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Out of the Closet and on to Fraternity Row: An Ethnographic Study of Heterosexism and Homophobia in a College Fraternity Community

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OUT OF THE CLOSET AND ON TO FRATERNITY ROW:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF HETEROSEXISM AND HOMOPHOBIA IN A
COLLEGE FRATERNITY COMMUNITY

By

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To:

Jeff
Beta Pi Pledge Class
Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity
Illinois Eta Chapter

You will likely never know what an inspiration you became to me....
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This entire study has been rife with personal contradictions. At one moment satisfying and rewarding, the next painful; times when I felt this project was an insurmountable task and moments it all appeared to fall into place. My passion and zeal for this particular study fueled my bursts of energy and creativity that enabled me to write.

There were many times when I detested the word “dissertation” and anything remotely related to it and this led to moments of procrastination. Throughout the study, I returned to my personal battle with self-acceptance. There were days when I would celebrate with the words of my participants as to how far gay males have come; there were days when I would malign the continued social stigma of my sexual orientation.

That all said I have emerged victorious. I am a different man than when I began this project: I am more confident, secure, happy, healthy, and hopeful for the future. I planted the seeds for this study even before my doctoral program began and I offer grateful thanks to my own fraternity, Sigma Phi Epsilon, the brothers of my Illinois Eta chapter who accepted a two-semester exchange student into their hearts – even when I never actually left – and who honored the bonds of brotherhood when years later I came out to them. I will never forget sitting in the legislative session of the 1999 Grand Chapter Conclave in Chicago, Illinois when my undergraduate brothers became the first fraternity in the country to add sexual orientation to our non-discrimination statement, much to the chagrin of some alumni in the room.

As I began my professional calling of working with undergraduate fraternity and sorority members, I found support from my first supervisor, Cheryl Heard of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) and the rest of the staff of the Kimmel Leadership Center along with peers in the Association of Fraternity Advisors and NASPA Fraternity/Sorority and GLBT Knowledge Communities. In each of these organizations, I developed strong friendships that helped me through the challenges of
this project. I give special mention for the love and acceptance from all the members of Chi Epsilon; while we’ve come so far over the years sadly, we still need our unique organization.

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As anyone knows who has ever undertaken a major research project, or struggled through the financial issues of going back to school, money is always a concern. I acknowledge the financial support of the National Order of Omega for a doctoral fellowship, the FSU Council on Research in Education for two research grants, the FSU Higher Education Program faculty for the Stickler Dissertation Award, the program faculty and my peers for the Sherrill W. Ragan Leadership and Service award, and a grant from the Commission for Student Involvement of ACPA: College Student Educators International.
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In closing, I am hopeful that being gay in a college fraternity will increasingly become a non-issue. I truly believe that the social climate of the 21st century will become one where all people will embrace each other. Together, we can break the silence.
The differences among the brothers is what makes a fraternity strong and allows brothers to learn and grow from fraternity experiences. I learned that brotherhood goes beyond gay or straight. If one can truly call the members of one’s fraternity his brothers, then coming out should not be a fear. If the experience of coming out to a fraternity is negative, then maybe the brotherhood was never there.

Family and the bond of brotherhood, by David Anglikowski (p. 198) 
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the influence of gay sexual orientation on the membership and peer culture of historically White fraternity chapters at Southeastern State University, the pseudonym for a large doctoral/research-extensive university in the Southeastern United States. I examined how the presence of gay members in historically White fraternities influenced the culture of the organization and how the fraternity culture affected gay fraternity members. I examined how brothers with a gay sexual orientation affected chapter culture, the experiences, perceptions, and transitions of the gay members, and whether the beliefs and behaviors of heterosexual brothers were consistent or in conflict with the values espoused by the inter/national fraternities. The college social fraternity is a prominent organization in the history of American higher education. Although White and protestant in origin, over time fraternities have also been the site of struggles for acceptance and recognition by Jewish, Catholic, and African American men and, more recently, gay men. Some gay men have initiated their own organizations while others have joined existing fraternity chapters. A fraternity community is an important subculture on a college campus and offers a microcosm to study the ways that peer groups reinforce and reproduce gender, sexuality, class, and other inequalities.

Chan (1996) reported that higher education institutions that have undertaken studies about gay issues on campus have “almost uniformly found that the overall climate for … gay men, educators and students alike, is ‘oppressive’ and that ‘invisibility’ is the norm” (p. 25). These findings show the need for awareness, education, and changes in addressing heterosexism and homophobia in higher education, especially given that these institutions “strive to be communities of learning, communities of tolerance that celebrate and appreciate diversity among their members” (p. 26). College social fraternities reflect
many of the same values as American society in general and attract gay male members as well as heterosexual members just as other social, political, and religious organizations do (Case, 1996; Case, Hesp, & Eberly, 2005). As private, members-only organizations, however, we know little about the internal deliberations, debates, behaviors, values conflicts, and moral dilemmas that fraternity chapter members experience when they face an existing gay member who comes out to them, or with an openly gay prospective candidate who has an interest in membership.

My investigation was an ethnographic study in the post-positivist mold of the effect of gay sexual orientation on members of a college social fraternity community. I employed purposive, convenience selection with a thorough and complex process and obtained participation from three openly gay fraternity members from three different chapters (with the pseudonyms Alpha, Beta, and Gamma Fraternities) and one former chapter member of Alpha Fraternity who spent most of his time as a fraternity member passing; these men became the key informants for this study. In addition, I got participation from one heterosexual brother from both Alpha and Beta Fraternities and a blended (i.e. openly gay) rush participant who was denied a bid to Beta Fraternity. Thus, I was able to triangulate much of my findings via the seven participants.

I utilized four basic research strategies when conducting ethnographic studies: (1) participant observation; (2) interviewing; (3) use of written sources; and (4) analysis or collection of non-written sources and displayed the results through the presentation of segments of transcripts and verbatim quotes from participants as exemplars of the concepts and model that I proposed.

Analysis provided significant insights and a rich description of how six chapter-member participants perceived gay sexual orientation within their fraternity chapters and how one blended participant, who was denied membership in a chapter, viewed fraternity life. As I analyzed each participant’s taped interview(s) and transcript(s), some core themes and patterns slowly began to emerge. Some themes were relevant to more than one research question and I discussed these inter relationships.

Overall, the participants of this study provided a significant amount of rich data pertinent to the initial research questions. Participants claimed that it was almost impossible to avoid hearing homophobic comments or slurs from other fraternity
members, but it appeared rare that the participants viewed these comments as negative and derogatory. Only when comments were obviously made in hateful or attacking ways did the participants consider addressing the speaker. Even for the blended participants, they suggested that in order to be accepted and successful in their fraternity chapters they felt the need to adhere to the established heterosexual norms, such as bringing a female date to functions.

The intent of this study was to provide new information with regard to these phenomena and I proposed a practical model to guide fraternity members, advisors, and professional staff members who encounter such situations. I intend the results of this study to add to the existing but limited literature regarding the collegiate experiences of gay males and their involvement in college fraternal organizations.
Although American society tends to think of organizations in asexual terms, a model of heterosexuality is often characteristic of some student organizations on college campuses. Group norms and practices often disguise heterosexual behavior and values and render heterosexuality invisible. Homosexuality is often made to seem disruptive, conspicuous, and unprofessional (Woods, 1992). While all students are likely to question aspects of their identity during college, students are often marginalized because of their sexual orientation and struggle more significantly than those who are not marginalized (Stevens, 1997). Such marginalization is particularly true in student organizations where students develop some of their closest relationships.

During their undergraduate college years, students face the challenges of cognitive, psychosocial, moral, ethical, and identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1968). These identity-related developmental processes often become more complicated for those students who are homosexual or may think they are homosexual, since they may face discrimination, isolation, and often their own internalized homophobia (Johnson, 1996). Non-heterosexual students may find themselves in an environment that offers little or no support or validation for being gay, and that could make the process of developing a well-defined personal identity even more confounding. Environmental theorists such as Conyne and Clack (1981) and Moos (1979) provided much research on the effects that social environment has on people and cultures in the collegiate environment. These models, however, do not examine how gay students maneuver through their environments.

The concept of fraternity

Is an American institution and the chapter in the form it ideally exists on the college campus is a miniature of the larger American democracy. Institutionally, the fraternity chapter is a dependency of the college. Spiritually it does not seem to be; the spirit it creates bears no definable relationship to the substance of the conventional curriculum.
The good fraternity chapter follows the principles, traditions, and ideals of which America was established by her founding fathers under God, the good fraternity man and good fraternity woman being cast in the pattern of the good citizen. It is an entity of freedom (Robson, 1963, p. 3).

The American college fraternity is one example of a collegiate student subculture that exudes heterosexism. Gay males who join college social fraternities therefore likely face the values, attitudes, and beliefs held by the larger society that fraternity communities merely reflect. Although many observers (see Case, 1996; Reisberg, 1998; Windmeyer & Freeman, 1998) perceived college social fraternities as heterosexist and unsupportive of homosexuality, there do appear to be a number of gay males who are active fraternity members (Case; Case, Hesp, & Eberly, 2005; Trump, 2003; Trump & Wallace, 2006). To understand the reasons a gay man would willingly associate with what these observers see as a stereotypically heterosexist institution, one must first recognize the impact of homophobia and heterosexism and the effect of internalized homophobia on gay men. Homophobia manifests itself in attitudes and behaviors, including verbal and physical abuse (see Herek, 1988; Morrison, Parriag, & Morrison, 1999; Van de Ven, Bornholt, & Bailey, 1996). Examples of this behavior range from avoidance through aggression and include spreading negative talk, changing seats, yelling insults, changing bathroom behavior, verbal threats, and telling anti-gay jokes (Roderick, McCammon, Long, & Allred, 1998). Adams, Bell, and Griffin (1997) defined heterosexism as the “societal/cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that assume that heterosexuality is the only natural, normal, acceptable orientation” (p. 162). Likewise, they defined homophobia as “the fear, hatred, or intolerance of lesbians, gay men, or any behavior that is outside the boundaries of traditional gender roles” (p. 162). Friend (1992) extended the definition of homophobia to include internal homophobia: “the fear and hatred of homosexuality in one’s self and in others” (p. 211).

Communities such as those comprised of fraternity chapter brothers are bound together by common threads entwined by interpersonal exchanges and rituals that continually communicate and construct the concept of the organization’s culture (Rhoads, 1994; Woods, 1992). Traditional research on communities and subcultures focused for

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1 Since not all organizations adopted Greek letters, it is now customary to refer to such groups as fraternities rather than Greek-letter or Greek organizations.
the most part on identifying these common threads and how these connections function to maintain cohesion. As a cultural enclave situated within the larger cultural setting of the university, for this study I examined a fraternity community as a student subculture.

Woods (1992) found that gay males in the corporate world used three coping strategies to manage their sexuality: (1) counterfeiting an identity through the manipulation of outward experiences; (2) integrating an identity by minimizing, normalizing, politicizing, or dignifying sexuality in the workplace; or (3) avoiding a sexual identity by verbally or situationally dodging sexual displays. Woods also claimed that some men used more than one of these strategies, requiring them to segregate their audiences and carefully monitor the different approaches used with each. Although Woods did not focus on fraternities, there could be implications for the behavior of gay men in fraternities since Bryan (1987) claimed that fraternities are “a microcosm of broader society” (p. 38). Woods claimed that several factors influence the choice of strategy. Men who counterfeit an identity usually do so to evade the stigma of being gay, but feel socially invisible, anxious, and dishonest. Avoidance strategies protect an individual from social situations that might expose or discredit him, but deny him same-gender social opportunities and relationships. Finally, men using integration strategies expose themselves to possible prejudice, intensified performance pressures, and the double-edged sword of tokenism. Woods found a man’s choice of strategy was also influenced by co-workers’ attitudes toward homosexuality, perceived economic vulnerability, and the availability of role models.

One might reasonably assume, therefore, that the social attitudes and values imbedded in the culture of a social fraternity directly affects a fraternity member’s willingness to disclose his homosexuality to other members of the chapter, or the willingness of a prospective member to disclose his sexual orientation during the recruitment and selection process. In fact, as Case (1996) discovered, many gay fraternity members chose not to come out during their undergraduate years and he explained why they might chose not to do so:

Over 70 percent of the respondents indicated that they had encountered homophobic or heterosexist attitudes within their chapter, usually in the form of derogatory jokes or comments. Homophobia was also frequently evidenced in membership selection. If a rushee was rumored or perceived to be gay … the chapter was likely to summarily vote
against offering the rushee a bid to join. Likewise, if a pledge was discovered or believed to be gay … the chapter was inclined to dismiss the pledge (p. 2).

While the majority of gay males in college social fraternities choose not to come out to their chapter brothers as undergraduate members, some gay males do choose to come out. Case (1996) suggested that the number of individuals who come out to their fraternal organizations was increasing and posited that more gay students “on campus, including those in fraternities and sororities, feel compelled to no longer hide their true identities” (p. 4).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how the presence of gay members in historically White fraternities influenced the culture of the organization and how the fraternity culture affected gay fraternity members. I examined how brothers with a gay sexual orientation affected chapter culture, the experiences, perceptions, and transitions of the gay members, and whether the beliefs and behaviors of heterosexual brothers were consistent or in conflict with the values espoused by the inter/national fraternities.

Significance of the Study

As private, members-only organizations, we know little about the internal deliberations, debates, and cognitive developmental processes that heterosexual fraternity chapter members experience when they are faced with an existing member revealing his gay sexual orientation to them, or an interest in membership by a blended (i.e. openly gay) prospective candidate. The intent of this study was to provide new information with regard to these phenomena and thereby guide fraternity members, advisors, and professional staff members who encounter such situations.

Reviewing the 1995 National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Report on pre-intervention research aimed at understanding community dynamics, Reiss and Price (1996) commented that characteristics of communities might have determined the pathways of personal development, the timing of critical development transactions, and
influenced an individual’s overall well-being. Furthermore, the NIMH Report concluded that stress engendered by experiences such as being gay in a homophobic environment led to socially disapproved behavior (Albee, 1996). Membership in this oft-invisible minority group of gay males and the concomitant burden of hiding one’s true identity exacts a heavy toll evidenced in an extensive array of psychological problems (Evans & Wall, 1991; Herek, 1995). McKirnan and Peterson (1988) reported that the more stress gay men experience, the more apt they are to misuse alcohol and drugs.

Identity development occurs during the college years, during which time individuals rely upon a primary peer group for support and socially disapproved behavior such as drug use and alcohol misuse is likely to occur. Thus, the results of my study should add to the existing but limited literature regarding the collegiate experiences of gay males and their involvement in socially based fraternal organizations.

