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They Have My Back: An Exploration of the Narratives of Latina Members of Latin Greek Letter Organizations (LGLOs) and their Journeys to Graduation

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the narratives of 28 Latina women who became members of their Latin Greek Letter Organizations (LGLOs) and the role that membership played in their journeys to baccalaureate degree attainment. The research question examined how participants narrated their college experiences, namely relative to successfully graduating. This research sheds light on the role that LGLO membership plays for Latina college students in their successful degree attainment, specifically that LGLOs facilitate the development of various skills, knowledge, and practices that assist members with their undergraduate experiences to graduation and well beyond. This research also adds to the larger body of literature in its investigation of the role of LGLOs within an overarching examination of Latinx college student success.

Keywords: Latin Greek Letter Organizations; Latina college students, Latinx academic achievement

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Latinx people constitute the largest ethnic group in the United States at 18.3% of the population and are projected to be nearly 1 in 2 Americans by 2030 (*Excelencia* in Education, 2020). From 2000 to 2016, Latinx students in higher education have increased 134% (de Brey et al., 2019) but low Latinx college completion rates persist with only half of Latinx college students at 4-year institutions reaching the milestone of graduation (*Excelencia* in Education, 2020). Factors identified as contributing to Latinx college completion include: intentional postsecondary retention and academic pathways programs (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Santiago et al., 2017), mentoring (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Quintanilla & Santiago, 2017), Latinx representation in faculty (Taylor & Santiago, 2017), and Latinx-based student organizations (Castellanos, 2016), including Latin Greek Letter Organizations or LGLOs.

Latin Greek Letter Organizations (LGLOs) refer to the Greek letter sororities and fraternities that were established largely by and for Latinx college students as a response to the absence of university resources and support. They are generally attributed as having been founded in the mid 1970's with roots that date back even farther, still. Their closest model are historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) in terms of historical reason for founding, missions that are centered around cultural maintenance, parallels in their respective literatures, and similarities in threats posed to their continued existence.

Empirical exploration of Latin Greek Letter Organizations have only just begun regarding their connection and relationship to Latinx college student success. This study adds to nascent literature about the relationship between these Latinx-centered student organizations and student success factors through the narratives of Latina students whose LGLO memberships further explore the idea of their serving as a vehicle for support, specifically as it relates to academic achievement. While higher education often vaguely defines academic achievement, I chose to define it for the purposes of this study as successful degree completion in large part due to the reality that participation in the knowledge-based economy is predicated upon the assumption of having one's baccalaureate degree. As the largest ethnic group in the United States, Latinx success is vital to and intricately tied with the success of this nation.

Author Positionality

My positionality as a Latina, first-generation United States-born American who has had to straddle multiple cultural boundaries throughout

my lifetime compelled me as a researcher to seek out a CRT theoretical lens in my attempt to illuminate the experiences of Latinx college students with respect to their occupying several (and at times conflicting) identities and spaces. Additional positionalities that merit acknowledgement in such a research inquiry is that of being a Latina woman working in higher education who is an actively involved member of an LGLO with experience serving in leadership within that LGLO's organizational structure. While I acknowledge that I should be continually aware of my memberships so as to not allow my biases or unchecked assumptions pave the way for my inquiry in lieu of sound methodology, I tend to view these memberships as a benefit to the research as a cultural insider who is better suited to understand community language and mores than a researcher who is non-Latina and/or non-LGLO member. A critical race paradigm tends to agree with this perspective of encouraging scholars of color such as myself to study issues particular to our respective communities and to engage with other community members in co-constructing knowledge, and with this study I answer Anzaldúa's (1990) call for Latina voices via my participants and myself to occupy critical theorizing space (p. xxv).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Latinx populations continue to grow nationwide in the United States with similar demographic shifts reflected in the microcosm of higher education. Latinx students are enrolled in postsecondary institutions at historic and unprecedented rates, "from 1.4 million to 3.2 million students" between the years 2000 and 2016 (de Brey et al., 2019, p. 126). Despite these gains, Latinx persistence to graduation remains a challenge with many Latinx students stopping-out or dropping-out before reaching the goal of graduation. Barriers rooted in structural and systemic oppression result in various push-pull factors that contribute to Latinx college attrition. Explanations for the persistence of low Latinx graduation rates include first generation status, a population we know to be particularly vulnerable (Flink, 2018; Salis Reyes & Nora, 2012); limited access to necessary cultural capital about college (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Núñez et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2012); challenges around academic preparation for college and the related need for remedial coursework (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Ross et al., 2012); limitations around financial access (Núñez et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2012; Saenz, 2002; Saenz et al., 2007); the tension of serving in myriad roles in addition to that of student, including that of being family caretakers (Cox et al., 2011; Saenz 2002; Saenz et al., 2007); and challenges of academic and social integration

while at college (Ross et al., 2012) to name a few. These well documented challenges should be understood as the societal failings which negatively impact Latinx people (and people of other ethnic and racial minorities), and not as a list detailing all the things that Latinx undergraduates supposedly lack.

Additionally important for consideration are the growing ways in which Latinx college students are being understood from a strengths-based approach relative to the unique "funds of knowledge" that they "tap into to resist oppression" while transitioning to and at college (Rios-Aguilar & Marquez Kiyama, 2012, p. 7). Pulling from this strengths-based lens and paradigm, a burgeoning subsection of the literature relative to Latinx students in higher education includes an investigation of the relationship between Latinx-centered student organizations, like LGLOs, and Latinx student success measures and outcomes. The literature suggests that these unique organizations operate as sites of support and resistance and accordingly serve as a way for Latinx students to collectively mitigate the very real systemic challenges faced when in college. From this paradigm, I outline the existing literature on LGLOs by grouping the findings thematically.

Main Findings/Themes of the LGLO Literature

Four main themes can be extrapolated from the literature on Latin Greek Letter Organizations in terms of their role and significance, with an additional fifth theme that undergirds the former four.

Belonging & Mattering in the Face of Marginalization, Isolation, and Alienation

Virtually all the literature on Latinx-centered student organizations and LGLOs, specifically, demonstrates time and again the importance of culturally specific subspaces on campuses for Latinx students and that LGLOs serve as a haven and a place of mentorship and growth where Latinx members feel a sense of belonging and mattering in the face of marginalization, alienation, and isolation (Arellano, 2018; Atkinson et al., 2010; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014; Dueñas & Gloria, 2017; Estrada et al., 2017; Garcia, 2019; Garcia, 2020; Gloria et al., 2005; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Moreno, 2012; Moreno & Sanchez Banuelos, 2013; Núñez, 2009; and Orta et al., 2019). The well-documented phenomenon of Latinx marginalization in higher education creates the conditions for necessitating subspaces where Latinidad or "Latinx-ness" is centered, appreciated, valued, respected, and validated. Within this theme endures

an express desire of Latinx college students to be a part of these subspaces, to maintain, sustain, and develop them, and to carve them out where they do not exist. Embedded within this theme includes LGLOs often conceptualized as important reproductions of family away from home and are structured from a collectivist paradigm. In this way, one can understand Latinx-centered subspaces and LGLOs, specifically, as sites of resistance in the face of the real and continued marginalization experienced by Latinx students.

Leadership skills and Professionalism

A second theme in the literature is that LGLOs have been found to be critical spaces wherein important leadership and professional skills and experiences are fostered, enhanced, and often expected vis-à-vis LGLO membership (Atkinson et al., 2010; Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014; Estrada et al., 2017; Guardia, 2021; Moreno, 2012; Moreno & Sanchez Banuelos, 2013; and Orta et al., 2019). Specifically, leadership development is articulated in two main ways: the accrual of professional social capital by way of the learning of soft and hard skills through the LGLO, and the access to networks that is afforded by way of the LGLO.

Sense of responsibility, civic engagement, and service to community engendered

A third theme is that of a sense of responsibility engendered or further developed by way of membership in an LGLO. This sense of responsibility is multifaceted including a responsibility to self, to one's chapter and organization, to one's family, and to the larger Latinx community. The theme shows up in the literature in three main ways: as the opportunity for members to lead, in being of service to the community, and the expectation/pressure to lead (Arellano, 2018; Atkinson et al., 2010; Estrada et al., 2017; Garcia, 2020; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Moreno, 2012; Moreno & Sanchez Banuelos, 2013; Núñez, 2009; Olivas, 1996; Orta et al., 2019). First, LGLOs offer leadership opportunities to Latinx students otherwise not afforded, and thus arises a sense of duty in taking advantage of those opportunities and not letting them go to waste. As such, members view leading and being of service as both a privilege and expectation. Second, LGLO membership promotes its leadership opportunities as a platform to serve and give back to the community. Third, a fine line emerges between the responsibility to lead and the pressure to do so in order to maintain the functioning of the LGLO chapter and in turn the organization as a whole.

