within the larger SFL community as a student and professional was felt as lacking and nonexistent as a Person of Color who is Queer. Next, Simi Cohen, a first-generation, low-income queer non-binary doctoral student, experienced harassment and ridicule when they were unable to enter a fraternity party due to wearing clothes that were "not in line with" their perceived gender identity. This experience negatively impacted their perspective of sororities and fraternities, especially as a non-member. As they continue their studies in higher education their views have shifted based on finding some sororities and fraternities that have been inclusive for queer and transgender people. Finally, Bonamy-Lohve is a Black, Queer, cisgender woman and member of a historically and predominately Black

sorority. She is a doctoral student with five years of experience as a campus-based sorority/fraternity practitioner. As a collective, we write as interpretivists with strong consideration for critical epistemologies; and with some hope that sororities and fraternities are places where openly LGBTQ+ people can engage and thrive. Yet we remain wary based on our understanding of previous and present scholarship, as well as the findings unearthed in this study.

Findings and Interpretations

Considering our dataset, 1.24% (507) of total posts (40,778) during 2020-2021 were about LGBTQ+ identities and issues. We present our findings and interpretations in response to our core research questions and have organized the interpretations as such. Our analyses present three overarching themes: 1) History and Education, 2) Telling Member Stories, and 3) Language and Lack Thereof. In sum, these findings speak to the ways sororities and fraternities refrain from recognizing the myriad gender, romantic, and sexual identities and expressions within the LGBTQ+ community. Despite the immense increase in LGBTQ+ recognition for most sororities and fraternities during Pride Month (June), our themes depict a deeper message at play regarding the communication of their posts both within and outside of Pride Month. The following sections outline these three themes and how our methodology informs the analyses.

Theme 1: History and Education

While many sororities and fraternities posted material outside of June, the bulk of the messaging was centered during this month. Many sororities and fraternities included posts that highlighted the historical purpose of June as Pride Month, while others used it as a means to send educational messages around inclusive LGBTQ+ practices and LGBTQ+ history to their members. Across all posts

there seemed to be a large spectrum of ways organizations explain and educate followers on the historical aspects about the LGBTQ+ community. Stonewall³ was the largest intersecting topic across sororities and fraternities, and while many mentioned Stonewall, the accuracy and language surrounding it differed. For example, many of the organizations in NALFO, NMGC, and NPC highlighted Marsha P. Johnson's⁴ integral role as a Black Transgender woman in Stonewall. Other sororities and fraternities also highlighted Marsha P. Johnson as across our data her name was referenced 18 times, whereas Sylvia Rivera's name was mentioned eight times, and Stormé DeLarverie twice. In one example, Sigma Sigma Sigma hosted a fundraiser in 2020, where they sold Pride merchandise through the sorority store, and donated \$1,500 to the Marsha P. Johnson Institute. The organization posted:

We want to close out Pride month by bringing attention to Sylvia Rivera. Sylvia Rivera, a Latina trans woman, was an integral leader in the queer and trans rights movements from the late 60s to early 90s until her death, just like her close friend Marsha P. Johnson.

Examples like this show an attempt to educate members, yet are still confined within the period of Pride, and in this case, through a capitalistic lens of selling/fundraising.

Even across NMGC, the umbrella with the most posts pertaining to this theme, the language and understanding of Stonewall differed. Delta Xi Nu Sorority Inc. shared, "The Stonewall Riots were pivotal demonstrations led by Black and Brown trans women, drag queens, and other LGBTQ* community members fighting back against police brutality and discrimination." Their capitalization of

³ In 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn, a historic gathering place for queer people in New York City, NY; this led to multiple days of riots, and is often marked as a catalyst of the gay rights movement in the United States (Pitman, 2019).

⁴ Johnson, Rivera, and DeLarverie are historic players in the early fight for LGBTQ+ rights (Goodin, 2020).

Riots shows the value they place on the term “Stonewall Riots,” acknowledging the importance of it as a purposeful push against the institutionalized homophobia at play. Further, their reference of “police brutality” is a powerful recognition of the systemic and historical ways systems of the state invoke violence (Kennedy, 2020; Kleinfeld & Barham, 2020) that align hand in hand with cis-heteronormative ideologies. However, another NMGC sorority, Omega Phi Chi Multicultural Sorority Inc, differed in their language usage as they used the term “Uprising” when referencing Stonewall, and did not include any identifiers of those involved.