A report by Boyer (1990) for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the American Council on Education suggested that in order to build a vital community of learning, a college or university must provide an environment where

- intellectual life is central and where faculty and students work together to strengthen teaching and learning, where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed, where the dignity of all individuals is affirmed and where equality of opportunity is vigorously pursued, and where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported (qtd. in Rankin, 2003, p. 8).

Promoting these ideals does not conflict with the role of higher education administrators to be defenders of First Amendment rights and academic freedom. Instead, institutions should provide a safe space where all voices are respected and where no voice is silenced simply because it is antithetical to another’s. Respecting the fundamental rights to free speech never justifies acts of violence, harassment, or discrimination (Rankin).

Chan (1996) reported that those higher education institutions that have undertaken studies about gay issues on campus have “almost uniformly found that the overall climate for … gay men, educators and students alike, is ‘oppressive’ and that ‘invisibility’ is the norm” (p. 25). These findings demonstrated the need for awareness, education, and changes in addressing heterosexism and homophobia in higher education, especially given that these institutions “strive to be communities of learning, communities of tolerance that celebrate and appreciate diversity among their members” (p. 26). College
social fraternities reflect many of the same values as American society in general (Robson, 1963) and attract gay male members as well as heterosexual members just as other social, political, and religious organizations do (Case, 1996; Case, Hesp, & Eberly, 2005; Trump, 2003; Trump & Wallace, 2006). However, the potential for discrimination keeps gay fraternity members closeted (either capitulating, covering, or passing, in social identity theory terms) (see Humphreys, 1972; Cox & Gallois, 1996). By not blending their identities (i.e. being publicly out), there are few visible gay fraternity member role models for chapter brothers, members of the campus community, and external constituents, regardless of sexual orientation. Consequently, the silence is perpetuated, fostering destructive myths about gay men and continuing the issue of homophobia in fraternal organizations.

**Conceptual Framework**

Pronger (1992) argued, “The experience of being gay is a matter of context, that is, of understanding oneself in the light of socially constructed sexual and gender categories” (p. 42). Bowen and Bourgeois (2001) suggested that “pluralistic ignorance, the tendency to believe that others’ attitudes are more negative or positive than one’s own … may be an especially relevant and potent factor in the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and discriminatory behaviors” (p. 92). Thus, an individual’s beliefs about gay sexual orientation identity and fraternity membership may be founded on the perceived and believed values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of other brothers in his fraternity chapter. The individual may therefore alter his personal beliefs and behaviors to fit this false norm. An adaptation of dynamic social impact theory (DSIT) (see Latané, 1996; Latané & Bourgeois, 2000; Schaller & Latané, 1996) may offer a general explanation for the transmission of values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors within a group and help explain the existence and maintenance of stereotypes and prejudices. According to DSIT, group attitudes shift as a function of the strength, immediacy, and number of people in the group who hold different views. Factors that may contribute to values, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior change include the closeness of the contact (living together versus
mere exposure in class) and the similarity of the person receiving the message to the one delivering the message (peer versus community member) (Bowen & Bourgeois).

Figure 1 graphically displays the conceptual framework for this study. Examining the culture of the chapters in a historically White fraternity community, I hoped to discover a set of shared values, attitudes, and beliefs engendered by the interaction of gay and heterosexual members that moderated the behavior of the fraternity members. Since “culture is a holistic, context-bound, and subjective set of attitudes, values, assumptions, and beliefs” (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 95), I believed the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of fraternity members would be influenced by the sexual orientation of existing members and potential members who thereby affected the culture of the fraternity chapters in the longer term.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

**Research Questions**

Consistent with the above purpose, based on DSIT, and the conceptual framework, the following research questions guided this study:
1. What were the experiences of an undergraduate gay fraternity member (blended, passing, or covering) in a historically White chapter?
2. Did the attempt to gain membership by a prospective member with a blended sexual identity (i.e. openly gay) influence the values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of undergraduate fraternity members in a historically White chapter? and
3. Was there a different influence on the values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of undergraduate fraternity members in a historically White chapter when the admission of homosexuality was after an individual had already received a bid?

Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) suggested that all qualitative studies merely begin with such foreshadowed problem statements and research questions. As such, their purpose was only to provide direction and to serve as a guide during the initial stages of the study and I did not consider them restrictive or limiting. Following the advice of Willms et al., (1990) and Miles and Huberman (1994), I started my analysis with some general themes derived from the literature and added more themes and sub themes as I progressed. I followed Spradley’s (1979) suggestion to researchers and looked for evidence of social conflict, cultural contradictions, informal methods of social control, methods by which participants acquired and maintained achieved and ascribed status, and information about how participants solved problems in order to yield major themes within a subculture.

Once I identified themes and marked the texts, I identified how these themes could be linked to each other in a theoretical model. Once the model emerged, I looked for negative cases that did not fit the model. Either these negative cases disconfirmed parts of the model or suggested new connections that I needed to make (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Ryan and Bernard also suggested researchers develop “increasingly richer concepts and models of how the phenomenon being studied really works” (p. 279). As I began to develop these concepts and categories, I needed to gather more data from participants. Thus, the development of my proposed model was not only ongoing throughout my data collection, but also resulted in new lines of questioning for subsequent interviews.
Population

Participants for this study were undergraduate students on the campus of Southeastern State University, the pseudonym for a large doctoral/research-extensive university in the Southeastern United States that had 94 programs at the Bachelor’s level. I chose this site purely due to sampling convenience and acknowledge that geographic politics and culture may have affected the transferability of my research findings to other areas of the U.S. The fraternity/sorority population represented approximately 12% of the undergraduate student body of 30,000 (average undergraduate age of 21.2 years and total campus population of 38,886). Total male students numbered 16,846 (43.3%) and 27,577 (70.9%) of the total campus population were White (Institutional Research webpage, 2004). The historically White fraternity chapter members had a collective grade point average of 2.56 that compared to an all-men’s grade point average of 2.80 (Greek Life website, 2005).

Definition of Terms

Language is a tool by which we communicate our needs and describe reality, with words having relatively fixed meanings (Eliason, 1996). In spite of these assumptions, confusions arise about words all the time. “Sexual orientation, sexual preference, affectional preference, and sexual identity are terms that have been used almost interchangeably, but that actually have slightly different theoretical connotations” (Eliason, p. 34). Thus, I use the ensuing terms according to the following definitions:

1. A **fraternity** is an all-male, undergraduate-focused, collegiate-based social organization with mutually exclusive membership that utilizes Masonic ritual forms for the induction of new members (Rayburn, 1993);
2. **Brotherhood** is a close intimate reciprocal relationship between fraternity members; one that could be said to be like that experienced within a family (Sykes, 1985);
3. **Members** are initiated participants in a fraternity chapter and consist of current undergraduates and alumni. They may also be referred to as **Brothers** (Gregory, 2003);
4. **Rush** is the formalized mutual selection process whereby a fraternity chapter’s members first identify individuals who appear to be worthy of consideration for membership (Kuh & Arnold, 1993). It may also be referred to as **recruitment** (Gregory, 2003);

5. **Prospective members** are those undergraduates interested in membership in the fraternity community and actively pursuing membership. They may be specifically interested in membership in a particular fraternity chapter or just the fraternity community. They may also be known as **potential new members**;

6. A **Bid** is the formal invitation of membership to a fraternity chapter that is issued to a prospective member (Gregory, 2003);

7. **New members** are individuals who have accepted a bid from a particular fraternity chapter but have not yet gone through the membership development program (sometimes known as pledging) and ritual initiation of the fraternity. In a two-tier, superordinate/subordinate membership model of fraternity organization they are also referred to as **pledges** or **associate members** (Gregory, 2003);

8. An individual’s **identity** is the link connecting that person to the social and interpersonal world. Thus, a change in sexual orientation identity usually leads to changes in an individual’s relationships with others (Rust, 1996). A person’s identity is in constant flux as an individual processes information about his own behavior and receives feedback from others. Thus, identities can change within individuals across situations and time (Eliason, 1996);

9. An individual’s **sexual orientation** describes a person's inborn, innate predisposition to amorous or erotic desires, fantasies, and feelings (Eliason, 1996). A person's sexual orientation is most often classified by the gender(s) one is oriented towards. Sexual orientation is not the same as sexual preference since preference suggests a degree of voluntary choice that is not necessarily reported by lesbians and gay men and that has not been demonstrated in psychological research. Sexual behavior is another separate term that refers to the physical interaction that occurs regardless of sexual orientation (American Psychological Association, 2003);

10. A **homosexual** is a person capable of feeling attracted to those of the same gender. In a male situation, an individual may also be referred to as **gay** (Sykes, 1985);
11. **Coming out**, or **coming out of the closet**, is the informal nomenclature surrounding the disclosing of one’s gay, lesbian, or bisexuality to others (Coleman, 1982b). Troiden (1988) defined coming out as the adoption of an identity that is a radical departure from a previous socialization. D’Augelli (1991a) reported that students’ first disclosure (coming out) to another person typically occurs while college aged and after coming out to self. In social identity theory terms, coming out corresponds to blending strategies (see Humphreys, 1972; Cox & Gallois, 1996);

12. **Blending**, or a **blended identity** is where individuals acknowledge and accept their sexual identity but such identity is merely a part of who they are. They blend their sexual identity into their day-to-day lives (Trump & Wallace, 2006);

13. **Passers** attempt to separate their lives into two worlds, one heterosexual and the other homosexual, hoping the two will not collide. If asked, individuals who are passing do not disclose the fact that they are gay (Cox & Gallois, 1996);

14. Individuals who **cover** are prepared to disclose their sexual orientation, if asked, but do not actively demonstrate it (Humphreys, 1972);

15. **Covering/passing** is defined as being observably heterosexual either by consciously altering one’s behavior or by deliberately creating an image through deceit or the manipulation of convenient circumstances (Trump & Wallace, 2006);

16. **Homophobia** is the persistent and irrational fear of homosexuality (Croteau & Morgan, 1989). It may also be **internalized** as a fear of one’s own homosexuality (Friend, 1992);

17. **Heterocentrism** is the assumption that no homosexual persons are members of a group. Such belief creates a climate of **heteronormality** (Stewart, 1995);

18. **Heterosexism** is the belief that heterosexuality is the only normal or correct sexuality (Lorde, 1985). A participant in Rhoads’ (1994) study stated, “In a way heterosexism hurts more than homophobia. When someone says something or does something homophobic they at least acknowledge you exist. With heterosexism someone is refusing to acknowledge your existence – you remain invisible” (p. 109); and

19. A **metrosexual** is a modern, usually single man in touch with himself and his feminine side. Typically, he is well dressed, with a manicured appearance and defined
body, articulate, and good looking. He might be officially gay, straight, or bisexual, but this is immaterial (Simpson, 1994).

Specific Delimitations

**Gender**

Women were not included in this study because ethnographic research is demanding work that requires crossing cultural borders that are typically foreign to the investigator. Developing a sense of trust among gay male college students was going to be difficult enough without adding problems compounded by gender differences.

**Bisexuality**

Researchers historically viewed sexual orientation in dichotomous terms with bisexuality as a transitional phenomenon (Fox, 2000). When researchers combined survey responses of bisexual and homosexual respondents for the purpose of data analysis, they obscured information about both these groups in all investigations (Fox). Today, researchers utilize a more inclusive perspective whereby they regard bisexuality as a distinct sexual orientation and identity. For this reason, my research sought to investigate only gay males who were non-heterosexual in their affectional orientation.

**Race**

Most gay, lesbian, and bisexual people formulate sexual orientation identity without the need to negotiate additionally the effects of race (Croom, 2000). “The LGB person of color may be left with a sense of having no one place to call home … and feel as if they must establish a primary identity and/or a primary identification with one group, and relinquish others” (p. 265). Men from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds face significant barriers in identifying with the gay community (Rhoads, 1994). Sears (1991) highlighted how society forces men of color who are also gay frequently to elevate one source of identity over the other. When a man of color who is also gay identifies with one community, that man may face a marginalized identity within the other community.
The nine historically Black fraternal organizations evolved during a period when society denied African Americans essential rights and privileges afforded others. Racial isolation on predominantly White college campuses and social barriers of class on all campuses created a need for African Americans to align themselves with other individuals sharing common goals and ideals. With the realization of such a need, the African American fraternal movement developed to foster unity in the pursuit of social change through the development of social programs (National Pan-Hellenic Council website, 2004).

As a White male whose undergraduate fraternity experience was within a traditionally White fraternity, I believed confounding race and cultural differences with members and prospective members of traditionally non-White fraternity chapters would be too extensive to overcome. In addition, most non-White fraternities employ very different membership intake (rush) processes than those used by traditionally White fraternities. Because of these important cultural areas, this research only investigated historically White fraternities.

**Role of the Researcher**

As an ethnographic study, it is not possible to divorce this research project from my own experiences, beliefs, and personal values. Cain (1993) asserted researchers carry their own cultural backgrounds, histories, and social positions with them into their research. Interviewers and participants have identities and perceptions of themselves and of each other and thus, there is always a context to be taken into account. Consequently, this study was also partly my story.

**Limitations**

1. The findings of this study are specific to the participants’ experiences. Thus, readers should not generalize the findings to the experiences of other fraternity members or to other institutions. The applicability of findings is best determined by replication of this study in other settings or situations or by other researchers.
2. The data gathering process involved participants reflecting upon past personal experiences that may have resulted in “subjective reconstruction” (Hareven, 1982). In this sense, participants may have reconstructed past events to fit with their present life experiences.

3. Participants may have remembered recent events more reliably than past events (Cohen, 1988).

4. The restrictive nature of the researcher-participant relationship may have also affected the degree to which participants were comfortable sharing highly personal information concerning sexual orientation.

**Overview**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter II provides an overview of the literature relevant to this study, Chapter III details the settings and research methodology, Chapter IV articulates the results of the study, while Chapter V discusses the implications of the data, recommendations, and areas of additional study.
College social fraternities reflect many of the same values as American society in general and attract gay male members as well as heterosexual members, the same as other social organizations (Case, 1996; Case, Hesp, & Eberly, 2005). As private member organizations, however, higher education researchers and professionals know little about the internal deliberations, debates, and cognitive development processes that chapter members undertake when they are faced with either an existing member revealing his gay sexual orientation, or the stated interest in membership by a blended (i.e. openly gay) prospective member. This literature review focused on four broad areas of importance in understanding the specific phenomenon of heterosexual fraternity member reaction to gay sexual orientation: (1) fraternity culture and group norms, (2) sexual identity formation, (3) social identity theory, and (4) the intersection of fraternity culture and gay sexual identity formation. Fraternity culture and group norms are important to study because they provide an awareness of the social milieu that may exist within the community under review, while social and sexual identity development are established areas of study that help create the conceptual framework for this research.