Academic Achievement

The fourth theme relates to the promotion of academic achievement because of LGLO membership. A handful of research inquiries regarding LGLOs investigate the linkages between the social dimensional aspects of LGLOs and the impact that belonging and mattering has on student success outcomes and academic achievement, suggesting a positive relationship between the two. However, the primary purpose of these studies does not typically investigate their academic components, and as such the discussion and implications are often tangential and underdeveloped. A few notable exceptions that detail the greatest nuance in the area of academic achievement is best exhibited by studies from Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014; Luedke, 2019; Moreno and Sanchez Banuelos, 2013; and Orta et al., 2019. These studies yield insight about LGLOs in higher education and broader society relative to the accrual of academic and professional skills that are then applied to degree completion. Most studies on LGLOs call for additional inquiries to focus on this particular dimension of academic achievement which is where this study situates itself.

Familismo as Undergirding All

Familismo as a codified concept has been utilized in the behavioral sciences and education (Gonzales, 2019) and refers to the centrality of the family unit in Latinx culture with regards to values, morals, and decision making. Familismo is grounded in collectivism in which it is uncommon to think about the individual divorced from the larger family unit. At its core, familismo eschews the dominant U.S. concepts of the individual and autonomy in favor of interdependence and community as means of radical resistance. The concept of familismo is so critically embedded within Latinx culture as a vital value and tenet that it shows up in virtually all themes with regard to the literature on LGLOs (Arellano, 2018; Atkinson et al., 2010; Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014; Dueñas & Gloria, 2017; Estrada et al., 2017; Garcia, 2020; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Miranda et al., 2020; Moreno, 2012; Moreno & Sanchez Banuelos, 2013; Olivas, 1996; Orta et al., 2019). Given the centrality of communal culture as epitomized via the Latinx family, it makes sense that Latinx undergraduates understand and articulate their LGLOs (and their sense of belongingness in them) in terms of familia. Familismo also appears in the subtheme of leadership skills and professionalism as the familia-like settings of LGLOs provide safe spaces to learn in a judgment-free zone the critical skills that aid in the accrual of the necessary cultural

capital for Latinx students to succeed in spaces where hegemonic values pervade. Familismo further enmeshes itself within the subtheme of responsibility and service, where, much like within our Latinx family structures, there endures a sense of a duty and expectation to lead, to help, and to serve something larger than oneself. Lastly, familismo appears in the discourse relative to academic achievement wherein going to college is often talked about as being a sacrifice for the greater good of their family.

RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative study is rooted in a Critical Race Theory theoretical framework which employed a narrative methodology through the use of counter stories. The research question explored how Latina-identified college graduates who were undergraduate members of a Latin Greek Letter sorority narrate their experiences of earning their baccalaureate degree to understand: (1) How they talk about the impact of LGLO membership in their academic experiences and (2) What their stories reveal about the skills, knowledge, practices, or relationships gleaned via LGLO membership that supported them in their academic journeys. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews of 28 alumnae Latina baccalaureate degree holders who gained membership in an LGLO during their undergraduate years at institutions in the Mid-Atlantic United States (a previously virtually unresearched geographic area in the literature). Purposeful criterion sampling was used in the calls for participants and included those who: (1) self-identify as Latina/e/x or Hispanic, (2) attended an undergraduate institution in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States (which I defined as New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland), (3) became a member of an LGLO during their undergraduate experience, and (4) have since graduated with their baccalaureate degree. Candidates who met the outlined criteria were sent a consent form and an invitation to coordinate a scheduled interview. Counter stories were collected and recorded via Zoom. Initial transcribing was automated via this platform and edited as necessary against the interview recordings. The framework for data analysis borrowed from Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) narrative coding approach of broadening, burrowing, and storying and restoring which Kim (2016) interprets as first broadening by "looking for a (broader) context of the story," then burrowing by "focus[ing] on more specific details of the data" (such as "participants' feelings, understandings, or dilemmas"), and finally storying and restoring by finding ways to represent and retell the stories "so that the significance of the lived experience of the participant

comes to the fore" (p. 207). Accordingly, larger segments were coded via descriptive coding (broadening), then organized via second-level coding into categories and eventual themes (burrowing), which in turn ultimately informed counter stories that were re-told individually and as part of a larger fictionalized metanarrative (storying and restoring).

Participants

The 28 women who participated in this study represent a range of backgrounds and experiences within the larger shared identity of being Latina members of Latin Greek Letter sororities within the Mid-Atlantic region who successfully graduated from college. While this inquiry is decidedly not a quantitative study, the inclusion of some traditionally quantitative metrics are helpful in shedding light on the sum total of a robust group that includes the stories and experiences of 28 individuals (See Table 1). All participants were traditional college students in the sense that they began their postsecondary education straight after high school, and only one became a non-traditional student after stopping out for a decade and then later returning to finish her degree. Relative to how long ago participants graduated from time of interview (which took place in the summer of 2022), the mode was having graduated two years ago (six participants) followed by the second most often of three years ago (five participants; see Table 1). The mode for the amount of time participants were undergraduate members of their respective organizations (the time between having become a member and when they graduated) was four semesters (eight participants) followed by six semesters (five participants). Identities around family's country of origin spanned 12 distinct Latin American nations (plus one non-Latin American country). Eight participants had ties to Puerto Rico, five participants were Dominican, and four were Salvadoran. Five participants hailed from two countries of origin and thus represented binational and/or bicultural identities. In terms of representation with where participants attended college, nine participants graduated from institutions in Maryland, nine from New Jersey, seven from Pennsylvania, and three from New York. There were no participants from the state of Delaware. Relative to LGLO membership, five distinct organizations were represented overall with 22 participants hailing from sorority A, followed by two participants from sorority B, two from sorority C, one from sorority D, and one from sorority E. With respect to college generational status identity, 20 responded yes they were first-generation college students, five were not, and three self-identified within a unique category of being the first in their family to be

educated within the U.S. system of higher education (as opposed to being educated at a post-secondary institution outside the U.S.). The most common institution represented among participants was a huge, public, R1 institution with 11 participants.

Table 1
Characteristics of Participants at a Glance

Participant	Preferred Pronouns	Ethnic Identity	Family's Nation of Origin Identity	College generation status	Where They Attended College	How long ago they graduated college	How many semesters participant was a member of their LGLO until they graduated	Institutional profile
Alicia	she/her	Latina	Bolivian	US 1st gen college student	Maryland	6 years ago	8 semesters	L Pu M1
Aracely	She/hers/ella	Latina	Ecuadorian	Yes	New Jersey	19 years ago	6 semesters	S Pr R2
Ariadna	she/hers	Latina	Puerto Rican	Yes	Maryland	5 years ago	5 semesters	H Pu R1
Ava	she/her	Latinx	Dominican	US 1st gen college student	Maryland	6 years ago	7 semesters	L Pu M1
Blanca	She/Her/Hers	Latina	Puerto Rican	Yes	Pennsylvania	21 years ago	2 semesters	M Pu R2
Claudia	She/her	Latina and Hispanic	Salvadoran	Yes	Maryland	2 years ago	3 semesters	L Pu M1
Daniela	she/her	Latina	Guatemalan	No	New Jersey	3 years ago	4 semesters	M Pu R2
Emilia	she/her/hers	Latina	Salvadoran	Yes	Maryland	21 years ago	5 semesters	M Pu R1
Evelyn	She/Her/Hers/Ella	Latina	Peruvian	Yes	New Jersey	5 years ago	6 semesters	H Pu R1
Fernanda	not provided	Latina	Dominican	Yes	New York	2 years ago	4 semesters	S Pr M1
Gabby	She/her/Ella	Latina	Puerto Rican	Yes	Maryland	15 years ago	7 semesters	H Pu R1
Gladys	She/Ella	Latina	Puerto Rican	No	Pennsylvania	25 years ago	11 semesters	H Pu R1
Glory	she	Latina	Dominican	Yes	New Jersey	15 years ago	6 semesters	H Pu R1
Isabela	She/Her/Hers	Latina & Middle Eastern	Puerto Rican and Iranian	No	New York	2 years ago	4 semesters	S Pr M1
Jimena	She/her	Latina	Puerto Rican	Yes	Pennsylvania	7 years ago	5 semesters	S Pu M1
Lisette	She/her/hers	Latina	Colombia	Yes	New Jersey	2 years ago	5 semesters	S Pu M1
Maite	She/Her/Ella	Afro-Latina	Panamanian and Puerto Rican	No	Pennsylvania	3 years ago	6 semesters	H Pu R1
Melinda	she/her	Hispanic	Puerto Rican	Yes	New Jersey	1.5 years ago	1 semester*	M Pu R2
Nancy	she/her	Latina	Colombian and Nicaraguan	Yes	Pennsylvania	25 years ago	7 semesters	M Pu R2
Nayeli	she/her	Latina	Dominican	Yes	New York	2 years ago	4 semesters	S Pr M1
Noemi	She/They/Ella	Latine	Dominican	US 1st gen college student	Pennsylvania	2 years ago	4 semesters	M Pu R2
Olivia	She/Hers	Latina	Colombian and American	Yes	Maryland	4 years ago	7 semesters	H Pu R1
Paula	she/her/hers	Latina	Ecuadorian and Costa Rican	Yes	Pennsylvania	3 years ago	4 semesters	H Pu R1
Samantha	she/her	Hispanic	Peruvian	No	New Jersey	3 years ago	3 semesters	H Pu R1
Sara	She her hers	Latina	Ecuador	Yes	New Jersey	10 years ago	9 semesters	H Pu R1
Sofia	she/her	Latina	Salvadoran	Yes	Maryland	5 years ago	6 semesters	L Pu M1
Vero	She / her / hers	Latina	Salvadoran	Yes	Maryland	3 years ago	4 semesters	H Pu R1
Yara	not provided	Latina	Honduran	Yes	New Jersey	1 year ago	4 semesters	S Pr M1