The accuracy of this education seemed to end after a simple recognition of Stonewall itself. For example, accompanied by an image of rainbow blocks, Sigma Pi Fraternity reposted the same post from June 22, 2020 on June 1, 2021 that read, “Pride Month is celebrated each year in June to honor the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in NYC. This uprising marks the beginning of a movement to outlaw discriminatory laws and practices against LGBTQ+ Americans. Happy Pride Month to our LGBTQ+ members!” Latinas Promoviendo Comunidad/Lambda Pi Chi Sorority, Inc. posted two LGBTQ+ posts during Pride Month in 2021, where the last stated that Stonewall “pave[d] the way to the Black and LGBTQ+ liberation across the world,” and they are “deeply grateful for ‘whoever threw the first brick that started this revolution.’” The text contained multiple hashtags and emojis with “LOVE WINS” and rainbows surrounding the text. Their post demonstrates not only inaccurate historical content, as Stonewall did not “pave the way” for the Black or LGBTQ+ liberation movement across the world, as made clear through the lack of intersectionality and whitewashing within the LGBTQ+ community today (Grullon & Astor, 2020; Lang, 2020). Their definition of Stonewall seeks to place Stonewall as the epitome of the Gay Rights Movement that started a national movement. Their addition of added

quotations to “whoever threw the first brick that started this revolution” further reiterates the ways cis-heteronormativity impacts our understandings of historical representation and sorority and fraternity’s ability to do their own work to educate themselves and others.

In sum, the majority of history shared was not the history of these organizations and their place within the discourse around LGBTQ+ issues, but rather that Stonewall exists as a singular and complete story of LGBTQ+ pride. Alpha Delta Pi was an exception when they posted, “Alpha Delta Pi has not always been a space where members with underrepresented identities have felt valued or a sense of belonging in the way that is promised when individuals pursue sorority membership.” The specifics of naming a harmful history of problematic behaviors and policies related to inclusive practices was otherwise largely absent, especially from sororities and fraternities that were in existence during the events of Stonewall. While Stonewall is a pivotal and momentous piece of LGBTQ+ history that should be known, distilling any discourse around the history of (P)ride to a singular moment discredits the need for further education. Moreover, it simplifies and minimizes the history and education of LGBTQ+ issues to check-box posts that can be posted and reposted and be seen as doing enough. The use of images among the social media posts was even more simplified with colorful text or a simple rainbow image that shows an awareness that it is Pride Month or when it is National Coming Out Day, as with the singular image posts of Acacia Fraternity, Alpha Epsilon Pi, Alpha Chi Rho, Alpha Pi Sigma, Delta Xi, Iota Nu Delta, and others.

Theme 2: Telling Member Stories

Another theme that many posts followed was the *vignette* or member story, where organizations shared long-form posts about the lives of individual members. These posts varied in style, but most included the name and/or pronouns of the member,

their chapter designation, and a story of coming out, overcoming external hardship, or experiencing love and embrace from the organization. While many posts used hashtags such as #translivesmatter and talked about LGBTQ[+] experiences, three story posts mentioned individual transgender members. From these, one detailed the person's experience in the organization. For example, Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity wrote about Tobias Gurl's experience as the first openly transgender man in the organization and detailed his experiences with chapter members, national headquarters, and some difficult experiences that queer members had in the organization. The other posts acknowledged the individual member as the first transgender member or leader.

While reading these posts, the heterosexual or cisgender gaze was palpable, as if the goal was to make LGBTQ+ members more real or relatable to those reading the post(s). Instead of stories about members who worked on LGBTQ+ causes, advocacy, or inclusion in their organizations, most stories were about a queer or transgender member who did something ordinary. Thus, these posts function as "queer member alerts" or "LGBTQ+ member roll calls" that normalize the existence of LGBTQ+ people in SFL. While it is important to show that queer people exist in these organizations, it is harmful when this is the most an organization does for its members. These spotlights on individual Queer members in a context void of systemic issues related to LGBTQ+ inclusion in these, by their very nature (Title IX), sex exclusionary practices relies on a discourse that upholds the idea that structural diversity is a byproduct of inclusion. For example, Chi Psi Fraternity posted a member story about a brother who "came out to [their] brothers during new member education." In this post, the fraternity described how representation of LGBTQ+ members is of greater importance than

formal education about sexual and gender identities. This example highlights the lack of responsibility among chapter members to do any labor to create queer inclusive environments and thus tokenizes the presence of their Queer members as proof that they are an inclusive organization.