Fraternity Culture

The American college fraternity began at the College of William and Mary with the founding of Phi Beta Kappa in 1776 that “established precedents that today’s groups still follow, including names composed of Greek [sic] letters; secret rituals and symbols that affirm shared values and beliefs; and a badge that, in general, only initiated members wear” (Whipple & Sullivan, 1998, p. 7). Phi Beta Kappa was founded on the principles of social interaction, free discussion of ideas of the day, and the desire of the members to advance their own learning (Schwartz & Bryan, 1983). At the time of Phi Beta Kappa’s founding, students were closely restricted in both their educational pursuits and social
life, if socializing existed at all. In response to this restrictive atmosphere, some students began to develop secret literary societies with mottos, passwords, and symbols based on the models of Phi Beta Kappa and some Masonic lodges to escape the limitations of a prescribed academic life.

However, college faculty did not tolerate such behavior since they saw these literary societies as a threat to campus order. At the University of Illinois, the faculty viewed fraternities as disruptive to the academic culture and campus order and the first two college presidents in the late 1800s not only banned fraternities but also made students sign a pledge not to join, and promised to expel anyone who did (Rudolph, 1990). The board of trustees of Middlebury College repeated these actions in 1992 when they decided to eliminate fraternities, forcing some members of the former chapters to meet in secret because if caught participating in the rituals and memberships of fraternities, students would be expelled (Sirhal, 2000).

Despite these prohibitions, the founding intent of most fraternities was, in fact, to aid or supplement college students in their personal development through educational debates and the presentation of original works and academic papers, all in the context of camaraderie and fun (Owen, 1991). Still to this day, fraternities teach new members the culture of the chapter through intentionally designed and carefully orchestrated recruitment and pledgeship experiences (Kuh & Arnold, 1993).

As fraternities, college campuses, and students each evolved, however, the primary function of fraternal organizations deviated from this original supplementary academic focus and began to stress the social aspects of college life. Consequently, a clear difference emerged between the formal statements of mission, vision, creeds, and values and the observed daily lives of fraternity members that defined the college fraternity subculture (Dewey, 1916). The common behaviors of fraternity members actually define the organization, rather than the formal statements of ideals, but one cannot exist without the other. As Horowitz (1987) stated, “although rhetoric paid tribute to serious, high-minded purpose, the real concern of each fraternity was to create within the larger college a small group of compatible fellows for friendship, mutual protection, and good times” (p. 29).
In the early years, fraternities were confined to individual chapters at single campuses (Anson & Marchesani, 1991) at a time when the student body was primarily White, Christian, and male (Boschini & Thompson, 1998). Growth occurred exponentially until there was a need for an organized governance structure (Owen, 1991). Owen went on to suggest, “The life of the fraternity is centered in each local chapter, occupied, managed, and governed by undergraduates” (p. 6). He noted that while professional staff advise, assist, and support chapters, “decentralized operation” (p. 6) is the norm. In addition, the change from being a group that merely met together to being a group that lived together was a turning point in the fraternal movement, strengthening unity, activities, and friendships (Mullens Jones, 1997).

Throughout recent decades, undergraduate members of fraternities have increasingly received sharp criticism for the deviation from their founding values and their movement toward the expression of more anti-intellectual attitudes, beliefs, and activities (see Wilder, Hoyt, Surbeck, Wilder, & Carney, 1986; Winston & Saunders, 1987). Many studies (Baier & Whipple, 1990; Byer, 1997; Miller, 1973; Wilder, Hoyt, Doren, Hauck, & Zettle, 1978) also found that fraternity members tend to have parents with incomes higher than the parental incomes of nonmember-peers, be more politically conservative, more dependent on peers, indifferent to moral and social injustices, and less passionate about cultural activities. Horowitz (1987) suggested that, “the fraternity member who came to college as a liberal was likely to turn conservative in the next four years” (p. 144). Baier and Whipple concluded that “students who join fraternities … are predisposed to peer conformity” (p. 48). Maisel (1990) noted, “Fraternities … are exclusionary by practice, sexist in nature, and gender specific by design” (p. 8) and Baier and Whipple posited “the fraternity’s welfare is always more important than that of an individual, reinforcing conformity … not bringing “unfavorable attention” to the fraternity” (p. 52). These attitudes ultimately lead to exclusionary practices, conformist ideologies, and selective isolation from individuals with differing values and beliefs.

Kuh, Pascarella, and Wechsler (1996) cited data from the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL), conducted at 18 four-year colleges by the National Center on Teaching, Learning, and Assessment. These data showed that, even after controlling for initial differences in such factors as pre-college cognitive development, academic
motivation, age, and selectivity of college attended, fraternity men were behind their non-member peers in cognitive development after the first year of college. However, Wilder et al., (1986) concluded these differences existed before the students joined their fraternity chapters and that any difference in values “is not the result of their Greek [sic] membership but of their individual backgrounds” (p. 518).

Research showed personal development is also affected by fraternity membership. Although many fraternities attract people with varied academic and avocational interests, students encounter a broader spectrum of human differences in the residence halls to which they are assigned randomly (Kuh, Pascarella, & Wechsler, 1996). In terms of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, individual fraternity chapters tend to be more homogenous than the student body in general.

Data from the NSSL, cited by Kuh, Pascarella, and Wechsler, showed that during the first year of college, fraternity members made significantly smaller gains than did non-members on measures of openness to diversity that included valuing contact with people from different backgrounds and learning about people from different cultures. However, Pascarella, Flowers, and Whitt (2001) found in their longitudinal study of the effects of fraternity affiliation that “the negative effects of fraternity … membership were much less pronounced during the second or third years of college” (p. 297). They concluded that after the initial year of college, any negative consequences of fraternity membership might tend to diminish, if not totally disappear.

As private member organizations, fraternities maintain the right to select their own members (see Boy Scouts of America v. Dale, 2000). Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibited sexual discrimination in higher education but was amended in 1974 to exempt membership practices of social fraternities. Despite this, many schools demanded that fraternities discontinue discrimination based on race, color, or creed if they were to be allowed to remain on campus (Mullens Jones, 1997). Nevertheless, membership selection remains the privilege of the individual chapters. Legal cases (Roberts v. United States Jaycees, 1984; Pacific Union Club v. Superior Court, 1991; & Louisiana Debating and Literary Association et al., v. City of New Orleans, 1995) regarding intimate association suggested that fraternities may find protection if they can document small size, selective membership, exclusion of non-
members, and a family-like setting. In addition, courts also recognized that the Supreme Court in Roberts v. United States Jaycees and Boy Scouts of America v. Dale made it clear that an organization need not be primarily political (or even primarily expressive) in order to receive constitutional protection for expressive associational activities.

Proponents of fraternal organizations declare that fraternity membership influences the ability to shape and develop leadership skills, strong same-gender friendships, and teamwork, promotes community service and philanthropy, and aids in the development of a strong sense of belonging and self-esteem (see Hughes & Winston, 1987; Winston & Saunders, 1987). Strange (1986) noted that fraternities might be

One of the best educational and developmental environments available to college students on campus…. [With] an effective method of attracting, orienting, and matriculating new members…. [And] a chance for meaningful achievement and leadership in various roles under the guidance and mentorship of more advanced members (p. 522)

Thorsen (1997) asserted that fraternity members were also more likely to volunteer and to be active in civic affairs after graduation. Her research showed that fraternity members were also more likely to contribute financially to charitable and nonprofit organizations and religious groups, and do so in greater amounts than non-fraternity graduates.

Baier and Whipple (1990) suggested that a fraternity experience provided a quasi-familial environment maintained and emphasized from the outset as new members learned that the fraternity was like a “family” (p. 52). Fraternity chapters perpetuate this idea with familial language such as “brother” and “pledge dad” (Jakobsen, 1986, p. 524). Jakobsen further hypothesized that there also existed a set of behavioral expectations regarding the ideal of preservation of values, fraternity, and family ideals from outside influencers and that if these expectations were too strict, allowing little deviation, fraternity chapters may hinder the emotional autonomy of members. Emotional autonomy is the basis of developmental epigenesis (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1968). Jakobsen posited that if an individual does not master autonomy, his exploration of diverse environmental stimuli is retarded and that failure to become autonomous means he is hindered from integrating a positive self-identity.

In a study by Hughes and Winston (1987), the values fraternity new members associated with independence and freedom in interpersonal relationships declined in
importance, with a lower value on autonomy. Hughes and Winston posited that if Chickering and Reisser were correct in asserting that the essential ingredient in freeing interpersonal relationships is allowing greater diversity and independence in peer relationships then fraternity membership may impede or at least slow the developmental process in this area.

Hughes and Winston (1987) reported that fraternity new members also became more homogeneous and their values almost identical to those of their chapter brothers who had been members for a year or more. Thus, the fraternity socialized new members to the norm for interpersonal relationships. Design limitations of all these studies, however, prevent us from knowing if the apparent effect was due to socialization or recruitment of new members. That is, do fraternities discourage autonomy in their members, or do they recruit students who are less autonomous than students who chose not to affiliate (Pascarella, et al., 1996)? Horowitz (1987) suggested that fraternities offered members “ready companionship, a homelike atmosphere, and lessons in good manners, at the price of a rigid conformity” (p. 140) but in “a highly visible framework of discrimination” (p. 275).

Fraternity enrollment dropped off during World War II, but with the return of the enlistees and the G.I. Bill, membership numbers bounced back soon after (Denizet-Lewis, 2005). By the Vietnam era, however, fraternity enrollment again dropped off significantly, as students began to see the fraternity community on a college campus as an outdated symbol of establishment culture (Schwartz & Bryan, 1983). Fraternity membership reached the bottom of the decline in 1971 and once again began to rise in popularity. However, as Levine (1980) noted, “What now looks like a dramatic rise in fraternity interest and participation actually represents nothing more than the reemergence of the status quo” (p. 97). Some college administrators continue to see fraternities as too much trouble, and in the cases of Bowdoin, Colby, Waynesburg, and Williams colleges, have ousted their entire fraternity communities from their campuses (Reisberg, 2000).

That said, as a wider variety of students enroll in higher education, they have begun to take advantage of all a college offers. The ranks of fraternities are once again growing with first-generation students and those who in previous generations either
would not have sought, or would not have been granted, membership (Binder, 2003). As Horowitz (1987) concluded, “many of the reasons that earlier generations of male collegians joined fraternities … have now evaporated. Hedonism, once their exclusive prerogative, is now shared by any college student who chooses it” (p. 274).

While the members of today’s college social fraternities have kept many of the rituals and symbols of the past, they have also changed quite considerably. As fraternities evolved, the focus of the members changed to one of having fun and being social to the extent that social activities now often tend to overshadow everything else. Randall and Grady (1998) stated, “Most people believe that social refers to events such as parties, date functions, and even intramurals sponsored by the organizations. They see these as Greek [sic] organizations’ primary activities, not the personal development of members” (pp. 29-30). Although the social college fraternities of today vary greatly from their founding organizations, they remain influential on college campuses, helping “shape the institution’s character and culture” (Boschini & Thompson, 1998, p. 21).

Strange (1986) posited that fraternities are powerful socializing agents. Whether that socialization is positive or negative could depend on the culture of a particular fraternity community. Regardless, if college social fraternities are to remain a vital influence in the development of their members as they have been in the past, they must begin to discard barriers that inhibit the inclusion of diverse members (Baier & Whipple, 1990; Boschini & Thompson, 1998).

Today’s college social fraternity members must stop being “purveyors of the status quo, reacting to issues rather than acting on issues. They must become bastions of tolerance when it comes to minority differences, religious choice, or sexual preference [sic]” (Bryan, 1987, p. 38). As other parts of a campus have diversified over the past two decades, “fraternities are one segment of the institutional population that has not followed suit to a significant degree” (Binder, 2003, p. 37). As Whipple and Sullivan (1998) concluded, “no amount of community service … makes up for the destruction of property after a weekend party” and “all the good deeds do not justify the sins” (p. 12).
Group Norms and Culture

Kuh and Whitt (1988) described culture as “a social or normative glue – based on shared values and beliefs – that holds organizations together” (p.10). Spradley (1979) defined it as “the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior” (p. 5). Giroux (1983) included the concepts of power and influence in his definition of culture, in that culture exists “within a social sphere of consternation and struggle, a sphere rooted in a complex of power relations that influence and condition lived experience” (p. 164). Kuh and Whitt suggested that organizational culture serves four general purposes: (1) to convey a sense of identity; (2) to facilitate commitment to an entity, other than self; (3) to enhance the stability of a group’s social system; and (4) to be a sense-making device that guides and shapes behavior. Culture is holistic and context bound; thus, we cannot fully appreciate the meaning of events and behavior apart from the location and circumstances in which they occur.

Strange (1986) suggested, “Environments are transmitted primarily through people” (p. 520), namely the character of an environment reflects the nature of its members, and the typical characteristics of its members define the dominant features of an environment. He went on to explain that externally, these dominant features influence the degree to which individuals are attracted to or repelled by an environment, and internally, they select and shape the behavior of participants in a coercive manner. Astin and Panos (1969) labeled this phenomenon of homogenization, reinforcement, and accentuation of the dominant characteristics over time as progressive conformity. Astin (1993) summarized his extensive research into student peer groups by positing that they are “the single most potent source of influence on growth and development in the undergraduate years” (p. 398). Dalton and Petrie (1997) suggested that student peers convey their impact through frequent interaction, social emphasis, and shared values and attitudes.

Thus, organization members whose characteristics most closely resemble the dominant features of the environment are the ones most likely to exhibit satisfaction and stability. Those who differ significantly from the dominant features are most likely to leave the organization and seek a more congruent environment. If leaving is not possible,
Strange suggested individuals might attempt to remake or adapt to the environment. Therefore, culture is a dynamic entity where power and influence help to determine appropriate frames of reference and appropriate norms, behaviors, and actions. It is important to remember, however, that culture – the knowledge that people have learned as members of a group – cannot be directly observed (Spradley).

Cultural values are likely linked tightly to basic beliefs and assumptions. In this regard, values provide the basis for a system of beliefs. These values sometimes surface as exhortations as to what is right or wrong and what is encouraged or discouraged (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). In the symbolic perspective, Kuh and Whitt viewed culture as an interpretive mechanism brought to life by an individual’s attempt to make meaning of his or her relationship with the external environment. In order to be truly called the organization’s culture, the organization’s members must share components, even just to some degree.