Note. College generation status includes an option for those participants who identified as being a first generation college student in American higher education meaning that at least one parent had a post-secondary education in their home country. Length of undergraduate membership was measured in semesters as this is a significant time unit in higher education. The key for institutional profile type is loosely based on the Carnegie Classification system where S = small enrollment, M = mid sized enrollment, L = large enrollment, H = huge enrollment, Pr = private institution, Pu = public institution, R1 = very high research activity, R2 =

high research activity, M1 = master's colleges and universities with larger programs (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education., n.d.).

FINDINGS

In making meaning of the emergent themes across interviews, I set up the basic structure of findings as being largely bifurcated into one of two buckets: those elements that participants viewed as benefits, that is, those skills and knowledge they believed they gained as a direct result of their LGLO membership; and those they viewed as challenges and difficulties brought about because of membership, the non-beneficial aspects related to membership.

Membership Benefits

The participants spoke handily and at length about the various benefits they believe they gleaned as a result of membership in their LGLO. Seven rather distinct (if at times, overlapping) themes emerged from within the overarching umbrella of Membership Benefits which include: Academics; Accountability; Professionalism; Leadership; Connecting and Reconnecting to Latinidad; Resilience and Perseverance; Networks; and Support.

Academics

While participants differed in terms of their academic preparedness prior to college with some having very solid academic backgrounds and others less so, every single participant talked about specific academic skills, practices, behaviors, and knowledge that was gleaned through their LGLO. This included namely: the practice of study hours that were set and mandated by the LGLO; teaching participants how to best organize and manage their time (which was critical considering various competing deadlines and assignments inside and out of the classroom); exposure to and knowledge of various learning styles which translated into being able to articulate what they needed because of how they best learned; as well as a handful of miscellaneous academic practices and skills.

Bar none, by far the most often cited practice by participants regarding learned academic practices was that of setting aside intentional time for studying through LGLO-mandated study halls or study hours. Glory said that her chapter "was really big on our academics…we were all just very focused on making sure that our grades were straight and we were going to graduate" and this was done largely through joint study sessions that dated back to when she was pledging." Olivia talked about how study

sessions were largely within her organization, but that once or twice a semester her chapter partnered with other Greek organizations on campus for large scale study hall events that included refreshments like coffee and donuts. (She said this practice had the added bonuses of helping build cross campus partnerships with other organizations while also serving as a recruitment tool in demonstrating in real time the premium her organization placed on academics.) Gladys similarly talked about study groups that took place both formally and informally, both within her organization and in partnering with other organizations.

Several participants discussed how their LGLO taught them skills around how to organize and manage their time. Ava talked about how organizing her time included setting a structured academic routine and said the practice began while pledging where she had "a set study schedule." In a similar vein of setting a schedule to manage her studies, Ava recalled learning through her LGLO the study skill of chunking time for accomplishing tasks and assignments. She said she applied this strategy in her undergraduate courses, as well as to her various tasks and responsibilities within the purview of sorority leadership, and admitted she still uses it now in her career.

Some participants talked about how their LGLO gave them exposure to different learning styles which in turn empowered them with a language and greater understanding of how they best learned. Nayeli said that "[my sorority] helped me realize how I best learn new information" by being compelled to experiment with various learning paradigms, namely during her orientation process. Alicia also talked about this process of being exposed to various study techniques and strategies, through which she learned what worked best for her and what was not as personally advantageous. Maite mentioned something similar that through different "academic workshops" as well as individualized conversations she learned there "are different ways to manage your time, these are different ways to study, not everyone studies the same way."

Accountability

Grade Point Average (GPA) requirements set at the overarching national level of sororities were discussed by several participants as being a standard that served as an accountability measure, mostly as it served as a motivator for members to be able to stay active in their organizations. GPA requirements are almost always tied to good and active standing, both within the context of the larger organization as well as to remain in good standing on campus with the university. Alicia talked about GPA

serving as a "benchmark" and "driving factor" where everyone "would literally tell each other, make sure your GPA is on point" so that they could remain active and participate in sorority activities. Claudia also spoke to this point of the minimum GPA requirement serving as an "incentive to keep up with your grades and academics to ensure that you're able to participate in all the fun stuff." Sofia talked about the GPA requirement as a motivator but that "in the grand scheme of things was not that hard to accomplish," which lends insight to the common practice expressed among several participants in which their individual chapter set an even higher GPA requirement to motivate and hold members accountable. In this vein, Evelyn talked about the national GPA minimum as the chapter's "primary layer expectation" and that her chapter maintained an internal higher expectation of 3.0 (as compared to the national requirement of 2.5). Yara similarly talked about having an internal chapter GPA expectation that was higher than the national requirement: "I think you need a 2.75 but our goal as undergrads was always to maintain a 3.0." Olivia also recalled that her chapter held a higher GPA minimum than the national one.

Beyond the GPA requirement that stuck out for many as a fairly standard accountability measure, a number of participants also talked about the accountability that was offered when members found themselves in academic difficulty. Some participants recalled practices in their LGLO chapters of reallocating work in which other members picked up the weight of chapter requirements and management (such as running events, recruitment, etc.) so that those experiencing academic difficulty could re-focus their efforts on their coursework. Others talked about deliberate programs that were largely created at the local levels of individual chapters often spearheaded by an academic chair position who was tasked with managing the chapter's academics. Gabby recalled that the "academic chair" was "a person who [was] monitoring your academics all the time and holding you accountable to them." She underscored the importance of this role in that poor academic performance could result in chapter suspension which in turn had ramifications for the livelihood of their organization, namely in being able to participate in recruitment activities and orientation which serves as the lifeblood in sustaining the organization, lest they go defunct and disappear.

In most instances the academic chair role was held by one of the active undergraduate members, but in a few instances the position was held by a chapter alumna who had since graduated. Olivia recalled that alumnae academic chairs at her chapter was preferred because the idea of an undergraduate having to manage their own academics plus that of their

peers felt too big a burden. Olivia commented, “if you think about it, an undergrad who does it, who’s checking them?” She continued, “I almost felt like, well, who am I to give advice on an academic plan? I'm not trained to do this.” Alternatively, she opined that alumnae offered advantageous perspectives of those who already graduated and figured out the so-called how-to’s of navigating through academic progress and offered guidance on things to do as well as pitfalls to avoid. The academic program Olivia outlined included regular check-ins throughout the semester so alumnae advisors always had a good gauge on where each of the members stood and thus could suggest when necessary if individuals should cut down on sorority involvement to re-focus on academics.

Professionalism

A key reason cited by participants for joining their LGLO was relative to the professionalism espoused by the organization. This also included the perception that in joining, they too would gain key professional skills. Sofia talked about how her sorority empowered her with tools to succeed in the professional world that she might not have been otherwise taught. For her, the development of professionalism took place through the learning of specific skills, such as how to create a resume, interview, dress professionally for an interview and for work, and engage in email etiquette. From her positionality as a first generation college student, Sofia underscored the importance of learning professionalism from her LGLO: “that whole world of professionalism is not anything that you or your family- that’s not even a conversation.” She continued that her sorority “allowed me to really understand, what is email etiquette? How do you come dressed when in an interview?. . .What is a resume? How do you interview?,” myriad behaviors, knowledge, and skills she summarized as knowing “how to…act professionally.” Ava also talked about professional skills and referred to them as “the basic skills that you need to be able to excel in this American work culture.” For her, that meant “the prioritizing, the planning, the organization, being able to put yourself out there and network and mingle, those type of skills is what I really took out of [membership].” Gladys added to this conversation in saying her sorority helped her learn how to code switch in knowing “what vocabulary are you gonna use in order to talk to certain leaders of an organization or certain offices” versus how you might conduct yourself with friends.