Rarely were there stories about members who experienced exclusion, hate, or bias from their organizations, and instead organizations focused on how the chapters had been integral to the sexual (not gender) identity development of members. Thus, the content or tone of the stories was another barrier to organizational change or growth. The overwhelmingly positive tone of the story posts calls into question who exactly was asked to share their story, as well as the overall goal of sharing. For example, Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity (PIKE) shared the following member story at the beginning of Pride Month in 2021:

When I walked into college, I was looking for a fraternity that would accept me for me and that I didn't have to worry. The minute I walked through the house it felt like home. PIKE was one of the best decisions in my life.

While this may be true for that member, it could potentially erase the stories of other PIKE members who had a less than positive experience. Other words posted from the Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity account during this month include, "complete bliss," "love," "support," "dignity," and "visibility." The positive accounts continue across many organizations. Alpha Phi Sorority shared a member story about a new member fearing they would be kicked out, yet were met with "nothing but love and support." It is important that so many students have positive experiences in their organizations, yet it is equally important for organizations to critique and challenge their practices that lead to other outcomes. *Rainbow washing* is a technique used by companies to publicly show support for the LGBTQIA+ community

when their policies and organizational environments remain largely unsafe (Wired Staff, 2018)—without prioritizing inclusive environments on the chapter and organization level, these posts do the same thing.

These cherry-picked stories are also an example of an organization pointing to happenstance relationships and individual experiences as evidence of intentionally designed organizational environments. Several queer people having a positive experience in one chapter does not indicate a culture of affirmation or inclusion for an entire organization. Essentially, these stories would make it seem that way. While the stories exist as a theme on their own, the compositional techniques used, as well as who chose to post and who did not are also important as we consider the impact of this messaging.

Theme 3: Language, and Lack Thereof

The final prominent theme persistent throughout our dataset was the language choices used by sororities and fraternities in their posts, and the noticeable lack of descriptive or specific language focusing on LGBTQ+ identities. Many organizations negated to define what LGBTQ+ represented for them, use the word “queer” (n= 1), or explicitly define the acronym or how the various identities within the acronym are related to specific members in their organization. This left ambiguity on what they meant when they used the words Pride or LGBTQ+. Lambda Tau Omega Sorority, Inc. shared that the purpose of Pride is for “the pursuit of equality, celebrating love everywhere, [and] making a better future for children,” leaving their support and meaning of Pride broad and unclear. Alpha Delta Phi, who posted one time in June, wrote that they value “the diversity of our brothers regardless of their race, faith, sexual orientation, economic background, and nationality,” and continued to state that they “[are] proud to celebrate Pride as we

support our brothers and friends in the LGBTQ+ Community.” Despite using the LGBTQ+ acronym, they explicitly leave out gender identity and expression from the aforementioned list of diverse identities that they value. Although they say “brothers and friends” at the end, the overt omission of transgender and non-binary identities begs the question if they actually understand what the letters in the acronym represent, and, what their members’ attitudes and perceptions are on transgender and non-binary folks.

Similar to results from the first theme where we unpacked and reflected on the language surrounding the historical effects of Pride Month, our analysis of language broadly reflected the loudness of silence, salience of desired recognition with little action, and how an us-versus-them mentality can be easily seen. Although most sororities and fraternities did post at least once during Pride Month, 39 organizations did not post a single LGBTQ+-related post over the course of thirteen months. The impact of the lack of messaging can be catastrophic to queer and transgender people both within and outside of these organizations. Seventy-six organizations posted one post throughout the 13 months, and out of the 140 organizations total, just 1.24% of these posts were LGBTQ+-related in comparison to their other social media postings. Viewing these data through a macro lens makes the silence of LGBTQ+ posts outside of Pride Month ring much louder. This recognition hinders the value of the posts within the month of June and positions them as performative and lacking intrinsic care for the LGBTQ+ community. The disregard of the LGBTQ+ community outside of Pride Month by sororities and fraternities demonstrates their power and privilege to continue upholding cis-heteronormative ideals that are already ingrained in SFL, as demonstrated through the literature and a CDA lens (Goodman & Garcia, 2021; Hall & La France, 2007;

Rhoads, 1995).