Crookston (1974) defined a primary group as one whose members know each other intimately and who accept cooperation with each other as a matter of course. Thus, the significance of the fraternity primary group lies in its ability to influence the attitudes, behavior, standards, and loyalties of chapter members. A subculture such as a fraternity chapter is more than a collection of people with similar attitudes or behaviors; members must interact persistently with one another over a period of time. They are aware of their common orientation that leads to a mutual attraction to one another. An individual must modify prior experiences and self-images, therefore, to fit the demands of new roles and new group memberships.

The new member’s adoption of the values, attitudes, and skills honored by the existing membership facilitates acceptance by chapter brothers (Merton, 1963 cited in Kuh & Whitt, 1988). The nature of this acculturation process varies, but some typical steps have been identified: (1) identification of role models; (2) observation of role model behavior; (3) imitation of role model behavior; (4) evaluation by others of the imitation; (5) modification of behavior in response to the evaluation, and (6) incorporation of values and behaviors of the role model into the new member’s self image (Bess, 1978). Masland (2000) posited that smaller organizations have stronger cultures than larger ones and colleges with highly interdependent parts have stronger cultures than institutions made up
of semi-autonomous parts. Culture then, is a form of social control (Foucault, 1979) in that there are accepted and valued ways of doing things, topics of conversation, and activities. Social control is achieved by inculcating members in “a state of conscious and permanent awareness of expectations and social repercussions” (Rhoads, 1994, p. 28).

Though typically stable, the interactions and experiences of members constantly change, evolve, and shape an organization's culture (Smircich, 1983). The characteristics of both the organization and the students, such as the students’ educational background, socioeconomic status, political and religious beliefs, goals for the time in college, and psychological characteristics and needs affect the formation of student subcultures (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). To constitute a subculture, a group of people must have shared meanings that differ in some way from the larger cultural body in which they are situated and that are manifested through their social interactions (Rhoads, 1997).

Ceremonies, rituals, and formal and informal mechanisms of social control such as expectations of dress maintain student subcultures. Socialization processes are important for the preservation of strong and cohesive student subcultures; in this way, values and behavioral norms are handed down from one student generation to the next (Bushnell, 1962). Culture frames the narratives people weave and, in turn, is reconstituted by those narratives (Rhoads). Thus, to examine the fraternity chapter culture, gay culture, and gay fraternity subculture, I will need to come to terms with the meaning participants give to particular practices.

A community may develop one of four different cultural perspectives: integration, differentiation, fragmentation, or change. An integrated community is one with an open system that functions through collaboration. This can be compared with a differentiation system that allows multiple facets to work synergistically to achieve consensus. A fragmented perspective is a threat to the collegiality of the community since the independence of the entities provides opportunity for conflict. Finally, with a change perspective, an open community must have the capacity for dynamic equilibrium in order to be effective.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) concluded that peer groups wield substantial influence on the cognitive and affective development of college students. According to Kuh and Whitt (1988), student subcultures are created through interactions with peers
and mediated to a certain extent by the campus structures and processes. Scott (1965) concluded that fraternities constitute a student subculture: members have constant contact with one another; the members’ strong loyalty to the group make them susceptible to peer influence; a clear distinction can be made between members and nonmembers; and group members share values and definitions of right and wrong. Systematic member selection and induction experiences protect a chapter from internal threats (member rebellion). Individual members tend not to question group practices in order to preserve self-esteem, thereby fostering internal stability; challenging the chapter’s practices would create dissonance and perhaps result in banishment from the group (Kuh & Arnold, 1993).

Since members of social groups such as fraternities share configurations of beliefs about behaviors in various situations or circumstances, these norms influence the behavior of the individual members. Such interactions include words, gestures, and behaviors of peer group members that communicate expectations for behavior by group members, indicating which behaviors are appropriate or inappropriate (Braxton & Caboni, 2005).

Kuh and Whitt (1988) warned that culture is potentially divisive insomuch that one group might consider some behavior normal but view different behavior performed by another subgroup as abnormal. For example, Braxton and Caboni’s (2005) research showed that “verbalized racial/homosexual intolerance … behaviors generally are not perceived as even moderately distasteful” by fraternity members (p. 5). Higher education is replete with community rituals that bind the academic community and translate the culture into action (Masland, 2000). Inviting new chapter members to affirm a belief, understanding, and acceptance of the values of the fraternity can highlight reification, whereas revitalization permits initiated brothers to renew and reaffirm their own commitments. Finally, incorporation absorbs an individual into the larger campus-wide fraternity community.

Fraternity chapter culture on a college campus is one concept that may be defined by the perceptions of both observers and participants. Within the generalized fraternity community culture, however, there is typically a set of subcultures for each of the fraternity chapters on the campus. Eberly (personal communication, June 3, 2005) articulated,
It has been my experience from my earliest exposure to campus fraternity chapters as a first-semester student in 1959 that one chapter will have the reputation as a chapter who accepts homosexuals, or is tolerant of homosexuals, compared to other chapters. Thus, at my undergraduate campus in the early 1960s, one chapter at the bottom of the campus prestige system was a place for “homos” (or men who did not meet the “male stereotype”) to join, whereas other groups, such as the top three chapters in terms of campus prestige, had the reputation of being extremely intolerant of any behavior that seemed “queer.”

Culture thus provided the lens through which I interpreted the stream of activity in the Southeastern State University historically White fraternity community. This cultural perspective was especially important for making sense of the topic of sexual orientation identity because no documents or official policy prohibit discussing homosexuality or prevent gay students from joining fraternity chapters.

**Sexual Identity Formation**

The concept of sexual orientation identity first emerged in developmental literature in the 1940s (Erikson, 1968) though the roots go back to Freud’s work at the beginning of the 20th century (Love et al., 2005). Erikson recognized the complex and dynamic nature of a person’s identity and suggested that it changes and evolves constantly, shaped by social, historical, and interpersonal forces, and personal experiences. There is a great deal of literature suggesting that individuals become aware of their sexuality during early adolescence (see Johnson, 1996; Troiden, 1989) and that the recognition that one’s affectional or sexual interests are dissimilar to those of the heterosexual in society initiates the process of homosexual identity formation (Coleman, 1982a; D’Augelli, 1991a; Eliason, 1996). The literature pertaining to homosexual identity formation suggested that, although young males do not typically identify as homosexual during the time of early adolescence, they do possess an awareness of their affectional orientation (see D’Augelli; Troiden). Troiden suggested that a major contributing factor to self-identifying as homosexual depends on the meanings attributed to experiences earlier in life and that males begin to suspect they could be gay at an average age of 18. Cass (1984) described this phase of identity confusion in the following manner:

You feel that you probably are a homosexual, although you’re not definitely sure. You begin to feel distant or cut off from [other people]. You are beginning to think that it
might help to meet other homosexuals but you’re not sure whether you really want to or not. You prefer to put on a front of being completely heterosexual (p. 156).

Researchers did much of the studies on the coming out process in the 1970s in the aftermath of the removal of homosexuality as a disease from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association. Since then, researchers have typically described coming out as a linear development process (Rust, 1996) with the majority of the literature that pertains to homosexual identity formation referencing Cass’ 1979 article, *Homosexual Identity Development*.

The six stages of Cass’ (1979) model assume a movement in self-perception from heterosexual to homosexual grounded in the crisis of striving for congruence between the individual’s perceptions of his own behavior, the perceptions of others’ attitudes, and self-identity. The first stage is identity confusion, where the individual first perceives his thoughts, feelings, and attractions to others of the same gender. The second is identity comparison, where the individual perceives and must deal with possible social stigmatization and alienation. The third stage is identity tolerance in which individuals, now having knowledge (though not necessarily acceptance) of their homosexuality, begin to seek out other homosexuals. In the 21st century, this is often via the Internet and online chat rooms. In identity acceptance – stage four – positive connotations about being homosexual foster even further contacts and authentic friendships with other gay men. In the fifth stage – identity pride – the individual minimizes contact with heterosexual peers in order to focus on issues and activities related to his homosexual orientation. Not all men go through the identity pride phase. Identity synthesis, the final of Cass’ stages, postulates less of a dichotomy for the individual differences between the heterosexual and non-heterosexual communities or aspects of the individual’s life; the individual judges himself on a range of personal qualities and not just upon sexual identity.

Two assumptions form the basis for Cass’ (1979) model: (1) “identity is acquired through a developmental process” and (2) “locus for stability of, and change in, behavior lies in the interaction process that occurs between individuals and their environments” (p. 219), namely there may be a distinction between private (personal) and public (social) aspects of identity. Cass emphasized that at any point in the process, an individual may foreclose and not accept his sexual orientation and that an individual “is seen to have an
active role in the acquisition of a homosexual identity” (p. 219). In Cass’ model, the goal of coming out is “to acquire an identity of ‘homosexual’ fully integrated within the individual’s overall concept of self” (p. 220). Identity integration (i.e. the blending of identities) involves accepting one’s own sexuality, gaining greater clarity of personal identity, and achieving a deeper sense of self-acceptance (Love et al., 2005). It is also important to remember, however, that Cass’ participants were Australian male (109) and female (69) prisoners in the late 1960s, which may call into doubt the generalizability and transferability of her findings.

The model of Fassinger and associates (Fassinger & Miller, 1996; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996) built on Cass’ (1979) concept by presenting a four-phase development process with two branches, where the two branches represented individual development and development as a member of the gay and lesbian community. Development of these branches is not necessarily simultaneous which allows individuals to be at different phases at each branch. The first of Fassinger’s (1998) four stages is awareness (of the existence of different sexual orientations among people and of being different from heterosexual peers). The second stage is one of exploration of how one might fit into a gay community and of personal emotions and erotic desires for those of the same gender. The third level represents a deepening commitment to this changing notion of identity through involvement with non-heterosexual reference groups and the realization of oppression and consequences of choices of vocalizing and socially participating with non-heterosexuals. The final stage – internalization/synthesis – represents an integration (i.e. blending) of same-gender sexuality into one’s overall identity across social contexts. Unlike Cass, the authors suggested that a person might recycle through one or more of the phases in the branches.

While most of the theories used by student affairs practitioners remain stage-based models of development, a few theorists have branched off into other, less incremental ways of understanding how traditionally aged non-heterosexual students grow and change during their college years (Dilley, 2002). Levine and Evans (1991) analyzed various sociological and psychological sexual identity models and identified four general development levels: awareness, self-labeling, community involvement and disclosure, and identity integration. Identity integration (blending) involves the
acceptance of one’s sexuality, gaining clarity of personal identity, and achieving a deeper sense of self-acceptance. Levine and Evans articulated that “most theorists … argue that at this point, one’s sexual identity is incorporated as one part of the person’s larger, overall identity” (p. 195). They acknowledged, however, that there was little empirical testing of the models reviewed and that most of them focused on White gay males.

Instead of linear models, D’Augelli (1994) suggested a complex process involving three sets of interrelated variables shaped an individual’s identity: personal subjectivities and actions, interactive intimacies, and sociohistorical connections. Personal subjectivities and actions refer to an individual’s perceptions, emotions, and actions that relate to his sexual orientation and the meaning he attaches to them. Interactive intimacies refer to the effects of family, peers, friends, and partners, and the messages received and meaning attached to these interactions. Sociohistorical connections take into account policies, norms, laws, and cultures in the organizations, institutions, or geographical areas within which an individual is a member or located. Thus, sociohistorical connections were especially important to my study given the policies, norms, and cultures that exist in historically White fraternity chapters.

D’Augelli’s (1994) model described six interactive processes, which he made clear were not sequential stages: They are: (1) exiting heterosexual identity; (2) developing a personal gay identity status; (3) developing a gay social identity; (4) becoming gay offspring; (5) developing gay intimacy status; and (6) entering a gay community. He argued that the development of a gay sexual identity was not a onetime event; rather, sexual and affectional feelings can change over the course of a lifespan. The changes in personal, family, and social expectations very much affect these feelings and the degree to which an individual acts on them (Evans, 2000). Evans saw the college years as a time of great fluidity for many students because of changes in relationships with family caused by leaving home, new peer groups, and new roles assumed.

D’Augelli (1994) also stressed the uniqueness of individual development; no two individuals follow the same developmental path. In addition, because the U.S. culture provides no systematic socialization for GLB people, they have to determine their own developmental path. Unfortunately, the negative forces of discrimination and oppression
directed toward GLB people often create roadblocks to successful cognitive development (Evans, 2000).

The term “closet” symbolizes the oppression of gay people who feel required to remain silent about their sexual identity and has been used by gay people to refer to their sexual orientation identity at least since the Stonewall riots in 1969 (Woods, 1992). Sedgwick (1990) maintained, “The closet is the defining structure for gay oppression” (p. 68) and symbolizes the normalization of other-gender relationships. The power of the norms associated with heterosexuality imprisons those who feel differently and who have attractions that do not fit the normalized version of how society expects an individual to be (Rhoads, 1994). For some, confinement is so severe that thoughts of suicide prevail while for others, fear of being found out leads them to filter carefully feelings and thoughts. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among males age 15-24 and young men kill themselves at four times the rate of young women (National Center for Injury and Prevention, 1999).

According to Rhoads, these factors make it unlikely that someone could establish deep relationships when a significant aspect of his or her identity is kept secret. As with all gay men, the participants in my study faced a choice to come out or not to come out. Resisting society’s norms can lead to social retribution while to comply is to deny one’s identity. The choice to come out is a very personal one and affected by an individual’s stage of sexual identity development.

Herdt (1992) recognized the ongoing nature of coming out in discussing it as a rite of passage to gay identity: “Although the ‘coming out’ concept conveys a single event pinpointed in time and space, many writers today recognize a multiplicity of events stretching over years” (p. 30). A criticism of linear models is that they fail to acknowledge that coming out is a continuous, lifelong process. Troiden (1989) concluded that gay males appear more likely to come out to siblings or close heterosexual friends, than to parents, coworkers, or employers.

Regardless of how an individual behaves in other contexts of his life, every time he encounters a new person (outside specifically GLB settings), that new person will assume the individual is heterosexual (i.e. heteronormality). The gay person will thus have to decide once again whether to correct that assumption and deal with whatever
reaction the other person might have or to let the assumption persist and thereby present himself as a heterosexual in that encounter (i.e. passing). Thus, the process of disclosure – coming out – proceeds slowly. According to D’Augelli (1991a) there are multiple overlapping processes involved in this developmental task, such as telling family (from parents, through siblings, to extended family), friends (close friends to casual acquaintances), and important others in one’s social network (coworkers, teachers, etc.). Most striking from D’Augelli’s research is the number of years between the “self-knowledge” of participants’ sexual identity and “disclosure to someone else.” An average of eight years passed between “self-knowledge” and “disclosure,” while sexual behavior was initiated an average of five years after “self-knowledge.”