Many participants talked about how these skills were readily transferred to their careers and the world of work. Nancy spoke

extensively about how skills gleaned from her undergraduate experiences in her sorority continue to be applied to her career some 20 years later, such as learning how to "prioritize juggling so many different things" and "managing different personalities, having to work with people who you might not get along with or having to find solutions to problems." Through her experiences in her LGLO, Nancy said she learned both to "work[] with other people, or also being independent and getting something done on your own."

Leadership

Leadership was talked about across virtually all interviews as a benefit gained from LGLO membership, especially the specific skills of project management, time management, public speaking, and teamwork which I parse out below with a bit more detail. Perhaps one of the most fascinating examples of how leadership had a definitive positive outcome is Melinda's story. Melinda's experience is certainly unique in terms of leadership skills learned because shortly after becoming a member of her organization, she stopped out of school for 10 years. Melinda said she leveraged her way through various jobs and careers all the way up to her current role as a chief operating officer based upon the foundation of business skills she felt her sorority taught her. Melinda said,

> I got to learn how to budget things for an organization, budget forms, planning fundraisers, planning out what the semester looks like and planning goals, I got to do presentations. I got to learn what it really meant to network, I didn't even know what networking really was. But the business fundamentals I got from [my sorority] and even when I dropped out I took those skills and I made a pretty good career path for myself even without a college degree. I was doing work that someone with a college degree probably should have been [doing].

Melinda continued that because of those critical learned skills, she was able to continue to level up positions that "even my friends that had degrees they would talk to me like, 'how the hell did you get a director job without a graduate degree?'" Melinda's story highlights the absolute value that her sorority had in affording her important leadership skills that were successfully applied in the absence of a degree.

Project Management.

Leadership was further parsed out within a vector of developing the skill of project management. Project management was conceptualized as that which relates to being organized, multitasking, goal setting, event programming, prioritizing among various competing tasks, and seeing through to their successful completion. Glory said that because of her LGLO "I had to learn how to create events from scratch and see them through fruition." Jimena said, "I'm a great event planner…and I think that really started with [my sorority] and having to throw on all these programs, being able to work under pressure, all those kinds of things from running a chapter on my own."

Participants talked about using project management skills in the application to their academics as well as beyond just the scope of college in applying to jobs, careers, even to personal lives. Ariadna talked about learning project management that "carried on in my real life," skills that continue to present day in "working full-time and having a kid and having a husband and going to school full-time." Ariadna said that learning how to effectively manage projects "was a major help" in her current day to day.

Time Management.

Time management was a highly referenced take-away skill for multiple participants. Claudia said that in becoming a member of her sorority, she quickly learned that there was a delicate balance and juggle of competing interests of hosting lots of events and programs, being in charge of running the organization, having an internship, a part-time job, and managing her academics, and so prioritizing became the name of the game. Claudia opined that membership "showed me how to prioritize what I need to get done first and I learned that having a big load of work doesn't necessarily mean that I'm gonna fail."

Public Speaking.

A number of participants reflected on the importance of being able to take ownership of one's own voice and confidently speak in front of others. Public speaking was developed within the sorority, practiced in hosting programs and events for the campus community, and then further applied within the classroom as well as in various professional settings beyond the undergraduate sphere. Melinda talked about the benefit of learning public speaking which was developed in part because she "had to do programs and events in front of the whole student body, and we're

talking a couple hundred people and I was on stage speaking." Melinda felt that "I would have never been able to do that if I wasn't a part of [my sorority] and I don't think I would have been given the platform to do it." Jimena talked about developing a "love with public speaking" through the various opportunities she was afforded through her sorority. Yara said she learned how to speak publicly which in turn helped her "to articulate myself better in more serious situations" such as when she needed to talk with her professors.

Teamwork.

Another skill within the larger umbrella of leadership was in learning how to work cooperatively with others towards common goals, particularly when folks were from different backgrounds or had varying outlooks. Evelyn attributed her sorority as the conduit for learning how to be adaptable "to different work environments" and in "working with different people." Successful interpersonal skills were especially critical for managing conflict, such as Daniela's example who said that her undergraduate experiences serving in sorority leadership helped her become a problem solver, particularly because "things can get ugly." Daniela felt that developing strong skills of working with others empowered her to learn how to navigate successfully through conflict. Many talked about how this skill applied to coursework and to eventual careers, like Alicia who said that learning to work with others in a team setting was utilized both in her laboratory courses as an undergraduate and now in her job that is team-based in nature.

Connect/Reconnect to Latinidad

The desire to be in spaces with others from similar backgrounds and be among those who "would have similar struggles like having immigrant [parents], being first generation college students, that sort of thing" as Alicia opined, was expressed by a number of participants. For many, this desire to connect with others like themselves was catalyzed by a sense of culture shock they experienced on their college campuses. Claudia talked about the huge culture shock she experienced, particularly as a new transfer student, and after seeking out several potential spaces on campus felt like she finally found her niche in her sorority. She positively viewed her LGLO as being the catalyst for overcoming and mitigating that initial shock.

An even deeper layer of the theme of connecting and reconnecting to Latinidad is represented by those participants who talked about having

been systemically separated from Latinx peers within the sphere of education. Olivia, Noemi, and Lisette all seemed to talk about how prior to college, the higher they were placed within honors and Advanced Placement courses, the further removed they were from their ethnic and cultural peers. They all seemed to conceptualize their LGLOs as a way to reconnect to other Latinas who were also high achieving. Noemi said that her LGLO served as a space where she was able to un-pack her lived experiences of attending predominantly White schools. In a related vein, Blanca opined that her decision to join an LGLO was directly related to her K-12 educational experiences where she was in majority White spaces and often felt Othered for her ethnic identity and experienced alienating microaggressions.

Within this theme of LGLOs as a means to connect and reconnect to cultural heritage and community was a thread linking not knowing how to speak Spanish to a perception of somehow not being Latinx enough. Paula said, "my life was always like, never Spanish enough, but not American enough" but after feeling welcomed by her LGLO finally felt she "had a place somewhere" she belonged and fit. Melinda similarly said, while "I'm Puerto Rican, I don't speak Spanish" and that "not speaking Spanish makes me feel a little disconnected from my heritage." She said this disconnect was what prompted her to seek out LGLOs as a potential conduit she thought might "help me be more connected to my roots." Ariadna also was among this group of women who talked about her Latina identity as a source of questioning from others "cause I couldn't speak Spanish," and that external challenges to her ethnic and racial identities were doubled as an Afro-Latina. Ariadna said that her sorority was a way to connect to her cultures and furthermore validated "that I could be both."

Resilience and Perseverance

Perhaps one of the more powerful themes to come up from participants was an expression of the resilience and perseverance fomented as a direct result of their LGLO membership, particularly in the face of adverse circumstances. Participants talked about learning for the first time in their lives to speak up for themselves, to stand tall (both literally and figuratively), to take ownership of their lives and their trajectories, and as some said, to not take no for an answer. Stories like Sofia's epitomize the notion of their LGLOs teaching them how to be resilient. Sofia talked about how her long held dream of becoming an educator came perilously close to being unrealized when she was in danger of failing the course associated with her internship. Adverse experiences with her mentor

teacher instilled in her a doubt of her capabilities: “she's really making me be like, no this is not what I'm meant to do. Maybe I'm not cut out for this. She really made me doubt my identity.” She continued that this experience so shook her foundation of confidence that she recalled that it is “one of the things that still sticks with me to this day.” Some six years later into a successful and fulfilling teaching career, Sofia is still haunted by those memories that cut her down as an undergraduate. Sofia pointedly said it was her sorority and the lessons she learned from it that helped her persevere in that rather life-defining moment and ultimately prevail: “I feel like [my sorority] taught me to fight for my spot, don't just give up. You're so close to the finish line, use your resources. Figure out what you need to do. You got this.” With this mindset, Sofia “fought for my spot” and found creative working solutions to persevere and overcome. Sofia continued that

> at the end of the day [my sorority] taught me: Don't Give up. Use your resources. Figure out, like, when there's a will there's a way. You can do this. Don't give up. And so I feel like I learned that through the process I definitely was like, I’m a fighter. I'm not just gonna sit here and let you fail me.