Next, the usage of hashtags and emojis appeared throughout many posts. Over 100 hashtags included the word “pride,” including #Pride (n=24), #HappyPride (n=3), #PrideMonth (n= 59) and more. Although relevant to many of the posts, there were those who used additional hashtags, often having more hashtag usage than the actual content in the posts themselves. For instance, Tau Epsilon Phi Fraternity had one post that vaguely referenced Pride/Month:

With May’s closure and June’s beginning, Tau Epsilon Phi would like to wish everyone a Happy Pride Month! June brings not only new opportunities for all, but also the continued celebration of the LGBTQIA+ community and every individual a part of it!

Tau Epsilon Phi Fraternity’s usage of hashtags seemed to boast more attention to the fraternity rather than the purpose of the post itself. For example, after this post were the following hashtags: #tep #tauepsilonphi #tauboy #friendship #chivalry #service #philanthropy #nonprofit #greeklife #TEΦ #gogreek #russtep #rushtauepsilonphi #fraternity #rushweek #brotherhood #tepdoes #philanthropy #teptraternity #greek #fraternity #organization #frat #fraternity #college #fraternitylife #greekletters #campus #myfraternity #pridemonth. Lacking recognition of the purpose of Pride entirely, the organization drew away from the original purpose of the post to gain attention to themselves, perhaps even with a template used for other posts. The hashtag #loveislove (n =25) was also used as a way to promote an ideal version of what Pride is, centering marriage legality, lacking recognition of the numerous struggles that continue to remain for queer and transgender people. The #loveislove hashtag became a centerpiece to extend picturesque ideals of what Pride is. Kappa Delta Rho Fraternity’s one LGBTQ+ post was a single sentence followed by

the hashtag #loveislove and a rainbow flag. Similarly, while Alpha Epsilon Phi Sorority shared the phrase, “Love is Love,” with three posts referencing Pride Month, they did not share any information about the importance or their values that could align with the phrase.

Many organizations referred to LG-BTQ+ communities as an external population, failing to reflect on their own potential community members. Alpha Phi Gamma National Sorority, Inc. posted once for Transgender Day of Visibility, where they externalized their celebration of transgender and nonbinary inclusion to those “across the world,” yet labeled themselves as allies, despite posting one time and not including any resources or demonstrating what allyship could or should be. Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity “condemn[ed]” one chapters’ actions participating in “homophobia, misogyny and racism” in September 2020, and in June 2021 had one additional post. Their language asserts that the organization “embraces men regardless of background and differences” and that they are “proud to embrace men regardless of background and differences and empower them to become better versions of themselves by finding their reason for being” (followed by #PrideMonth hashtag). This statement is not corroborated through any additional posting outside of Pride Month one time in 2021, nor does it provide resources, historical content on Pride Month, or ways for members of the fraternity to be an ally.

Discussion

To further understand how (if at all) organizations engage online about LGBTQ+ identities and issues, we believed it was important to expand the sample size from Goodman and Garcia’s (2021) study. As such, we looked at a period of 13 months rather than four years to tighten the timeframe, and to include more organizations in the sample—thus, allowing us to understand more recently

if, when, and how organizations posted (compared to those who posted once in a four-year spread, in year one or two of the timeframe). In all, there was a very small increase in posts about LGBTQ+ identities and issues, from 0.53% in Goodman and Garcia's (2021) study to 1.24% in ours. Out of the 140 organizations in our sample, 39 did not have a single post about LGBTQ+ identities or issues. As early sororities and fraternities were created, there were no known sexuality-based membership clauses; thus, the heteronormative nature of these organizations is in part maintained by the social discourses in which they engage.