George Takei (Star Trek’s Captain Sulu) best articulated the concept of coming out in the Winter 2006 edition of the Human Rights Campaign’s Equality magazine:

The word “out” seems to suggest opening a door and walking through a portal and suddenly the world changes. It’s really not like that. I use the metaphor of a long, narrow corridor which is dark at first, then there are little glimmers of light coming in, then it starts to widen, and then there’s a window opening. And you peek out, and you see some possibilities. And then there are doors that are ajar, and you might step out briefly and then come back in. So it’s a long process. It’s not as the word “out” suggests – a sudden decision and you step into another world.

D’Augelli (1994) emphasized the effect of environment, context, and history and pointed out that given the heteronormality that exists in U.S. society there are few visible appropriate socializing forces for young gay males; thus, much of their individual development is because of their own choices and actions. Troiden (1989) discussed avoidance as a strategy for dealing with identity confusion. Some men distance themselves from their homoerotic feelings by attacking and ridiculing known or perceived gay men, while others establish heterosexual involvements at varying levels of intimacy in order to eliminate their same-gender sexual interests.

Coleman (1982a) reported that while sexual activity may be a healthy method of building self-esteem, if used compulsively it can interfere with the development of an integrated self-concept. Another avoidance strategy involves escapism. According to Troiden, some gay males avoid confronting their homoerotic feelings through the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs. Such a high can provide temporary relief from feelings
of identity confusion but an individual could use such a high to justify sexual feelings and behaviors ordinarily viewed as unacceptable. Coleman warned that if drugs become associated with sexual expression, problems with the development of intimacy and other development issues could result.

Gay Culture

The terms available for the description of sexual identity have changed over time and hold different meanings for different people (Rust, 1996). Some men reject the label homosexual as too clinical a description. They prefer to describe themselves as gay because they see that term as an accurate description of their feelings and behaviors. Queer is viewed as a decidedly political term that, for many people, symbolizes a challenge to traditional category boundaries. For other people, however, the term is too political and they reject the label because they do not share these politics.

In spite of having made substantial gains toward greater equality, gay men continue to be stigmatized (Boies, 1997). Their experience is subject to backlash from institutions and individuals that see gay lifestyles as a threat to values, ways of life, and self-esteem (Herek, 1992). D’Augelli (1991a) posited that gay adolescents often acknowledge to themselves their affectional orientation while still in high school but wait until college to share information intentionally about their sexual orientation. The means and ranges of ages of Savin-Williams (1995) developmental markers fall within the traditional collegiate years.

College students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender often have a difficult time fitting into the mainstream of college life (Sanlo, 1998, Wall & Evans, 2000). According to Sanlo (2000), “there is little research on the full array of LGBT issues among college students in general” (p. 644). The Cooperative Institutional Research Program of the Higher Education Research Institute has analyzed entering-student trends since 1966 and Sax (2003) posited that among incoming freshmen, “support for gay rights continues to grow” (p. 19) and that only 24.8% of students surveyed in 2002 believed that it is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships. This figure is less than half of what it was in 1987.
Shilts (1993) maintained, “Homosexuals … have very little control over many of the most crucial circumstances of their lives. Control resides with the heterosexual majority, which defines the limits of freedom for the homosexual minority” (pp. 6-7). Lukes and Land (1990) described how members of minority groups become bicultural within the majority and minority cultures. They point out that most gay men differ from members of other minority groups: Most minorities first become acculturated within their own group and then later are socialized (by the media, education, and workforce) within the dominant culture. The dominant culture first socializes White gay men however; only later do they identify with their minority sexual orientation culture. Both of these facts were of special importance when analyzing the impact of historically White fraternity membership criteria and requirements.

Exploration of the gay subculture and socialization into its norms are important steps in gay identity development (Plummer, 1975). Gay adolescents generally do not take part in typical adolescent social and romantic experimentation such as dating, a process of actively exploring and integrating emotional and sexual feelings. These activities are important aspects of socialization and development of a capacity for intimacy (Bois, 1997) and can leave an individual feeling a sense of loss, possibly predisposing him to depression and self-esteem problems in adulthood. Because gay identity develops in a heteronormal environment, an individual typically discovers his gay sense of self in isolation and without benefits that come from a sense of belonging to a community.

Rhoads (1995) provided an ethnographic study that described the coming out experiences for gay and bisexual men in college. A gay college student who participated in the study described coming out as:

Taking all the negative things that you’ve heard about yourself – heard about those people – and just saying to yourself that none of it matters as much as you do. It means opening up the door and letting out all the internalized hatred, fear, self doubt, and self worthlessness…. You either come out or you sort of die (p. 67).

According to Rhoads (1995), “coming out significantly changed the life of nearly every student involved” in the study (p. 70). Many experienced an improved sense of self, with increased openness, self-confidence, and understanding of their lives. Several students in the Rhoads study became more interested in politics after coming out,
especially issues related to gay rights, with one student stating, “I went from being a staunch conservative to more radical politics” (p. 70). Rhoads went on to suggest that realization of a gay or bisexual orientation brought about a period of reflection for the student participants as they tried to make sense of their past. Savin-Williams (1990) reported that gay youths felt the greatest acceptance from their closest heterosexual male and female friends and the poorest acceptance from their parents.

Most students in the Rhoads (1995) study viewed coming out as a great relief that was freeing and empowering. However, even those students who described coming out in positive terms suffered some negative consequences. One of the major themes of the Rankin (2003) study was the participants’ experience of harassment and discrimination in residence halls and classes. Rankin found that over one third of respondents to her study experienced some form of harassment on campus, with 89% of the incidents being derogatory remarks, with other students most frequently the perpetrators. One participant in the Rhoads study stated, “You just never know when a group of frat boys or jock types – you know those who are probably most closeted – are going to beat your face in because you remind them of what they can’t admit to” (p. 71).

A study of college athletes by Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morphew (2001) indicated, “at best, those in intercollegiate athletics embraced a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy” (p. 468). Jacobson (2002) suggested, “The culture of sports tends to be conservative, and most people equate male heterosexuality with strength – and homosexuality with weakness” (¶ 5). Coaches and student-athletes in the Wolf-Wendel et al., study acknowledged that gay and lesbian student-athletes existed, but insisted they played other sports. When Jacobson asked the football coach for Rice University what he would do if a player came out to him, the coach responded, “While he would not necessarily kick a player off the team for being gay, he probably would think hard about it” (¶ 17). However, Wolf-Wendel et al., also found exceptions to the negativism regarding homosexuality such as when several male athletes indicated that they could be ‘forgiving’ of someone who was gay, or ‘look beyond it’ if the person was truly a good athlete and an asset to the team. In 2002, the National Collegiate Athletic Association clarified its Principal of Nondiscrimination to include explicitly sexual orientation but left each member institution to determine its own policy regarding nondiscrimination.
The psychological toll of homophobic and heterosexist, if not hostile, environments has been theorized to negatively affect the development of a positive gay identity (Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001; Fassinger, 2000). Fassinger (1998) noted that sexual identity formation is both an internal process as well as an external process that helps to explicate how individuals relate to social group membership. Bowen and Bourgeois suggested that positive experiences with heterosexuals might facilitate the establishment of a positive identity among gay individuals. Thus, positive attitudes of heterosexual peers could help to provide a campus climate that is welcoming and supportive and that could facilitate the development of a positive gay identity.

Studies have shown that researchers found gender to be a correlate of heterosexual attitudes towards gay individuals, with heterosexual men consistently having more negative attitudes toward gay individuals than do heterosexual women (see D’Augelli & Rose, 1990; Marsiglio, 1993). Herek (1986) suggested that the reason men have more negative attitudes is because men experience a greater pressure to conform to traditional gender roles (i.e. heterosexual masculinity). Theodore and Basow (2000) found that an important predictor of homophobia was the extent to which heterosexual males attributed the degree they fit the community norms of masculinity. According to Aberson, Swan, and Emerson (1999) the expression of bias toward gay men has become less overt as societal mores begin to condemn negative attitudes related to sexual identity.

Critics of higher education have argued that emphasizing differences between individuals and among groups (especially groups sharing a common subculture such as student-athletes or fraternity members) leads to self-segregation and works against creating community (D’Souza, 1995; Schlesinger, 1995). Thus, any emphasis on team, cooperation, community, or brotherhood might retard participants from developing their own sense of identity as separate individuals (Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morphew, 2001). Even Coleman (1982c), while proposing a linear sexual identity development model feared that

There is a danger in any model that oversimplifies the developmental tasks that must be completed to assure an integrated identity. Rigid rules of conformity are sometimes dictated by the gay community, and these can be harmful to the many men and women who do not comply (p. 40).
Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (see Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) examines the identity processes that occur within an individual. Unlike stage models of identity development (see Cass, 1979; Fassinger, 1998), however, social identity theory explores the effect that larger social and societal forces have on these processes, and how these processes affect broader social structures. While many of the models of sexual identity development primarily focus on individuals and their relation to society as a whole, social identity theory is concerned with social influences in the development of the self-concept and the derivation of positive self-esteem contingent upon it (Cox & Gallois, 1996). When trying to understand the social world, individuals construct social categories to help account for the differences between people in order to predict others’ behaviors with greater success.

Self-esteem has been linked to personal adjustment, physical health, and academic motivation and success among college students, at least partially through mechanisms of social support (Brand & Dodd, 1998). Aspinwall and Taylor (1992) found self-esteem to be the best of five predictors for academic motivation and Thombs (1995) found that first-year college students with relatively low self-esteem were more likely to exhibit a variety of problem behaviors.

Self-categorization is an adoption over time of the perceived normative behaviors, characteristics, and values associated with a particular group’s membership. For those with multiple dominant status (such as the White, heterosexual, fraternity man), possessing multiple identities is unlikely to be a source of problems and may assist in the development of high esteem (Cox & Gallois, 1996). The substitution of a minority identity (such as gay sexual identity) may potentially bring the remaining dominant social identities into conflict. The perception that the norms and values of groups could be incompatible requires some kind of resolution of the identities within the individual concerned.

According to Cox and Gallois (1996), sexual orientation identity can be the basis of social identity for some people and personal identity for others. Social identity theory is primarily concerned with process issues about identity, rather than the specific content
of identity that is the primary focus of most stage theories. Empirical evidence suggests that there is a great variety in the developmental paths of sexual identity. Cox and Gallois posited that social identity theory may account for such variation and that the resulting large range of identities can change over time. These representations continue to evolve in the light of experiences, whether direct, as with contact from members of social groups, or indirect, from other sources of information. Social identity theory gives a framework through which to explore the interaction that occurs between an individual’s multiple identities. The result is a model of development that focuses on the interaction between an individual, his groups, and the social milieu (Cox & Gallois).

Humphreys (1972) described four strategies used by gay men that in social identity theory terms involved being in control of social mobility: (1) capitulating; (2) passing; (3) covering; and (4) blending. Capitulators try to avoid all homosexual activity, maybe to the extent of marriage or extreme numbers of opposite gender sexual partners. Passers attempt to separate their lives into two worlds, one heterosexual and the other homosexual, hoping the two will not collide. If asked, individuals who are passing do not disclose the fact that they are gay (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Individuals who cover are prepared to disclose their sexual orientation, if asked, but do not actively demonstrate it. People who blend act in a manner that is appropriate for their gender and see their sexual orientation as being irrelevant to any other part of their life.

Dependence concerns the degree to which an individual needs a particular group membership, compared to other distinct group memberships, for social identity. The fewer distinct group memberships an individual claims, the greater his dependence is likely to be on those particular groups (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Nevertheless, a person may have many group memberships and still be highly dependent upon one in particular, if that one membership is the major source of social status for that individual. Research by Hayek et al., (2002) suggested that fraternity communities at large public universities constitute distinctive subcultures since the institutional culture at such campuses tends to be more fragmented and less coherent. Thus, fraternity membership at large public universities may have more of a conforming influence on the attitudes and behaviors of fraternity members.
According to Cox and Gallois (1996), when an individual believes his primary social group (such as a fraternity chapter) is perceived to be under a threat of some sort such that the group is likely to be worse off (such as from the revelation of a gay brother), those brothers who are highly dependent on the group may become more insecure about the group than those who are less dependent. The greater the insecurity, the more likely these individuals are to try to maintain the prestige of the group. High dependence may lead to hostile reactions to these perceived threats to the group. This is in part because people who have higher levels of dependence are less likely to be able to change their group membership.

**Fraternity Culture and Gay Sexual Identity**

Burke (1994) interviewed 36 GLB British police officers to investigate the effects of simultaneously belonging to two marginal and ostensibly antagonistic communities. The research explored how officers often lived double as opposed to integrated lives and how the stress caused by leading two discrete existences could be detrimental to mental health, contribute to ineffective work performance, and prohibit the formation of satisfying personal relationships. Burke concluded that only after the police and gay identities were reconciled was a rounded sense of self in the participants seen to emerge.

According to Rhoads (1997), some of the most prominent research into the collegiate experience of gay students tended to portray them as a homogenous body, sharing similar experiences. He posited that this overgeneralization contributed to the inadequate articulation and ineffective implementation of campus policies, practices, and support and reinforced the need of understanding of the diversity of students’ experiences. Research by McMillan and Forsyth (1991) suggested that learning was affected by motivational factors intrinsic to the individual, such as self-confidence, perceived importance of learning, and expectations for success, as well as the social context, including whether or not the learning environment was encouraging and supporting (Tiberius & Billson, 1991). Learning is enhanced when students feel validated (Rendón, 1994) and when they experience positive interactions with peers and faculty both inside and outside the classroom (Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurnek, 1994).
Because of the hostility that GLB students experience, these students often question themselves.

Many college campuses have a student organization for GLB students. Historically, these groups alone have addressed the needs of GLB students because counseling centers and campus housing professionals paid little attention to the problems of these students until recently (D’Augelli, 1996). However, it remains highly unlikely that many such support organizations exist for gay fraternity members (Case, 2005) and those that do exist are still in their infancy (see Hesp, 2005). Much informal counseling and crisis intervention occurs in these support organizations and D’Augelli saw it as imperative that campus administrators support them. Tierney and Rhoads (1993) suggested that if institutions of higher education wish to create multicultural communities of difference, they must recognize the needs and human rights of GLB community members. Several studies have indicated that educational efforts were helpful in combating negative attitudes and increasing accurate knowledge of the GLB population (see Nieberding, 1989; Serdahely & Ziemba, 1984; Wells, 1991). Appropriate education was also found to enhance the levels of self-esteem and self-concept of both heterosexual and non-heterosexual students (Wells, 1989).