A handful of other participants also talked about how their LGLO membership helped them develop a sense of perseverance and resilience. Blanca talked about how “when I felt like giving up it gave me a purpose and a reason to keep pushing.” She continued that this purpose and its related “reason to keep pushing” was the single ”most important factor for me” in graduating. Gladys expressed the sentiment that through the hardship endured in pledging and keeping her chapter alive single-handedly, she adopted a mindset that “if I can get through that experience, I can get through anything.” Alicia talked about the experience of needing to take extra time to earn her diploma than initially anticipated, and how her organization helped her stay motivated and keep her eye on the prize. Similarly, Vero said that when she had to add an extra semester because of a failed course, her organization helped sustain her “to really keep myself pushing.”

Networks

Several participants talked about their LGLOs as a network in being bonded with women through time, space, and distance where the tether was their shared sorority membership. Women who would otherwise be strangers were not because as Nancy said, “we have the

sorority in common." Emilia said that the connection that membership fosters a shared sense of closeness amongst all members in being "connected by this organization" that transcends how similar or different they are. Perhaps no one said it better than Claudia who in talking about the bond amongst women that is kindled through shared membership within the same network spoke about this ability to

> always find people in any chapter, in any area or region, or really anywhere, you're gonna find sisters that are going to motivate you because you have something in common with them, and that's the sorority, that's the organization…You may have come to it for different reasons, you may have had a different journey in coming to it, your story may be so different. You may not even be alike, but because you have [the sorority] as a common ground there's a natural responsibility to want the best for you as a sister.

A subtheme within that network of members who actively want to help each other out is that of connecting one another to job opportunities and helping career growth. Blanca opined unequivocally that her membership afforded her "the power of networking and how it can open doors of opportunities for jobs." She continued that "the first couple of jobs I've ever gotten were through sisters referring me, recommending me, being references." Glory also talked about landing her first job post-graduation because a sister shared her resume with her mother who worked in the same field. Glory said within the larger context of the 2008 recession, her sorority network allowed her a foot in the door to interview whereas nothing else she tried to do on her own came to fruition. Claudia and Ariadna shared very similar experiences of their first jobs post-graduation having been landed because of fellow members within their LGLOs.

For some, membership in their LGLO afforded participants access to a larger network of "Greek Life" (which was almost exclusively referred to by participants as that which is comprised of Black, Latinx, and other multicultural organizations, not mainstream ones). Emilia recalled the interview for her first supervisory position where she was up against a candidate who had the requisite in-field experience. Emilia's experience- though transferable- took place within the scope of her sorority leadership. Emilia recalled saying to the interviewer, "Well I've never supervised at a job, but for my sorority I'm responsible for maintaining four schools in the area, follow protocol, procedure, that they understand expectations, that

they're following mandates with paperwork, I ran down the whole thing." Emilia said that the interviewer was herself a member of a historically Black Greek Letter Organization that there was a shared paradigm of being members within this larger network of Greek Life. This in turn meant there was also a shared understanding that the work and leadership experiences Emilia had through her LGLO were valid, thus netting in her securing the job.

Support

The last key significant theme was that of the support that was beget as a direct result of LGLO membership. Participants talked about feeling supported by their sisters both in accepting and welcoming them for who they were, as well as feeling like others within the organization had "their back" when times were hard (this was a commonly used expression among participants). Ava talked about viewing her sorority as having gained a squad of "ride or dies," a sense of having unconditional support that she feels has been maintained "still up to this day." She said this support was particularly important in the face of alienation on campus where she did not feel she belonged on campus. Ava continued that "because we've always had each other, that feeling never really lasted long." Gabby said her sorority empowered her in "knowing that I had a core group of people who had my back and I wasn't alone." For Gabby, support meant being "around other women who were like myself, the first person to go to college." Sofia also talked support from her sorority in her identity as a first-generation college student. She appreciated being in community with others from similar backgrounds, who were also the first in their family to go to college and who like her did not always fully understand its bureaucracy. Sofia said it was so important to be able to rely on one another for navigating things like FAFSA, financial aid, registration, etc.

Within the larger theme of support felt, some participants talked about feeling particularly supported by their LGLOs when they experienced struggles with their mental health and wellbeing. Olivia recalled experiencing some "pretty serious mental health issues my last semester." She said that it was because of her sorority that fostered a "strong social connection that I had built over the years, there was always someone to be with" which she felt helped her get to the finish line of graduating. Vero went so far as to say she did not believe she would have graduated had it not been for the support she received from her fellow members, particularly when she was struggling with her mental health.

Alicia similarly said that "I went through some mental health stuff and it was really hard. Had I not had the support that I got from sisters that I was particularly close with, maybe I wouldn't have made it through those dark times." Blanca also talked about "the sense of community" and support from her sorority when "I struggled with depression in college."

This sense of support is one that a handful of participants felt was a community that they continued to depend on well beyond the undergraduate experience, particularly for participants who became members of their organizations 10+ years ago. Glory talked of the continued support gleaned from her organization as having compounded over time, and mostly through the lens of family-like relationships where her sorority sisters were "tias" to her children. Emilia also talked about the staying power of support from her organization through various life chapters and phases. Emilia reflected in thinking about "the way that I have had people literally have my back" through "the things that life throws at you that you just don't expect."

Membership Drawbacks

In reflecting on the ways in which participants felt their LGLO membership was not beneficial, a clear theme of pressure emerged across interviews. In fact, the challenges that were discussed centered almost exclusively around a sense of pressure felt. Pressure manifested in a number of different ways and included the pressure caused in not having enough members; a sense of having to invest everything into one's organization; alumnae pressures via expectations to perform while simultaneously not having enough alumnae support; the perception of needing to be excellent; pressure from the national organization; and pressure from the university, namely through unsupportive OFSLs. The consequences of the pressure in all its iterations largely resulted in negative impact on one's academics and missed opportunities, as well as a sense of acute burnout that required stepping back or away.

Too Few Members

Participants talked about the structural pressure that was specifically brought about in not having enough active undergraduate members. Pressure resulted because expectations were not necessarily tempered to take into consideration chapters or organizations with lower member numbers, and individuals expressed the hardship of having to divvy up the same amount of work among less people which resulted in a heavy lift for all. Lisette talked about the pressure of having to perform at

a high level in that "it was stressful trying to do everything with being a smaller chapter and also trying to survive." Alicia alluded to a similar necessity in that immediately upon becoming a member of her organization, there was a need to "hit the ground running" in taking "on multiple different leadership positions within the chapter….because there just wasn't enough of us." Aracely recalled that as an undergraduate she and her chapter sisters "had three positions a piece…we were carrying the chapter by ourselves for two years." Paula likewise talked about "the workload of running" a chapter that in terms of membership had "smaller numbers compared to others." She continued that the pressure "to keep the chapter alive" with so few members meant that "sometimes chapter business overtook my school priorities." Gladys also talked about the pressure of being one of two or at times the sole member to hold down the chapter and having to complete various requirements. As a transfer student, she had to do this twice: once at the chapter she founded at her first college, and then all over again at the institution from which she earned her degree. Gladys talked about the pressure of having to do it all on her own and with limited funding and resources to boot.

Need to Invest All

The pressure created because of having only a few members to manage the chapter relates directly to a linked subtheme of participants who felt like they had to pour their whole selves into the maintenance and survival of their organization via their chapter. Jimena's story particularly exemplifies this notion of an internalized pressure of feeling compelled to devote one's entirety into the organization, even if it was to the detriment or outright sacrifice of academics (which is counter to the very espoused purposes of these organizations as all claim being ones where academics are prioritized). As the sole active undergraduate on her campus, Jimena talked about the blood, sweat, and tears that she invested in trying to uphold the chapter all by herself, one that she herself established as a solo founder. She pointedly recalled a session with her therapist in which she was asked, "do you want to graduate or do you want your chapter to survive" and without a hesitation Jimena immediately responded: "my chapter." Jimena talked about harboring very mixed feelings about her undergraduate experience and said "I still am very proud of what it means to be a member, but I burned myself out." When asked to further expound upon why Jimena thought she was driven to a point where she reflexively articulated that she was more invested in the survival of her chapter at the expense of her academics, she answered that her LGLO "was my legacy."

She continued that "who I was became very entwined with my letters and what I represented on campus" where she was not just Jimena but "part of something bigger."

Gladys' story was parallel to Jimena's in a number of ways in that she also was a founder for her chapter, establishing it where her organization did not yet exist at that college. Gladys was one of two founding members, but when she transferred schools, she found herself as the sole member and thus all on her own in needing to lay the groundwork all over again in establishing a chapter there, as well. Gladys talked about having little support with the closest nearby sisters being in New York while she was in Pennsylvania. She recalled, "I didn't have anybody near me." Like Jimena, Gladys talked about prioritizing the chapter above her academics and even her wellbeing at times. When asked why she thought she did that and felt that carrying the chapter was so vital, Gladys said that in pledging "she made a commitment" to her organization. Similar to Jimena who lamented joining an organization for the purpose of having community and then feeling cheated that her undergraduate experience really did not really consist of that, Gladys also said that she desired and felt she missed out on "that sisterly type of bond." She often felt lonely "cause I didn't have anybody around, and that really, it sucked."