Hall and La France (2007) speak to the desire of fraternity members to have a cohesive male-male relationship, however, data shows that there is a dearth of fraternity social media posts showcasing that this environment exists within organizations for queer members. When fraternities do post messages of acceptance, the queer community is seen as external to their brotherhood, which corroborates a negative attitude toward gay fraternity membership (Hall & La France, 2007). This was also the case with the sororities who chose language that painted their support toward the LGBTQ+ community as a community outside their sisterhood. While Worthen (2014) found that identifying as female in general positively related to supportive attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people, this lack of acknowledgment of queer members within a sisterhood reveals the limit to their supportive attitudes. These posts recognize that queer people do exist, however the lack of awareness that they exist within their sister/brotherhood leaves room to interpret that they either do not recognize that they have queer members or that queerness should not be associated to what it means to be a member of that organization. In other words, representing queerness within their organization can be a reflection of homophobia that labels

queer/queer people as deviant behavior that is not welcomed in their organization (Rosiek & Heffernan, 2014).

The rainbow washing tactic that organizations used to showcase their queer members within their organization is an attempt rooted in the idea that representation matters. However, the impact of showing that these members exist within the organization is reduced because this highlight distracts from the reality that the organization might have a problematic history and culture related to queer members (Rhoads, 1995). Hall and La France (2007) named that while there might be some acceptance of queer members within a fraternity, hostility can still exist, such that some members disclosed fear about what they would encounter if they came out to their fraternity. This was also present for culturally-based fraternities and illuminated how heterosexist and hypermasculine ideologies carry across race (Duran & Garcia, 2021). As for queer women representation in sororities, the engagement of testimonies, history, and education were across the spectrum for both culturally-based and NPC sororities and overall the most progressive of posts around advocacy and education came from sororities. However, the inconsistency among sororities speaks to issue of concealment (Literte & Hodge 2011) or choosing which social justice battle to engage in (Garcia & Duran, 2021), and overall illuminates the mitigating factor that sorority has on the experience of queer women (Worthen, 2014). While we rejoice that queer alumnx and undergraduate member stories were a part of a social media message, they represent individual experiences and fall short on describing the culture (current and past) of their chapters, let alone the inter/national organization.

Our findings reinforce the way cis-heteronormativity is exemplified through these individualized experiences. Telling LGBTQ+ member stories is a way for

organizations to seemingly promote acceptance of queer and transgender people, while refusing to elaborate on ways they want to provide more support for their LGBTQ+ members, address the hostile history Hall and La France (2007) reckon with, or provide resources to members. This bare minimum storytelling technique does little to address the historical and systemic power relations sororities and fraternities have toward oppressing LGBTQ+ people and in many ways it further positions SFL as appearing to be dedicated toward diversity efforts, while not actually doing the appropriate work required. Ahmed (2012) and Museus and LePeau (2019) elaborated on this idea in institutions as a way to further stifle actual diversity work and progress, while maintaining and upholding the vision that institutions care. This can also be seen through Sigma Pi's example of reposting the same post during Pride Month from 2020 to 2021. The act of reposting takes minimal effort, yet, it is just enough to say that they did something. While "liking," "reacting," or "commenting" on existing posts does not ensure that an account's followers will be reached, reposting guarantees some level of visibility. Their post then provides an illusion that Sigma Pi cares about their queer and transgender members, without having to do any actual work. Moreover, the use of singular stories of queer members as social justice currency as proof of actual change is akin to a racial discourse that uses the fact that Barack Obama was elected as president as proof that we are living in a post-racial era.

Organizations that did not tell stories of their members used language that exhibited an inherent lack of ownership or intrinsic connection toward the LGBTQ+ community. By externalizing queer and transgender identities as outside of the organization, sororities and fraternities are furthering the "othering" of queer and transgender folks as not a part of their community. Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity's

condemnation of one chapter for their "homophobia, misogyny and racism" could be considered important with a single read. However, with CDA we find that the lack of critical self-reflection around the history of their own chapter and privileges, it begs to question if they actively care about addressing homophobia, misogyny, or racism. This aligns with the historical literature surrounding the lack of access for LGBTQ+ folks in SFL, and demonstrates the privilege SFL organizations have of not needing to see how their language or lack thereof could affect the attitudes and feelings of their own and potential members (Goodman & Garcia, 2021; Hall & La France, 2007)