Although social attitudes toward gay men are becoming more positive, and gay men are becoming more visible, homophobia and heterosexism still pervade both our culture and social systems (Rust, 1996). No place is the assumption of heteronormality more true than within the college fraternity subculture (DeQuine, 2003). Gay groups have gained acceptance on many college campuses, but acceptance of gay men into the mainstream fraternity community has been a slower process (DeQuine). Because more young gay men come out of the closet while still in high school, they arrive on college campuses expecting little or no discrimination in social opportunities due to their sexual orientation (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Savin-Williams, 1995). Although there have been few, if any, formal exclusionary clauses within fraternities’ membership guidelines based on sexual orientation, some organizations are making specific, affirmative statements to indicate that a differing sexual orientation from that of the majority of organization members is not a reason for denying an invitation to join, or removal of a brother who comes out after his initiation (Binder, 2003).
The familial environment of the college fraternity, however, may be concurrently a supportive yet hostile environment, particularly for those men in the process of developing a gay identity. Horowitz (1987) suggested that “contemporary fraternity members no longer feel confident that they are one with their brothers; they find the fraternity [chapter] divided from within into cliques, divisions that can be as powerful as those between chapters or between the initiated and the outsider” (p. 275). Kuh and Lyons (1990) claimed that “a close community can become closed, oppress as well as support” (p. 21).

According to Chan (1996), psychological research indicated that it is far easier and more common to hold negative attitudes towards members of minority groups if an individual does not know or feel connected to someone in the stigmatized group and if he cannot see the humanity and similarity to himself. As noted by Chickering and Reisser (1993), “homophobia discourages closeness between males. Men are more likely than women to equate warmth and closeness with sex and look for an erotic component when a strong emotional component exists” (p. 170). When a chapter culture “inhibits personal or cross cultural connections, or assigns second-class citizenship to certain types of students or relationships, then avenues for dialogue and exploration may be closed” (p. 396). Thus, gay or questioning students may feel alienated from fraternities and fraternity members, especially since “rednecked” displays of discrimination in society often have been replaced by a more subtle, aversive form of bias (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986, p. 62).

Windmeyer and Freeman (1998) and Windmeyer (2005) gave voice to the experiences of select fraternity members and their involvement in fraternity life as gay males. These anecdotal reports affirmed that some men who are openly gay, or who later come out, achieved and maintained membership in fraternity chapters. Some researchers have also identified and labeled distinctive coping strategies used by gay males (See Burke, 1994; Trump 2003; Trump & Wallace, 2006; Woods, 1992). Johnson (1996) suggested that some gay adolescents follow one option of being the “best little boy on the face of the earth” (p. 38) whereby the gay youth tries to put all of the non-sexual events of life in perfect order and have them under perfect control. A variation of Johnson’s pattern is the attempt of the gay/lesbian student to blend and appear as much like heterosexual peers as possible. Case’s (1996) exploratory study of gay fraternity men
provided some validation of this claim as 80% of the male respondents held at least 1 executive committee position and over 20% were either president or vice president of their fraternity chapters. Case believed these findings suggested that a “tendency toward ‘overachievement’ may reflect a desire for validation and acceptance by the group” (p. 2). It is important to note, however, that Case’s study was based on a volunteer sample of respondents, and may thus be non-representative of gay fraternity men in general.

Case (1996) also reported that gay men join fraternities for reasons similar to heterosexual men, namely friendship and camaraderie, social activities, and a support group with a sense of belonging. Likewise, the benefits of chapter membership reported by gay brothers were similar to those reported by other students: social and interpersonal skills, long-term friendships, and leadership skills.

Over 70% of the 524 respondents to Case’s (1996) exploratory study reported that they had encountered homophobic or heterosexist attitudes within their chapters, usually in the form of derogatory jokes or comments. Respondents also cited homophobia as frequently occurring in member selection. Nonetheless, almost 85% of respondents felt that they were at least somewhat satisfied with their undergraduate fraternal experience. This compares to an 88% satisfaction rate on the AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment Survey for a sample of all fraternity members (Vestal & Butler, 2005).

During the 1990s, when diversity was a buzzword on college campuses, many fraternal organizations were founded and organized with a focus on cultural diversity (Johnson & Larabee, 2003). Many of these groups do not currently have a national governing body or umbrella organization (such as the North American Interfraternity Conference for historically White fraternities) to which they belong. Members join these culturally diverse groups for numerous reasons, oftentimes the same reasons that members join the older and more traditional fraternities. According to Johnson and Larabee, foremost among the reasons for joining was the desire for a sense of truly belonging and the satisfaction of a need that the older and more traditional groups did not fully understand. Additionally, these organizations contributed significantly to their respective communities and endeavored to improve the quality of life for those in the particular cultures.
Delta Lambda Phi Fraternity (DLP) was founded in 1986 in Washington, D.C., and modeled on the traditional programs, policies, and activities of the older and more traditional groups. The organization membership cites their mission as “enhancing the quality of life among gay, bisexual and progressive men by providing dignified and purposeful social, service and recreational activities” (Delta Lambda Phi website, 2005). Johnson and Larabee (2003) posited that the meaning and purpose for members of organizations such as DLP is to “have some social group that understands, appreciates and respects members as individuals, and which will help them develop into caring, balanced citizens” (p. 103). In a study by Yeung and Stombler (2000), some members of DLP reported that joining the organization marked their first coming out experience and that many men used the rush events as their first function in the gay community. As Yeung and Stombler stated, “Through organizational ideology, formal rules, organizational practices, and interaction, DLP fostered a site where young men negotiated their sexual identity both internally and externally” (p. 140). They concluded that “the brotherhood that DLP cultivated was both a brotherhood for men and also uniquely ‘gay’ in the sense that it was a direct response to the need of young, college, gay men who sought an alternative site for interaction and support” (p. 145).

Summary

I examined three primary areas of interest for this review of literature: group culture and group norms specifically related to fraternities and gay men, homosexual identity formation and gay culture, and the intersection of gay sexual identity within fraternities through the study of social identity theory. The literature on fraternity subculture was dichotomous since some critics suggested that fraternities have become less concerned with the growth and cognitive development of their members and more concerned with social interaction and intolerance of differences (Wilder et al., 1986; Winston & Saunders, 1987). Other critics claimed that fraternities are “one of the best educational and developmental environments available to college students on campus” (Strange, 1986, p. 522).
The literature pertaining to homosexual identity development was also dichotomous with some research suggesting that a majority of gay males move through a series of stages from awareness through to the attainment of an integrated homosexual identity, whereas others articulated a nonlinear model. Cass’ (1979) model of homosexual identity development appeared to be the most widely recognized model within the literature reviewed and suggested environment greatly affected the coming out process. A participant in Rhoads’ (1995) ethnography described his coming out as “‘something that has a beginning but never really ends’” (p. 69). Students in Rhoads’ study also continually reinforced self-acknowledgment as the first step in the process of coming out.

Mead (1934) argued that self-identity is formed out of the interaction between the “I” and the “me,” where the “I” is our internalized sense of self and the “me” is our sense of self as we imagine others see us. Through social interaction such as in fraternity chapter membership, the self emerges as individuals move back and forward between the “I” and the “me.” Culture frames social interaction and is reshaped by that interaction. It also establishes the roles that individuals adopt as they engage in social interaction. Erikson (1968) discussed identity development as a sense of self that emerges from the interaction between the individual and social relationships. He recognized the role that society and culture play in shaping how we think of and define ourselves. Both Erikson and Mead highlighted the fundamental role culture and social life play in the process of identity development. Thus, I posited that fraternity membership has a major impact on gay undergraduates and vice versa.

While it appeared fraternity chapter members seemed generally unwilling to extend a membership invitation to a student thought to be gay, chapter members appeared to demonstrate greater tolerance if a brother came out after his initiation. In most instances described in the Case (1996) investigation, the majority of chapter members had at least a somewhat supportive response to a brother coming out. In those instances where the gay fraternity member had control over the circumstances of his coming out, the response was more likely to be supportive than in those instances in which the member’s sexual orientation was discovered by others and he was outed against his will (Trump, 2003).
Rhoads (1995) posited that “where there was once a self-imposed but socially enforced closet door, there is now a socially imposed form of confinement – the social environment students encounter” (pp. 71-72). The likelihood is that gay students have always been in social fraternity chapters, although they have probably hidden their identity. The “don’t ask, don’t tell” modus operandi of the U.S. military was long the norm in the fraternity community when it came to homosexuality (Case, 1996). In the 21st century, however, many gay students on campus no longer feel compelled to hide their true identities (Howe & Strauss, 2000). As D’Augelli (1991b) pointed out, “They see no reason for shame” (p. 5). I concluded that this included participation in fraternity activities to the extent of seeking full membership.

By acknowledging the existence of these hidden members and endorsing openly gay males as a new recruitment pool of candidates, campus professionals, alumni advisors, and fraternity headquarters staff members should be better equipped to assist undergraduate fraternity chapter members deal with challenges created when a traditionally heterosexist and possibly homophobic institution comes face-to-face with non-heterosexual members and potential members.

In closing, Rhoads (1997) warned that

Efforts must be made to avoid grouping the identity challenges lesbian, gay, and bisexual people face under one generic rubric. Furthermore, greater insight is needed about the social contexts of sexual identity acquisition. This means the knowledge of sexual identity processes must be contextualized (p. 478).
The purpose of this study was to identify the interplay of gay sexual identity orientation with the subculture of selected chapters of a historically White fraternity community at Southeastern State University, the pseudonym for a large, doctoral/research-intensive university in the southeastern U.S. I examined how the presence of gay members in historically White fraternities influenced the culture of the organization and how the fraternity culture affected gay fraternity members. I examined how brothers with a gay sexual orientation affected chapter culture, the experiences, perceptions, and transitions of the gay members, and whether the beliefs and behaviors of heterosexual brothers were consistent or in conflict with the values espoused by the inter/national fraternities.

I intend the results of this study to add to the existing but limited literature regarding the collegiate experiences of gay males and their involvement in socially based fraternal organizations. My desire is that this study will improve higher educational practice.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What were the experiences of an undergraduate gay fraternity member (blended, passing, or covering) in a historically White chapter?
2. Did the attempt to gain membership by a prospective member with a blended sexual identity (i.e. openly gay) affect the values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of undergraduate fraternity members in a historically White chapter? and
3. Was there a different affect on the values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of undergraduate fraternity members in a historically White chapter when the admission of homosexuality was after an individual has already received a bid?

Consequently, this investigation was an ethnographic study in the post-positivist mold of the effect of gay sexual orientation on members of a college social fraternity
community. In contrast to experimental design that seeks to control variables, qualitative research deals with words and meanings, seeking to maximize understanding of events and facilitating interpretation of data. “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 4). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) warned that due to the wide range of activities under consideration it is not always possible to specify in advance what specific areas to consider. Qualitative methodology should help the researcher understand behavior from the participants’ frames of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Ethnographic techniques have traditionally been the principal strategy for examining cultures and social phenomena, with Harris (1968) defining culture as “the sum of a social group’s observable patterns of behavior, customs, and ways of life” (p. 16) and Fetterman (1989) defining it as “the ideas, beliefs, and knowledge that characterize a particular group of people” (p. 27). Kuh and Whitt (1988) suggested that “culture is revealed by examining artifacts like products and processes and the values and assumptions on which products and processes are based” (p. 96) and that to appreciate the nuances of behavior in a college or university, an understanding and appreciation of the cultural milieu is necessary.

Investigating culture requires discovering and understanding the meanings that individuals give to their experiences (Love, 1998). This involves identifying shared meaning, beliefs, values, and assumptions related to organizational experiences. Uncovering these meanings, beliefs, values, and assumptions requires prolonged contact with study participants, in-depth interviews, and empathic listening (Love). Spradley (1979) warned that an ethnographic researcher must also recognize the existence of any subtle language differences between himself and the research participants. While I have extensive fraternity and gay culture knowledge and experience, there may have been important differences in the way I interpreted and articulated participant data compared to other researchers.

Spradley also warned researchers to be aware of participants’ “translation competence” (p. 19), namely the ability to translate the meanings of one culture into a form that is appropriate to another culture. While this could have affected the way a participant articulated his views to me (framing them in terms he believed I would want
to hear) it was perhaps more important in this study’s data analysis for me to assess how participants shifted back and forth between the language of an undergraduate fraternity brother and that of a young, gay male.

Spradley (1979) noted that the ethnographic method yields “empirical data about the lives of people in specific situations. It allows us to see alternative realities and modify our culture-bound theories of human behavior” (p. 13) and helps anthropologists and sociologists make sense of complexities of culture and social life. Ethnographic research seeks as its goal what Geertz (1973) referred to as “thick description,” which is achieved through extensive and intensive involvement in the culture of the group under study (in this case a student subculture). Kuh and Whitt (1988) suggested ethnography enables the capture of multiple realities and the description of different perspectives in ways that others can understand. Fetterman (1987) suggested that an ethnographic approach “also accommodates the mutually shaping influences of subcultures, values, rituals, and the physical environment” (p. 103) through immersion in the culture of a community or social group (Fetterman, 1989), with Merriam (1998) defining ethnography as “a sociocultural analysis of the unit of study” (p. 14).

Qualitative research allows the investigation of the perspectives of people excluded from the mainstream, such as gay men, because of the “democratic emphasis of the method, the ease with which the method attends to the perspectives of those not traditionally included in mainstream research studies, and the strengths of the qualitative approach for describing the complexities of social conflicts” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 14). Thus, an ethnographic approach allowed me to describe aspects of the fraternity chapter subculture under consideration concerning values, attitudes, and beliefs about sexual orientation.

**Participants**

Fetterman (1989) referred to the process of “getting in” as the initial step in the process of establishing trust within a specific community or culture. Morin (1977) noted that due to the invisibility of gay men and their frequent concealment of sexual orientation, there is no such thing as a representative sample of them. Thus, I employed
purposive, convenience selection with a thorough and complex process. I used the example of ‘Doc’ who was responsible for initiating W. F. Whyte into street-corner society (Whyte, 1955). Thus, I called upon the assistance of colleagues, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances to identify potential participants whom they believed had significant personal experiences both as a gay male (one who is blending, i.e. open, or one who is passing or covering, i.e. closeted) and the campus historically White fraternity community. Rhoads (1997) cited these purposeful “elite sampling” and “snowball sampling” approaches (Zuokemea, 2003, p. 49) as the best procedures when the universe of the population under study is largely unknown. Researchers use such a technique when attempting to sample statistical minorities (Battle et al., 2002). Merriam (1998) argued that researchers need to choose participants from which the most can be learned and those who are able and willing to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions on the subject. Figure 2 graphically displays the population and participants.