Alumnae Pressure

Another iteration of the pressure felt by participants was expressed as having come from within the chapter itself, particularly from alumnae members who had since graduated. The relationships with alumnae certainly seems complicated. Some participants stated pointedly that they joined their organizations because of the alumnae and what they represented as potential mentors and teachers. However, there was also a very real expression by participants who talked about alumnae being involved in their undergraduate chapters to such a degree that there was a perception of being held to their expectations of excellence and needing to perform at a level which at times felt overbearing or hard to live up to. Daniela reflected particularly from the vantage point of having served as the president of her chapter and having to navigate the pressures of alumnae who regularly voiced their opinions on how they felt the chapter should be managed.

Another way in which alumnae were perceived to be unhelpful and adding pressure was through a lack of constructive support, or not being there at all. Lisette spoke frankly about a lack of support she felt from her alumnae sisters in that "a majority of our alum at the time were

more critical. So they weren't really providing support but they would say, 'you did this wrong,' or 'why didn't you do this,'...so the support was very limited." Paula reflected on a similar sentiment in feeling like alumnae solely offered criticism when they felt like the undergraduates erred, that alumnae were "quick that if something went wrong, they were so quick to be like, '[Undergrads], how did you let this happen?' and it's like, well, we're handling so many other things. We ask for your help but we barely get it."

Internalized Pressure to be Excellent

A somewhat more nebulous permutation of pressure felt was an internalized sense of a perceived expectation to be excellent. Some said these expectations started well before college and began within their families in how they were raised, like Alicia who talked about familial values that prioritized academic excellence. Alicia talked about "coming from a Latina background" where "there wasn't room for mistakes, you had to be perfect, you have to put your best foot forward." Alicia said "that there's a perfectionism that is expected, and anything less is like, 'oh you're a bad daughter,' or 'you're a bad student.'" She continued that this unrealistic ideal of "always hav[ing] to have this perfect image" compels one "to put on a show"..."even if things are not perfect."

Gabby talked about a slightly different sense of internalized expectation from her family, that of the "pressure being the only person in my family to go to college" where she "had to be excellent." She connected this expectation of excellence as also represented within her organization that likewise "demands excellence and exceptionalism." She continued that this expectation at times insists upon "being excellent and exceptional without recognizing the human that is going through it." Gabby said that this pressure in part came from the expectations of feeling like she had to represent her organization at all times, regardless of if she was wearing her letters or not. Sofia also talked about internalized expectations of feeling the need to represent the Latinx community well vis-a-vis her sorority and to strive for excellence because of that. In the absence of other LGLOs on campus when she was an undergraduate Sofia said, "at that time we were like, we wanna be the best, we wanna strive for gold. We wanna make sure we are top notch and that really helped push us." Emilia talked about a very similar internalized sense of expectation that came from being the first multicultural Greek lettered organization on her campus. She said there was an expectation and responsibility for the future sisters of this chapter she was seeking to establish as a founding member, as well as an

internalized sense of responsibility to other future Greeks that would come after her.

Pressure from the Overarching Organization

Beyond the micro layer of pressure from one's individual chapter, many talked about pressure that came from their larger organization from a top-down perspective. Some talked about how "nationals" or "HQ" (as they were variously referred to) were perceived as being rather out of touch with the happenings and challenges on the local chapter level. Daniela said that she felt her organization at the national level focused solely on "business, business, business" to the detriment of other aspects like the "sisterhood" and academics. She felt that this "emphasis" on business prioritized "national deadlines getting met" above all else. Paula understood the prioritization of business from the national perspective for the livelihood of the organization, but questioned, "how are we supporting our members fully to also be college students?" She continued that "running a chapter is like a business and it's hard." Daniela was particularly critical of the overarching organization sharing her belief that "they want sisters to have better grades and they want them to have an academic wellness plan and they want them to be involved in [the sorority]" but that the sorority "relies on sisters to basically figure out your academics on your own." Daniela continued that "even though one of the first things we're told is [our sorority] was based as an academic sorority, where? I don't see emphasis on any academics, I don't see any proper help." She opined that having a top-down national program or system for academic success and accountability is necessary but lacking.

Sometimes pressure from the overarching LGLO was expressed through a pressure or outright mandate to host orientation to bring in new members. Maite talked about having been told by the overarching national organization that her chapter needed to have back-to-back semesters of orientation in order to maintain good standing with regard to a required minimum number of active undergraduate members. She felt that because her chapter was navigating through growing pains that they were not well positioned to do so, but they were required to comply. Similarly, Samantha also talked about her chapter having been mandated to host a line "or you're gonna lose your chapter charter," she recalled. Samantha talked about how disappointing it was to not have their national organization advocate for them. In the absence of support, Samantha said they were forced to host "five lines back to back to back because of needing active members." She recalled that "we didn't feel like we're ready to go on line,

but at this point we needed numbers and I will say they are great sisters but they weren't really ready."

In another vein, Samantha talked about the strains she experienced as an undergraduate because as a national entity the organization does not "have enough time or manpower to check in on every single chapter." She said this is particularly challenging when so many chapters have unique needs and "need extra attention." Emilia acknowledged that these pressures are in large part due to a lack of sufficient infrastructure and "internal support" as a result of the relative youth of these organizations as compared to others that have been around for much longer: "we're still really new, we haven't been around hundreds of years, we don't have access to financial resources like other orgs do, we don't have access to alumni networks like other orgs do." She continued that the lack of an extensive alumnae network often results in relying on leaders to drive forward the organization who are barely out of college themselves.

Pressure from University

Yet another form of pressure was derived from the university, particularly as manifested through the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life (OFSL). OFSLs are charged with being a resource and support for managing the various Greek letter organizations on a particular campus, but some participants talked about the challenging relationships they had with their OFSLs. Isabela, Fernanda, and Nayeli's stories taken together offer great insight into this perspective of pressure experienced from one's university.

Isabela said the challenges began in having a revolving door of OFSL staffers, many of whom had little to no knowledge of the unique particularities of non-mainstream Greek organizations like her own. Isabela continued to say this was a huge burden on her organization in making "them struggle even more because now we're trying to prove ourselves on campus…we had to constantly be educating other people."

Isabela's linesister Nayeli spoke in her interview of feeling taken advantage of and tokenized by the OFSL and university at large. Nayeli felt that her institution used her sorority as proof that they were a diverse and inclusive campus but without actually doing any of the work of helping to support them to thrive. Nayeli said that overall she and her linesisters felt a burden of being "'the Latinas on campus' [pantomimes air quotes], that was our label…they tried to give us…the burden of educating people on diversity and inclusion and cultural sensitivity and cultural competence and cultural humility and cultures." Nayeli continued

that the OFSL would often volunteer her organization for various DEI initiatives and she felt they "had to bear the responsibility to educate these people as to what we do, as to who we are… it was an added burden like, 'Okay, now educate everyone at [university] as to what diversity is.'" Without a doubt, these are certainly embarrassing examples of institutions using students of color to tick a box to demonstrate performative diversity without putting in actual work toward the ends of promoting and supporting inclusion and equity while also placing the burden on students to do that work.

Fernanda talked about learning that there were very specific discrepancies as it related to money and funding between her LGLO and mainstream historically White organizations. She said that relative to students of color it seemed "there was always a lack of [money] when it came to events" that they wanted to host. Fernanda said she recalled that when they "would come up and advocate for themselves, there was always a backlash because of the way that the staff perceived them advocating for themselves when it came to funding." Because of her unique position of being the president of the council that oversaw the various multicultural organizations plus having an insider within the college that allowed her "access to knowing how much everybody else was getting funding," Fernanda learned the true extent of the funding discrepancies by organization in that her and other multicultural organizations received far less funding than the historically White Greek letter organizations.

In addition, incentives were skewed to favoring organizations that boasted more members (which tended to also be the mainstream White organizations). Within the "points packet" requirements that served as a standard from the OFSL for the Greek organizations within their purview to be measured as a way of assessing performance, organizations were often rewarded when they surpassed the set standards, notably by being awarded with extra funding. This is a hard system to excel in as a chapter of five active members going up against organizations that boast 50+ active members, where larger organizations clearly have advantages in winning coveted extra funding. Fernanda readily recognized that members of those organizations "were able to do a lot more stuff because they had a pool for …members," and that metrics and incentives that were tied to rewarding more populous organizations was an inherently unfair system.