The absence of certain conversations and prioritization of others surrounding LGBTQ+ communities have been central to our findings. The immense ambiguity on accurate historical representation and language was made clear through organizations' posts and is not new. Garcia and Duran (2021) recall how Queer Women of Color felt forced to shift their own language use around their identities and shift their appearances to be seen as more appeasing, desirable, or feel accepted within SFL. Glover (2017) cited how this could be seen as an example of forced *respectability*, where one must meet the standards of those in power in an appeasing way. This idea of respectability can also help us understand the members' stories that were highlighted in the posts. The usage of appeasing language was prevalent throughout the posts, where we saw the differing of language when talking about Stonewall, rainbow washing of Pride Month, countless Love is Love! hashtags and statements, and upbeat history unladen sentences merely promoting individual chapter successes. Simply posting a rainbow or a picture of chapter members with no content during Pride Month is not an act of solidarity, rather, imitates an act of performativity. It takes the position that organizations are trying to blend in with popular culture while

patting themselves on the back for being part of a movement in which they were never part of, almost in search of gratitude from the LGBTQ+ community.

Through the posts we examined, we have seen how SFL attempts to maintain alignment with the desires of the shift toward DEI efforts while refusing to grapple with or reflect on their own organization and chapters' complicity and history with cis-heteronormativity, exclusivity toward queer and transgender students, or create meaningful change to address it and curate better environments for queer and transgender members. The bare minimum effort to post once during June while forgetting about the LGBTQ+ community the rest of the year aligns with the ways sororities and fraternities have structured their organizations both historically and currently. We must be critical of the simplicity of happy-go-lucky stories and appeasing "love-is-love" language in order to move away from performativity and toward action. SFL must move beyond a "June approach" to LGBTQ+ inclusion in their social media messaging if they plan on actively changing and addressing their negative environments for queer and transgender members.

Recommendations for SFL Practice and Research

As we continue to make sense of these data, as well as the implications on SFL and the organizations themselves, several recommendations are drawn for both practice and research.

Practice

First, there are implications for inter/national organizations and their use of social media particularly about and for LGBTQ+ people and issues. Organizations should consider what they mean when they write "LGBTQ+" and other queer-community-lumping (e.g., "LGBTQIA+", "LGBT", "queer," etc.) in relation to their organization. For example if a fraternity

is referencing their LGBTQ+ members, do they have transgender-inclusive policies such that the "T" in "LGBTQ+" is representational? Apparent in our data, there is a lack of awareness and recognition of the complexity of the LGBTQ+ acronym, specifically as it relates to gender identity of membership requirements, or any interrogation of gender beyond a binary sister and brother approach. Moreover, not all posts were about the community at-large, nor did they point to the nuances of what it means to be independently lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, or identify in some other way. As such, organizations should be explicit, yet inclusive, when talking about the community, avoiding monolithic framing (e.g., say "gay" if that is the reference; "nonbinary" if that is the reference). Further, organizations should leverage their own identity in relation to both history and present-day issues (e.g., moving past the "It Gets Better" approach, with realistic historical contexts about Stonewall, police brutality, and homo/transphobia). Similarly, organizations should consider engaging with legislative decisions that are impacting members and alumna. Silence and inaction around this issue can and do become harmful for all queer folks and is indicative of a legislative culture that wants to codify harm and exclusionary practices, which we see today in Florida's "Don't Say Gay Bill," and other states and anti-trans directives (ACLU, 2022).

Organizations can and should post in support of students and alumna with children—these issues impact all those affiliated with a membership, and at different points in one's lifespan. Organizations seemed "neutral" on issues such as these, and this may be one way to signal support for members and alumna beyond the simple/sole Pride posts that seemed to dominate this dataset. This may be an additional calling for campus-based practitioners to train chapters and

student leaders on not just social media in a vacuum, but also how they communicate their values through social media, and in particular, the nuances of identity within those values. This includes over-viewing and introducing LGBTQ+ histories to students through programs offered by the campus LGBTQ+ resource center, or through organizations like GLSEN or the Human Rights Campaign. Campus-based practitioners can even lead students on how to “manage-up” with their organizations if they have local-chapter-related posts or ideals that they are not seeing actualized in their larger organization’s posts/training.