Figure 2. Population and Participants
I obtained participation from three openly gay fraternity members from three different chapters (with the pseudonyms Alpha, Beta, and Gamma Fraternities) and one former chapter member of Alpha Fraternity who spent most of his time as a fraternity member passing; these men became the key informants for this study. In addition, I got participation from one heterosexual brother from both Alpha and Beta Fraternities and a blended (i.e. openly gay) rush participant who was denied a bid to Beta Fraternity. Thus, I was able to triangulate much of my findings via the seven participants. Figure 3 graphically displays the participants.

Figure 3. Graphical Representation of Relationships Between Participants
Minimum Requirements for a Good Participant

Spradley (1979) identified five minimal requirements for selecting a good participant: (1) thorough enculturation; (2) current involvement; (3) an unfamiliar cultural scene; (4) adequate time; and (5) nonanalytic.

Thorough Enculturation

Good participants know their culture well, often to the extent that they no longer think about it (Spradley, 1979). Spradley even recommended that “if it is a part-time interest … at least three or four years of involvement is needed” (p. 48). However, sometimes the views of a marginal person might provide an important contrast.

Current Involvement

When people are currently involved in a cultural scene, they use their knowledge to guide their actions (Spradley, 1979). However, it is also important to look closely at the kind of current involvement. Individuals who live and work in close proximity often believe they share the same way of looking at the world, but as Spradley stated, “a college student who lives in a dormitory [sic] cannot act as a good informant on the culture of women … cleaning the same dormitory” (p. 49).

Unfamiliar Cultural Scene

According to Spradley (1979), when ethnographers study unfamiliar cultures, their unfamiliarity keeps them from taking things for granted and makes them sensitive to things that have become so commonplace to participants that they ignore them. In this study, I have knowledge of fraternity life and gay culture but I did not know the particular cultural scene of gay fraternity life at Southeastern State University prior to this study.

Adequate Time

Spradley (1979) recommended a minimum of six one-hour interviews to obtain in depth information from participants. However, he also commented, “a busy informant keenly interested in the project will often make time” (p. 52).

Nonanalytic

Some participants described events and actions with almost no analysis as to their meaning and significance, whereas others offered insightful analyses and interpretations.
I was therefore certain that any analysis by participants during their interviews was from the perspective of the insider.

Participants for this study were thus a purposive but opportunistic sample of traditional-aged (18-22) undergraduate members of the historically White fraternity chapters at Southeastern State University. I did not know any of the participants prior to this study. I required my colleagues to have their identified individuals contact me via phone or email to set up an initial meeting. This ensured confidentiality of participants prior to the explanation of the study and the signing of the Informed Consent Form that included the rights of participants to discontinue participation at any point in the study if they so chose. As Spradley (1979) stated, “researchers must “go beyond merely considering the interests of informants [sic]. We have a positive responsibility to safeguard their rights, their interests, and even their sensitivities” (pp. 35-36). Since potential participants contacted me, it also prevented their possible outing.

At the end of an interview, I asked the participant if he knew someone who would be able to add to the study. If so, I asked that the participant pass on my contact details and have that referred person contact me. I acknowledged that some of the referrals could be unwilling to contact me but utilizing this system maintained the privacy of participants – I only knew the names of those potentially willing to participate in the study, thereby preventing any unintentional outing of individuals. The desire was that my colleagues and the existing participants would help me develop, network, and grow – like a snowball – referrals to fraternity chapter members who were blending their social identity (i.e. openly gay) as well as some who may have remained passing or covering (i.e. in the closet or not open about their sexual orientation).

The intent was that this process would lead to an ever-growing list of referrals that would facilitate the expansion of the developing theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Rhoads (1994) posited that snowball sampling is possibly the best method to employ in a study of gay men since it is not feasible to identify the universe from which to draw a sample. Consequently, I acknowledge that my study participants were likely neither typical nor representative, but were men I felt were integral to this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended sampling until I reached a point of saturation or redundancy. Thus, I terminated sampling when I stopped receiving new information.
Once contacted by a potential participant, we scheduled a mutually convenient time to meet to discuss more fully the research. During this initial meeting, I explained the study, including the nature and purpose of the design, the processes relating to it, and what I would be seeking from him (especially in terms of time commitment) if he were to participate. This meeting was also an opportunity to answer any questions or concerns and together we made an assessment as to the level of mutual interest in participation and the desire to make a commitment. Once there was consensus as to suitability and appropriateness for the study, I sought consent and once given, I scheduled the first interview appointment. I did not interview any participants prior to their signing an Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) outlining the purposes of the study.

Unless otherwise agreed to, I will continue to protect the identities of all who participated by using pseudonyms. At all times, I treated participants with respect and I did my best to ensure that no physical or psychological harm came to anyone who participated in this study. I followed all procedures for qualitative ethnographic research as approved by the Florida State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.

According to Rhoads (1994), critical ethnographers recognize that they are not removed from their settings but rather they are participants within their own fieldwork. Rhoads went on to suggest that traditional research tends to portray the researcher outside the production of knowledge and as the one who merely collects data. He concluded by saying that critical ethnographers conceptualize the researcher as one intimately involved with research participants in the creation of new knowledge. Thus, a major aspect of the ethnographic process is the development of relationships with participants. As Spradley (1979) pointed out, “Informants [sic] are a source of information; literally they become teachers” (p. 25). Spradley went on to posit that ethnographic interviewing involves two distinct but complementary processes: developing rapport and eliciting information.

Rapport encourages participants to talk about their culture and refers to a harmonious relationship between participants and me. According to Spradley (1979), it means that a “basic sense of trust has developed that allows a free flow of information” (p. 78). In terms of this study, I built trust and rapport with participants through conversations about my interest in them grounded in my fraternity knowledge, my ability
to speak the language of fraternity men, and my personal experiences. Spradley warned that rapport does not necessarily mean deep friendship or profound intimacy between two people, but rather a relationship where both parties freely exchange information. Although sometimes unpredictable, rapport frequently develops in a patterned way. Spradley cautiously delineated a purposeful and developmental sequence based on outcomes and concluded that relationships between the researcher and participants usually proceed through four stages: (1) Apprehension; (2) Exploration; (3) Cooperation; and (4) Participation.

In the apprehension stage, uncertainty is the primary feeling and neither participant nor researcher truly knows what to expect. According to Spradley (1979), one of the most important principles to overcome apprehension is to “keep informants [sic] talking” (p. 80). In the exploration stage, both parties begin to disclose and cooperation starts to develop. Spradley suggested that participants need the opportunity to move through this stage without the pressure to cooperate fully. I achieved this through repeated explanations of the study and restating in a non-judgmental way what I heard participants say. In the cooperation stage, the researcher and participant each develop a more genuine partnership spirit, no longer worried about offending each other or making mistakes in asking or answering questions. In the final participation stage, a heightened sense of cooperation leads to full participation by all parties with the participant recognizing and accepting his role of teaching the ethnographer. Participants may begin to analyze their culture, but always from their own frame of reference.

Building rapport is a complex process. Spradley’s (1979) schema is interesting since Jackson (1987) suggested, “I don’t know of anyone who can tell you how to make rapport happen” (p. 70) and that rapport is something “you can lose … in a moment and in a like amount of time with another person achieve … to an astounding degree” (p. 68). Jorgensen (1989) suggested

Within almost every complex organization…. there are cliques of people whose activities are kept secret from nonmembers. Locating these settings is extremely difficult without prior experience with more visible aspects of these human scenes. This knowledge may be acquired by gaining the trust and confidence of an insider willing to talk with you. (p. 43).
Lincoln and Guba (1989) indicated that the nature of qualitative research is such that the relationship between the researcher and participant is paramount and should be based on dignity and respect. Glaser (1982) defined such reciprocity as “the exchange of favors and commitments, the building of a sense of mutual identification and feeling of community” (p. 50). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) recommended that it is a good idea for a researcher to play down status and experience, since emphasizing these qualities often causes participants to be cautious and guarded. However, they also intimated that similar experiences, gender, and the ability to speak the language of fraternity members would help me facilitate rapport.

“Thick description” (Geertz, 1973) details and examines the intents, purposes, meanings, contexts, conditions, and circumstances of actions. Of importance to a qualitative investigation, Sears (1991) noted:

The power in qualitative data … lies not in the number of people interviewed but in the researcher’s ability to know a few people well. The test of qualitative inquiry is not its unearthing of a seemingly endless multitude of unique individuals but illuminating the lives of a few well chosen individuals (p. 433).

Consequently, preferring to utilize fewer participants, albeit examining each in greater depth, I illuminated the experiences of the purposively selected students by employing thick description. I achieved this slowly, through a series of interviews, by repeated explanations, and using special questions through extensive and intensive formal and informal conversational interviews, participant observation, and content analysis.

Data Collection

Wolcott (1990) recommended four basic research strategies when conducting ethnographic studies: (1) participant observation; (2) interviewing; (3) use of written sources; and (4) analysis or collection of non-written sources. Kuh and Whitt (1988) went on to suggest:

Traditional methods of social science research are not well suited for identifying properties of institutional culture. Qualitative methods, such as ethnographic culture audits grounded in the paradigm of appreciative inquiry, enable researchers to identify cultural properties and develop an appreciation of the holistic influence … (pp. 109-110)
of the organization’s culture. Spradley (1979) argued that the major part of an ethnographic record consists of written field notes, observations, interviews, records, and other personal documents. He went on to posit that each step in the ethnographic process involves translation of the various languages used in the field situation. Both native terms and my own terms found their way into my field notes; the important thing was to distinguish them carefully, with the native terms recorded verbatim.

**Interviews**

Fetterman (1989) described interviewing as the most important data collection technique a qualitative researcher possesses and Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) called interviewing a key qualitative technique. Patton (1990) identified five basic types of questions that would be useful to ask during an interview: (1) background or demographic questions; (2) knowledge questions; (3) experience or behavior questions; (4) opinion or value questions; and (5) feelings questions. In addition, I used what Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin (1981) called devil’s advocate questions, since these are particularly good to use with a potentially controversial topic such as that encompassed in the present study. Merriam (1998) suggested that responses to devil’s advocate questions are usually a respondent’s personal opinion or feeling about the matter.

I asked nonthreatening questions first to put the participant at ease before posing more personal and potentially threatening questions. An atmosphere of trust, cooperation, and mutual respect was vital if I was to obtain accurate information and Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) posited that interviews “depend heavily for … success on the relationship that is developed between the interviewer and respondent” (p. 160). Spradley (1979) suggested, “a few minutes of easygoing talk interspersed here and there throughout the interview will pay enormous dividends in rapport” (p. 59). Utilizing an interview guide approach (Merriam, 1998), I established in outline form in advance the topics and issues that I would investigate (Appendix A). However, it was virtually impossible to detail the flow of an interview ahead of time because it was dependent on how a participant answered the questions posed. As such, I made adjustments in my interviewing as I went
along. Such “probing” (Merriam, p. 80) came in the form of asking for more details, for clarification, for examples, or even through my silence.

Each participant chose the location and time of our meetings based on his schedule, convenience, and personal need. Most interviews occurred in local restaurants where I paid for participants’ meals as compensation for taking part in the study. Prior to beginning each interview, I reviewed with the participant once again the purpose of my study, a general sense of what I hoped to achieve, the process that I would use to analyze data, and provided the opportunity for the participant to ask questions. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) recommended that, “The tape recording of the interview session will produce the most complete record of what was said” (p. 170). Thus, I obtained permission from each participant to tape record each interview with a cassette recorder and microphone placed in a position that would not distract the conversation. On average interviews lasted 60 minutes and were in conversational style.

I began my initial interviews with each participant with a review of the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C). The participant signed two copies (one for him and one for me) and I then asked background and demographic questions followed by knowledge questions. Such knowledge questions allowed me to discover facts about the fraternity community and the participant’s specific chapter.

Through the course of each interview, I decided the sequence and specific wording of questions. While salient topics could be inadvertently omitted, such an approach increased the comprehensiveness of the data and made data collection somewhat systematic for each participant while also keeping the interviews somewhat conversational and situational (Patton, 1990). I moved to experience or behavior questions with the intent to elicit descriptions of experience, behavior, or activities that I may not have observed. Finally, I asked questions to find out what the participant thought about the topic of gay sexual orientation and how he felt about the topic in connection with his fraternity chapter. Each participant was encouraged to present his experiences in a method appropriate and comfortable for him.

Opinion or values questions call attention to the respondent’s goals, beliefs, attitudes, or values, whereas feelings questions are directed toward the emotional responses of the participant to his experiences. By asking the same question in different
ways during the interviews, I was able to check my understanding of what the respondent had been saying. Where possible, I avoided the use of any dichotomous questions; instead, I attempted to use open-ended questioning. If there was ever any doubt about the completeness of a remark, or the understanding or clarification of something said, I asked the interviewee to repeat his answer or statement. While it was tempting to interrupt a respondent to pursue an interesting item, I was aware this could have broken his train of thought. Thus, I always attempted to make a note of my comment and question to be able to ask it when the interviewee had finished his response. As we approached the conclusion of an interview, I encouraged the participant to reflect upon what he had said and if there was anything more that he wanted to contribute.

Researchers often use semi-structured interviews to “understand complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 366). Semi-structured interviews allow depth to be achieved through asking major questions of all participants but altering the sequence to probe more deeply and overcome a common tendency for respondents to anticipate questions (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). A semi-structured interview format thus helped me obtain a participant’s viewpoint on diversity in general and specifically the impact of gay sexual orientation in his chapter both from a personal viewpoint and as it related to the specific chapter and overall fraternity community cultures. I intentionally looked for how certain kinds of questions were answered, the meaning that participants gave to certain words and actions, and how attitudes were translated into actions. When the emergent concepts became what Glaser and Strauss (1967) called saturated, I ended this component of the study.

I personally transcribed all the interviews, which allowed me to begin analysis as I typed. These transcriptions became the primary data for my analysis and the electronic versions were entered into the QSR NUD*IST software program that I used for coding of the data. I analyzed the data for themes and possible follow-up questions.

**Observations**

An important aspect of ethnographic study involves participant observation in the natural environment of the research participants. Spradley (1980) articulated that “every
social situation can be identified by three primary elements: a place, actors, and activities” (p. 39). To be immersed in a culture or subculture one must become a participant-as-observer with no manipulation of variables or control of the activities of the participants. Fetterman (1989) noted, “Participant observation combines participation in the lives of the people under study with the maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data” (p. 45).