Maite also talked extensively about the lack of support she received from the OFSL at her institution when she was an undergraduate. Similar to Fernanda, Maite had friends who were members of mainstream organizations and was able to see the discrepancy in treatment and

resources allocated. Additionally, Maite recalled that whereas her ideas on behalf of her LGLO seemed to be routinely dismissed or rejected, "my friends from IFC and Panhellenic…their ideas weren't shut down because the system was made for them and they had the resources *because* of that." She attributed this to a desire on the part of the OFSL "to make us fit in that system that clearly wasn't working."

Ramifications of Pressure

As a result of the varying iterations of pressure felt through LGLO membership, two main consequences were discussed by participants. First, that pressure caused a negative impact on academics and often precluded pursuing opportunities outside of membership, like other co-curricular involvement, internships, and study abroad experiences. Second, sustained pressure caused a burnout so intense that many participants talked about having to step away from their organizations for an extended period of time in order to prioritize their wellbeing and health.

Impact on Academics and Other Opportunities.

Gladys attributed her trying to do it all by herself as definitely having had an impact on her overall academics, her course performance and grades, and ultimately extended the time it took for her to graduate. She also talked about how she feels like she missed out on a number of quintessentially collegiate experiences because she was so singularly focused on maintaining her chapter. Gladys said these missed opportunities included substantive involvement in other on-campus organizations, pursuing internships, and engaging in study abroad which she recalled she "was too involved in the organization to even put forth the effort to apply." Nancy similarly talked about how if there are regrets she has, they are related to opportunities she was not able to pursue because of the heavy lift of managing her chapter. Paula reflected that the hardship of "struggling sometimes academically" due to prioritizing chapter business was at times difficult for her to reconcile being part of "an academic sorority."

Emilia spoke from the perspective as a long-time alumna advisor to her undergraduate chapter and having seen the negative impact that pressures for involvement had relative to members' academics. Emilia said acknowledging the very real pressure to perform has influenced the ways in which she mentors her chapter undergraduates in emphasizing the

absolute priority of school, even if that is to the direct detriment of the chapter she herself founded:

> Many times I've told my own undergrads and my chapter, let the chapter go, let it go, let it go, because [the sorority] is not gonna give you your degree and they're not gonna give you a job or a career. They only help, [the sorority] helps you, supports you, connects you, but at the end of the day if it's between you failing and you getting some kind of chapter award, I don't care about that chapter award. I need you to be a success, because at the end of the day that's what we founded this chapter for, was for your success…And it's a hard place to come from as a founder, like no one wants to ever say, 'don't keep my chapter running.' But I know that you have to put yourself in focus, and school is your job. You came to this university for a reason, many times with other people's dreams on yours, on your success. So yes [the sorority] is here and yes we started this chapter for people just like you and yes I want you to be successful and yes I want you to have a network…and I want you to experience all of the things but I need you to remember what your job is…it is to graduate.

Emilia concluded that "at the end of the day you are one person and you can't sacrifice your academic career for the success of this chapter."

Burnout and Disengagement.

Related to pressure from various forms and iterations, some participants talked about having experienced such an acute sense of burnout that they needed to step away from the organization altogether to rest. Ariadna talked about how she often saw burnout among chapter sisters, and recalled a linesister who stepped back in her final semester before graduation to focus on finishing strong which she felt "was completely understandable because you've been under this pressure for so long." Ariadna believed that burnout was almost inevitable, especially if you joined the organization early on in college and said "the younger that you join, the more quickly you get burned out." This belief also colored the way in which she mentored younger chapter sisters in essentially giving them permission to prioritize their academics by stepping back if they needed to, mostly because this was not a message she felt she herself had received. Ariadna recalled advising them, "you might not wanna be active at some point and that's okay because you started when you were so young, you're going to get tired quick."

Jimena talked about needing time to heal from her undergraduate experience and did so by stepping away from her organization after graduation. She said, “it's been almost 10 years and I think I still have a little bit of bitterness about it.” Jimena has since reconciled her undergraduate experience in making new memories and new experiences as an alumna, but it seems like her healing process is ongoing. Gladys also talked about experiencing burnout after her undergraduate experiences of investing her all into trying to maintain her chapter singlehandedly. Her efforts and sacrifices resulted in feeling exhausted and lonely, and she felt she needed to take a break after graduation. Nancy similarly talked about stepping away from her organization, in her case for nearly 20 years before coming back to help her undergraduate chapter get back in active standing in supporting a long anticipated revival line. Her chapter continues to be active now, but she talked about it being a constant struggle to stay in good standing because of myriad requirements and continued challenges. Ava voiced a similar perspective of being so tired from the grueling years of her undergraduate experience that she needed to step away before she felt comfortable coming back to be engaged and involved in her organization again. Vero, too, recalled that shortly after graduating that “I was burned out, I don’t have the capacity to do this.”

DISCUSSION

Recommendations for Practice and Policy *Reevaluation Within OFSLs*

One of the most logical and necessary first-step recommendations is that university Offices of Fraternity and Sorority Life reevaluate their current policies, processes, procedures, and practices relative to the LGLOs they are charged with supporting on their respective campuses. As Garcia (2020) wrote relative to her study on Latinx belongingness at PWIs, “institutions should carefully consider whether ethnic-based organizations including Latina/o sororities and fraternities are provided supports necessary to ensure these groups not only exist on campus, but that they can thrive” (p. 191). Delgado-Guerrero and Gloria (2013) similarly wrote that “institutions should welcome Latina-based sororities into the university environment as legitimate and of equal stature with other student groups” (pp. 375-376). Participants in this study represent five distinct LGLOs, and while all talked about the invaluable benefits, nearly all also talked about the pressure they felt via membership, some to the point of burnout that necessitated stepping away to restore and heal. Participants in my study demonstrably shared that necessary supports were not provided on their college campuses, and a few explicitly discussed

understanding that their organizations were not just given inadequate support, but were given diametrically less than mainstream organizations. LGLOs do not and will not (in the immediate future, anyway) have members on campus in the hundreds like their historically White counterparts (nor do they seem to desire this, as articulated in Estrada et al.'s (2017) study). Accordingly, OFSLs must pay special attention to assessing the ways in which they support or fail to attend to "the needs of multicultural Greeks [that] are very different than those of traditional mainstream Greek organizations" with respect to "governance structure, recruitment of prospective members, the membership intake/educational process for initiates" (Guardia & Evans, 2008, p. 178). These unique aspects should be taken into consideration when making recommendations and mandates for its members to ensure that a one-size-fits-all standard is not employed.

This study can certainly serve as a starting block for universities and OFSLs, specifically, to consider: what do we know about LGLOs and how are their needs the same and/or unique from mainstream organizations? Ultimately, it would behoove offices to engage in formalized evaluation processes to consider what the unique needs of LGLOs are, and how those are currently being met or not. Evaluation should include areas in which LGLO members feel are strengths as well as areas of challenge and pain. Just as colleges and universities submit to regular assessment through accreditation processes to ensure what they are doing aligns with their stated mission, purpose, etc., so should be expected of OFSLs. It was a striking revelation that the stories of participants who became members of their LGLOs 20 some years ago recounted nearly identical stories to those relatively newer members from four years ago in terms of challenges faced. This finding suggests there have not been any substantive reevaluations within OFSLs especially as it relates to support and resources allocated to LGLOs. Participants from this study do not necessarily seem to be advocating for a blanket abolishing of standardized practices for assessment, but rather an opportunity to revisit expectations to allow for "some leniency" as opined by Isabela who felt that standards helped chapters excel, grow, and advance. She felt that standards were a good source of accountability, but that it was important for these standards to be created in a way that took into consideration that each campus and organization is unique and "different so they can't be held to the same standard."

Given the diverse needs of LGLOs, specifically, applying a one-size-fits-all model of benchmarks for all Greek organizations to adhere to

does not work. Greater nuance is required to promote the success of all students where equity, not equality, is the goal. A call for developing new standards that are culturally-specific and culturally-embracing and validating will be necessary. In the creation of these standards, LGLOs and their national overarching leadership bodies should be invited to participate in a co-constructive process done together and not for them and then imposed onto them.

Reevaluation within LGLOs

LGLOs from the perspective of the larger organization would also stand to benefit from engaging in similar evaluation practices as was suggested for OFSLs. Despite time and space, members of their organizations are reporting almost identical stories relative to pressure felt that is engendered by expectations of having to perform despite having very few members to rely on, or feeling like academics is not actually prioritized in truly meaningful ways from a national perspective. This suggests a misalignment of values with which formalized processes of evaluation can certainly assist. Such an evaluation should consider, what is it that organizations say they prioritize, and what are they actually prioritizing in practice and allocating resources towards through actions and policies? The participants in this study suggest an incongruence, of a focus on business at the expense of sisterhood and academics which should serve as a jumping-off point for organizations to engage in meaningful evaluations of where they are at and charting out their futures via visioning.