Organizations can also expand the ways they post about LGBTQ+ topics and issues. For example, since this data collection, we discovered Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity has a “Pi Kapp Pride” Instagram account. In January 2022, the fraternity reposted a Pi Kapp Pride post of a photo of one of their members (drag performer, Daya Betty) competing on the 14th season of RuPaul’s Drag Race, with the caption, “Start your engines and may the best Pi Kapp Win! Shout out to @DayaBetty [Theta Lambda (Missouri State!)] who is on Season 14 of Rupaul’s Drag Race! #PiKappPride.” They again posted support in April 2022 when Daya Betty made the top five of the television competition show. In the timeframe of our data set, very few, if any, organizations posted about drag, ballroom, ball, or house culture. Thus, we wonder what it might mean for inter/national organizations to engage in queer culture beyond June, and also to embrace various expressions of their members (and members’ interests).

Research

As this study itself is a continuation of the research done by Goodman and Garcia (2021), further research can and should be conducted to continue understanding how inter/national sorority/fraternity organizations message to and about LGBTQ+ people. In addition to continued

capturing of social media posts about LGBTQ+ issues and identities, future critical discourse analyses may include examinations of internal organization documents (e.g., constitution, by-laws), curricula and training (e.g., convention materials, programming), and chapter-specific posts (e.g., social media from the chapters themselves). Future papers related to this research could examine the ways organization posts differed across umbrella groups. Future research may also include qualitative interviews with social media or communications managers of inter/national organizations to explore what goes into posting—or not posting—about these topics. Further, it should be interrogated what resistance there is to posts about LGBTQ+ issues and identities specifically, and what have been practitioners’ experiences with comments, feedback on posts, or edits to posts (including deleted posts).

Ballinger and colleagues (2020) remind us that while many organizations have yet to make statements regarding gender inclusivity, they may still be accepting of transgender and nonbinary members. Future research might include a critical discourse analysis of those messages specifically—and lack thereof—from organizations engaging in dialogue around gender-inclusion within their membership. For example, what public statements have organizations made that do or do not contribute to gender inclusion? Further, in what ways if at all do organizations’ governing documents provide for a more expansive understanding of gender and inclusion? One such media source that engages with campus-based policies, practices, and inclusion of LGBTQ+ people is the Campus Pride Index (n.d.), which identifies LGBTQ+-friendly colleges and universities. The Campus Pride Index (n.d.) has a list of eight factors that include items such as policy inclusion, housing, and recruitment. While this is a university self-reporting system, the Campus Pride Index denotes that

their instrument is not a replacement or substitute for a campus climate study for that particular institution. Organizations might be mindful of how campuses with their chapters are or are not highlighted on these types of lists and conduct their own research about member experiences at these institutions.

We must also be mindful of the nuances of racial inclusion. The elimination of white racial clauses for membership where abolished did not end racial discrimination in historically white fraternities who used *blackballing* to maintain racial homogeneity (e.g., see Ross, 2015). Even when that practice was eliminated, we still have largely racially homogenous chapters. Similarly, will the addition of sexual orientation into a non-discrimination clause lead to welcoming and inclusive environments or will homophobia endure in recruitment and selection practices? What does this mean for transgender and non-binary members seeking membership in sororities and fraternities when the Title IX exemption of organizations allow for the discrimination of sex? Finally, does the Title IX exemption status that allows for sororities and fraternities to exist continue to align with the mission of an ever evolving and diversifying landscape of higher education? These questions, and more, can be explored through multiple methods of future research on this topic.

Conclusion(s)

Sororities and fraternities continue to evolve through the inclusion of people with diverse sexual identities (Ballinger et al., 2020). For the purposes of this study, to go from examining 37 to 140 organizations was no small task. Yet, this work is important as the SFL industry continues to grapple with our understanding of supporting LGBTQ+ members and communities. Further, this study affirms the value in creating as wide of a snapshot about the community as possible, including organization types and makeup. The

dominant use of Stonewall riots as an explicit moment of hate towards queer people that should be remembered and acknowledge creates a cognitive dissonance that frames issues related to homophobia and transphobia as issues of the past and not current realities that queer students are facing today. Our findings demonstrate a scary truth of the lack of intercommunal support and recognition SFL provides to LGBTQ+ communities based on an overtly-positive post-queer society since Stonewall has passed and Gay Marriage has been legalized. Their silence shines a light on the lack of care SFL organizations are providing to all of their students, as their inherent lack of inclusivity affects more than just openly LGBTQ+ members and non-members but affirms the cis-heteronormative standards plagued within society. Therefore, SFL organizations have the ability to transform their organizations through the ongoing power of messages they assert via social media.

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