Specific to the focus of this particular inquiry and based on participant commentary, there is a suggestion that LGLOs would do well to include in their evaluation processes considerations on how to establish and better support top-down academic programs and initiatives. Those participants who reported on robust academic programs all said those were locally created and maintained, that nothing of substance came from the overarching organization other than a standard for minimum GPA requirements (which, it is worth noting, several participants talked about those being inadequate or easy to achieve and thus implemented their own). Both the participants whose chapter had local-level academic programs and those who did not said they felt their overarching organization should have more meaningful involvement in supporting academic initiatives rather than expecting individual chapters to manage this on their own. In this way, LGLOs should in their evaluation processes pay close attention to their current practices and resources around academic support, specifically.

Recommendations for LGLOs to Move Forward

In addition to the recommendation that both OFSLs and the larger structures of LGLOs engage in much needed reevaluation, a number of other recommendations should be considered for the vitality and continued existence of LGLOs. As such, I have outlined a handful of recommendations on how to move forward toward a stronger future. These include connecting with or fortifying partnerships with existing university resources on college; considering options of consolidation namely through metropolitan chapters; and evaluating the true value of continued partnership with universities that are unable or unwilling to adequately support these organizations.

As part of the interviews, participants were asked about support and resources they felt positively contributed to their academic journeys and the process of graduating that were external to their LGLOs. A whole swath of amazing feedback came up, and across interviews clear patterns emerged including: pre-matriculation summer orientation programs that were tailored to minority, low-SES, and first generation college status students; minority mentorship programs that partnered participants with near peers and in some cases faculty and staff of color; key faculty relationships largely within one's major or field of study; campus academic resources like Writing Centers and Tutoring Centers; and cultural resource centers like those for students of color and occasionally for Latinx students specifically. These findings suggest that LGLOs and universities would do well to create new partnerships therein or fortify existing relationships for the ultimate benefit of Latinx students.

Another low-risk solution to help fortify existing LGLO chapters, particularly where there are habitually low member numbers and/or known campus obstacles, might be to partner within the organization, namely through metropolitan chapters. Metropolitan chapters seem like a viable example of how LGLOs can promote better long term outcomes of partnering, especially in spaces and campuses where there are low numbers of ethnic and racial minority students in general and low numbers of Latinx students specifically where recruitment of new members can be challenging. This is a practice that several historically Black National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) organizations engage in, especially in geographic areas and colleges where campus demographics, enrollments, and support structures are not strong and might hinder chapter success. It offers an ability to partner together to divide the work and weight of carrying a chapter so they can continue to exist and serve as a positive

helpful space and community for those who might most need it and benefit. These kinds of chapters could help continue the longevity of the organization especially where support is limited or non-existent.

In the event that OFSLs are unable or unwilling to re-evaluate their practices in meaningful ways that help to offset or otherwise eliminate the pressure that is experienced by undergraduate members, LGLOs should begin to consider redefining their relationships with their university hosts. Namely, if their host colleges and universities are not willing to relook at and genuinely revise practices that result in real pressure on LGLO members that LGLOs in turn replicate in order to maintain active charters to continue to exist on those campuses (a burden that is most heavily carried by the undergraduates), these organizations should reevaluate the pros and cons of maintaining this tenuous partnership. I recognize that this is a seemingly radical recommendation and one that is likely to be outside the limits of what would ever be reasonably considered as a first, second, or third solution by LGLOs. However, given the current landscape of higher education and the continued calls for the abolishment of Greek Life as a supposed increasingly outdated vestige of college life, coupled with the real threats to culturally-specific subspaces as a result of the present day persecution and elimination of DEI objectives nationwide, LGLOs would be wise to proactively consider a reality in which Greek Life (particularly multicultural Greek Life) ceases to exist on college campuses in the ways we currently understand them. Insofar as LGLOs maintain that they are diametrically distinct from mainstream organizations in their purpose, mission, values, and outcomes, it might make sense to proactively and officially separate from universities and consider other ways to fortify them from within their existing organization structures while building new ones to still be in service to their original missions of providing support, resources, and community for Latina college students.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study marks the start of what should continue as critical investigation and inquiry within the larger conversation of LGLOs. This study would do well to be offset by future ones from additional qualitative as well as complementary quantitative paradigms to investigate and further substantiate their value. This includes but is not limited to longitudinal studies following members over an extended period of time; comparative studies like those that might compare the experiences of individuals who became members of their LGLOs during their

undergraduate experiences versus those who gained membership post-baccalaureate degree conferral; studies from a specifically systems or organizational theory orientation (particularly as it relates to the LGLOs through the lens of their overarching, national entities and the OFSLs that host them on campuses); and studies that offer more robust and varied representation of several LGLOs as well as institution types in the Mid-Atlantic beyond Predominantly White Institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions. Potential future inquiries that seek out these specific perspectives would be crucial in adding to the robustness of legitimizing the true value of LGLOs.

LIMITATIONS

There are a number of limitations in this inquiry. As with any study, we only know as much as participants are willing to share with us, and there is a real limitation in not knowing the stories of those who did not want to participate. While the majority of participants talked about the majority positive benefits gained from their membership and seemed open and honest about the real drawbacks and limitations, perhaps we do not know the full extent of the story that might have been furnished from individuals for whom they do not feel LGLO membership was beneficial-academically or otherwise. Additional for consideration is my positionality as a cultural insider on two points: that of being a Latina-identified woman and member of an LGLO. I viewed these memberships as a value add in this study on the grounds of increased insider cultural understanding, but can also be viewed understandably as a limitation. Time and, relatedly, the number of participants involved in this research inquiry were also limitations. Ideally, numerous accounts of Latina-identified women who are members of various LGLOs would take part in constructing a narrative around the experiences of the academic skills, behaviors, and opportunities fostered in relation to their LGLO membership. In a perfect study this would include women from multiple LGLOs from all across the country who went to varying institutional types and represent different statuses in relation to immigration status and race (which too often is incorrectly conflated with ethnicity or assumed that all Latinx people share similar racial experiences). There is great plurality that exists within this subgroup of Latina LGLO members and much could be gleaned from additional inquiries to supplement this one which was most concerned with producing depth and rich, thick description.

CONCLUSION

The perspectives of the 28 participants that make up this study corroborate the value of LGLO membership relative to their academic experiences in college. Previous literature about LGLOs include the findings that within its members LGLOs help foster a critical sense of belonging and mattering in the face of marginalization, isolation, and alienation on college campuses; they promote the development of leadership skills and professionalism; they inculcate a sense of responsibility, civic engagement and service to the community; and they foster academic achievement, all of which is infused by strong underpinnings of familismo. Through a narrative inquiry methodology, the participants' counter stories were collected and re-presented to convey the themes that emerged about experiences and benefits that extended well beyond the realm of college achievement and success. The benefits they talked about were principally around academics, accountability, leadership, an ability and opportunity to connect and reconnect to Latinidad, resilience and perseverance, networks, and support. Their stories are tempered by accounts of membership drawbacks that are largely couched within an overarching theme of pressure. This includes: the pressure from having too few members, a felt need to invest their all into their organizations, alumnae pressure, internalized pressure, pressure from the overarching organization, and from their universities. Participants also talked about the ramifications of these various iterations of pressure which largely resulted in adverse impacts on academics and the ability to seek out other opportunities, as well as in the development of a sense of burnout and disengagement.

These findings are best viewed and contextualized from within a CRT lens which affords a macro investigation and interrogation of the power structures that foster the conditions for the necessity of LGLOs and serve to undermine their continued existence. This inquiry should serve as a catalyst for the necessary reevaluation of practices and policies within universities, namely within the Offices of Fraternity and Sorority Life that are charged with supporting LGLOs, as well as within the larger structures and organizational bodies of the LGLOs themselves. It should also be a jumping off point for future academic inquiries about LGLOs within the overarching examination into Latinx college student success.

The reality of increasing Latinx representation within the landscape of college enrollment seems to be a new constant, and institutions would be wise to assess where success and challenges are with regard to the achievement of their Latinx students. I believe this study

taken within the larger literature can serve as validation that LGLOs do indeed help support students in their achievement and success within their undergraduate careers and beyond, while also taking into account the challenges they present. It is not enough that universities simply let these minoritized spaces exist. Institutions have a responsibility to help them do well by offering genuine support and endeavoring to reduce barriers and obstacles for success.

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