By means of passive participant observation, I observed the day-to-day activities of fraternity brothers at Southeastern State University, the physical characteristics of the social situation, and what it felt like to be part of the scene but without participating or interacting with other people to any great extent (Spradley, 1980). After making broad descriptive observations to obtain an overview of the social situation, I narrowed my research and began to make focused observations. After more analysis and repeated observations, I narrowed the investigation still further and made selective observations. Participant observation allowed me to develop lines of questioning for participant interviews and validation or questioning of the data received during interviews. It is through this triangulation that I corroborated data, interpreted, and reinterpreted the data received. Rosaldo (1989) called this process self-reflective with the involvement of revision of questions as well as theories. However, even as I made my observations more focused, I continued making general descriptive observations.

I examined and took notes on how fraternity brothers interacted with research participants. I acknowledge that my presence could have had an effect on those being observed, and thus on the outcome of the study. However, by developing positive relationships with participants through interviews, I hope that their undergraduate fraternity chapter brothers felt comfortable with my presence. I gained knowledge of both the formal and informal operations of the chapter and fraternity community and explained how important it was for me to be unobtrusive and non-interfering in what the chapter members normally do. In addition, I explained that I would not use any individual’s name or the name of a chapter and that I would disguise the name of the institution.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggested that an overt role gives the researcher greater access to a range of people. Through overt observation of various recruitment and chapter activities in the natural setting of a college campus, I got a holistic feel for the
subculture of particular fraternity chapters in addition to the culture of the entire fraternity community. The focus of this study was on interdependencies that I have not reduced to discrete variables or linear, cause-effect relationships. Fetterman (1989) suggested such key events provide a “lens through which to view a culture” (pp. 91-92) in context. I therefore noted the gestures, jokes, conversations, and body language of undergraduate fraternity members to gain insight to the fraternity chapter culture.

At the first observation of chapter activities I requested that the interview participant who was knowledgeable about my research accompany me, since “while you may get official permission, [the] study may be sabotaged by the subjects [sic]” unless they feel “they had a hand in allowing [me] in” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 76). Eberly (2005) strongly endorsed the use of a gatekeeper to vouch for the credibility of the researcher in all fraternity-related research activity due to the closed nature of fraternal organizations. I also postponed noting observations for the first couple of sessions while physically present but recorded my impressions in field notes later to allow the participants to get comfortable with my presence. This procedure thus limited the major effect on the behavior of those I observed. Merriam (1998) suggested researchers record field notes as soon as possible after an observation and draw a diagram of the setting to trace movements through it. She also recommended listing the participants present or at least indicating how many and what kinds of people were present. It is important to note, however, that Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) warned that writing up observations after the event is retrospective with the potential of recording features in the written record that were not present in the original encounter.

I limited the length of my first couple of observations. If I sensed I was in a situation where dissension and political wrangling was present, I attempted to be low key until I was able to figure out the struggles through listening carefully and saying very little. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggested that studying an organization in conflict could be particularly productive experiences since in such situations people reveal their true perspectives.

One of the changes that occurred after five or six periods of field observation was that fraternity brothers recognized me. This offered me the opportunities for conducting informal ethnographic interviews during participant observation. When such
opportunities arose, I engaged brothers in conversations and then asked them some ethnographic question appropriate to the conversation such as if brothers reacted to potential homophobic and heterocentric comments, and if so, how they reacted.

**Content analysis**

Content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communications in a systematic and objective manner to determine the presence of concepts within a set of texts (Kerlinger, 1986). Although the primary source of data for this study was the semi-structured interviews, I also used records from the campus fraternity chapters and inter/national organizations of the participants to supplement these data. I also attempted to gain access to participants’ private and personal documents. These techniques enabled me to study the beliefs and behavior of undergraduate fraternity chapter members in an indirect way through an analysis of their communications. Communications often reveal a chapter member’s conscious and unconscious beliefs, attitudes, values, and ideas (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) so content analysis was helpful in validating my findings from other methodologies. As I read the texts within the ongoing context of my research, they obtained new meanings, sometimes contradictory but always socially embedded (Hodder, 2003). It was important to remember, however, that personal documents are highly subjective in that the writer is the only one to select what he considers important to record. As such, these documents may not be representative or necessarily reliable accounts of what may have occurred (Merriam, 1998).

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) used the term documents to refer to “materials such as photographs, videos, films, memos, … and memorabilia of all sorts that can be used as supplemental information as part of a case study in which the main data source is participant observation or interviewing” (p. 57). This can be compared to Lincoln and Guba (1985) who delineated records as formalized and official items and documents as prepared for personal usage. Thus, I obtained recruitment brochures, flyers, and other primary marketing and promotional materials published by the fraternity chapters under review and participants’ private documents such as journals, letters, and photographs and analyzed, categorized, and coded them onto a document summary form. This procedure allowed me to compare the manifest content with the actual behaviors and beliefs of the
chapter memberships. A review of the latent content of these publications helped crystallize my understanding of the fraternity chapter culture and the data furnished descriptive information, verified emerging hypotheses, advanced new categories and hypotheses, offered historical understanding, and tracked change and development, among others (Merriam, 1998).

**Transcription and Field Notes**

I transcribed and coded field notes from observations and interviews immediately at the conclusion of each event and avoided recording notes in front of participants. I tape recorded interviews, transcribed, and subsequently coded and developed field notes from my observations and discussions. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggested that, where possible, researchers should do transcription analysis with both the written transcript and tape recording since this is the best way of gaining an appreciation of the subtle features of tone, pitch, intonation, and other crucial aspects such as pauses, silences, and emphasizes. Indeed, I added descriptions of the paralinguistic and non-verbal dimension to the written transcripts, where appropriate.

After analyzing the publications of the participants and fraternity chapters under consideration, I developed field notes of my thoughts and conclusions. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) advised that field notes form the first stages of preliminary analysis from which ideas and lines of inquiry can develop. Such analysis and interpretation notes often represent a kind of brainstorming, and Spradley (1979) suggested these field notes be thought of as a place to “think on paper” (p. 76) about the subculture under consideration.

As well as the official language of the fraternity chapters and community, there existed an informal, special language used by undergraduate chapter members. Ethnographers (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Spradley, 1979) have demonstrated the existence and importance of the use of a specialized language and it was essential to develop a working knowledge of the specialized terms and language used. Thus, an initial task was a review of field notes to understand the ethos and climate of the culture of these fraternity chapters.
Data Analysis

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) commented that in qualitative research, data analysis is not altogether a separate process since the researcher is the funnel through which the data are received. This results in some form of analysis occurring simultaneously with the data collection. Merriam (1998) noted qualitative design is emergent and Firestone (1987) reported that a “qualitative study provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show the author’s conclusion ‘makes sense’” (p. 19). Thus, I needed to uncover meaning and intention from my observations, content analysis, and interviews. Analyzing the data in this qualitative study involved reviewing and synthesizing the information I received into a coherent description and moving from a description of what is the case to an explanation of why that is the case (see Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Hitchcock & Hughes; Spradley, 1979).

Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) argued that for data analysis to be justifiable it must be transparent, namely other researchers must know the steps through which I arrived at my interpretation. Qualitative data analysis relies heavily on description and I made interpretations and judgments continuously throughout the course of the study and categorized behavior adapted from Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) constructivist methodology and Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) constant comparative method. Sears (1991) noted that “the qualitative inquirer begins with general questions and, as data are collected and analyzed, develops and refines specific research hypotheses and further data collection strategies” (p. 432). Hitchcock and Hughes advised that reading and rereading materials is necessary to engender a sense of their coherence as a whole.

Up until this point, my analysis was largely informal or piecemeal and conducted on an ad hoc basis. In the analysis of the data, I was concerned to validate and verify analyses made and explanations offered. This meant constantly moving backwards and forwards between data and analysis, between data, theories, and concepts developed, and between the data and other studies or literature.
**Coding**

“Coding is the heart and soul of whole-text analysis” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 274). The fundamental tasks associated with coding are identifying themes, marking texts, constructing models that identify relationships among codes, and testing those models against empirical data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The initial task is one of sorting the data into manageable units.

The literature review was a rich source of themes, as were my own experiences with the subject. However, more often than not researchers induce themes from transcripts and field notes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Thus, I read carefully the transcripts and field notes line-by-line looking for processes, actions, assumptions, and consequences. Following the advice of Willms et al., (1990) and Miles and Huberman (1994), I started my analysis with some general themes derived from the literature and added more themes and sub themes as I progressed. In order to yield major themes within a subculture, Spradley (1979) suggested looking for evidence of social conflict, cultural contradictions, informal methods of social control, methods by which participants acquired and maintained achieved and ascribed status, and information about how participants solved problems.

According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), “the central idea of coding is to move from raw text to research concerns in small steps, each building on the previous one” (p. 35). Data analysis involved using the QSR NUD*IST software package to compare and code recurring ideas, categories, and themes derived from interview transcripts, notes from informal interviews, field notes obtained from participant observations, and content analysis of documents.

Auerbach and Silverstein suggested utilizing three criteria when reading and coding a passage: (1) does it relate to the research concern; (2) does it help understand the participants better and clarify thinking; and (3) does it simply seem important, even if there is no basis as to why. Selecting categories and themes involved were both inductive and deductive processes (Rhoads, 1995). The emergence of categories was consistent with Patton’s (1980) idea that grouping of data is derived inductively and will reveal salient patterns in the data. Auerbach and Silverstein advised researchers that repeating ideas and themes could occur both within and across participant groups, with themes
defined as “an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas” (p. 38), and the abstract grouping of themes as theoretical constructs.

**Computer Analysis**

Qualitative research produces an assemblage of data (Lee, 1993) and there was a chance that much of it could be non-relevant to the study at hand. As well as being voluminous, qualitative data are also typically unstructured, context-specific, and recalcitrant (Fielding & Lee, 1998). Since I developed a non-linear practical theory through this study, there was a constant interplay between me, my data, and the theory being developed. Fielding and Lee (1991) posited that computer analysis makes qualitative research easier, more productive, and potentially more thorough. Thus, I facilitated the coding of these data into themes that emerged as the analysis proceeded using the QSR NUD*IST software package for data management.

NUD*IST is a computer package designed to aid researchers in handling non-numerical and unstructured data, such as are created through interviews, field notes, and collections of documents. Fielding and Lee articulated that “NUD*IST is now probably the package that most people at least know by name” (p. 15). The software offers tools to assist interpretation and coding, indexing, searching text or patterns of coding, and theorizing about what is seen and understood as patterns become clearer. It is important to remember, however, that truth is constructed from the data; it is not out there to be discovered (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). Such transparency avoids underinterpretation of data, coupled with any interpretation to rely on the “exotic, the near at hand or the voluble” (Fielding & Lee, p. 63), while also indicating when and how further iteration through the data might be appropriate.

Conrad and Reinharz (1984) suggested that computer analysis eases replication of a study through a log or trail of analytic procedures. Such a process therefore assisted in the justification and communicability of my data. Thus, my themes and constructs should be more easily understood by and make sense to other researchers. If they understand what I am saying, then the construct is communicable. For data analysis to be justifiable, it must be coherent. This means that the theoretical constructs must fit together and allow me to tell a coherent story (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Schwandt and Halpern (1988)
advocated the use of audits to determine how far qualitative findings are dependable, confirmable, and credible, and computer-based methods encourage systemization to ease data auditing.

NUD*IST allows analysis of two types of data: Both the text and any coding of imported documents, such as interview transcripts and memos, can be searched. Web sites, flyers, and other external data are not entered directly into NUD*IST, however, the document system maintains a reference to external documents and data about them. While NUD*UST cannot search or retrieve these external texts, it is still possible to code these documents which NUD*IST will file and archive for subsequent retrieval (Gahan & Hannibal, 1998).

As my ideas about the data developed, I created notes and memos as NUD*IST annotations since this allowed them to be integrated into the project as data and worked with using the software index and document systems’ tools. (The process of using NUD*IST is detailed in Appendix D.) Part of the strength of working inside NUD*IST is that it enables a researcher to move interactively between the data held in the document system and the concepts under exploration held in the index system (Gahan & Hannibal, 1998). Another major benefit of computer-aided analysis is that the ability to reorganize coding schemes obviates attempts to conceptualize a complete coding scheme prior to applying codes to data (Fielding & Lee, 1998).

The quality of liquidity of coding enabled me to continue to clarify and distil a category (Gahan & Hannibal). Once I identified and named the themes and marked the texts, I identified how these themes could be linked to each other in a theoretical model through the movement of the description of subjective experience found in repeating ideas and themes to a more abstract and theoretical level (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Once the non-linear theoretical framework model started to take shape, I looked for negative cases that did not fit the model. Either these negative cases disconfirmed parts of the model or suggested new connections that I needed to make (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Auerbach and Silverstein suggested that participants’ concerns that do not fit into a researcher’s theoretical framework could form the bases for future research.

My preliminary analysis also shaped the interview protocols for subsequent rounds of interviews. Ryan and Bernard also suggested researchers develop “increasingly
richer concepts and models of how the phenomenon being studied really works” (p. 279). As I began to develop concepts and categories, I gathered more data from participants through member checking. Thus, the development of my proposed model was not only ongoing throughout my data collections, but also resulted in new lines of questioning. As I undertook the process of developing the theoretical framework, I maintained memoranda and notes of my thoughts and ideas about what I believed the data to mean. Auerbach and Silverstein suggested that researchers find such a process important in the organizing of data analysis and theorizing.

**Theoretical Sensitivity**

Theoretical sensitivity is the ability to recognize what is important in the data and to give it meaning (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Theoretical sensitivity came from my being well grounded in the study’s literature as well as my professional and personal experiences. However, I also acquired theoretical sensitivity during the research process through continual interactions with the data. Thus, it was important that I maintained a balance between that which I created and what the data said.

**Presentation of Data**

The analysis of qualitative data must recognize the complexity of the data, engage in “microscopic familiarity” with the data, and be able to take into consideration the experience that the researcher brings to the study (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 297). Once I observed a series of relationships, I attempted to formulate these insights into a model that would cover and account for as many of the cases as possible. Unlike quantitative research, I generated these ideas out of the interaction of my own personal and professional experiences, and the nature and content of the data. Once I worked through the stages of analysis, I then made use of existing concepts and theories and developed a proposed model that sensitized issues rather than imposed an order on to the data.

I am displaying the results of this ethnographic research through the presentation of segments of transcripts and verbatim quotes from participants as exemplars of the
concepts and model that I propose. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) called this process a theoretical narrative, namely “the process that the research participants reported in terms of your theoretical constructs. It uses your theoretical constructs to organize people’s subjective experience into a coherent story. It employs people’s own language to make their story vivid and real” (p. 73). These voices may be prototypical examples of central tendencies or they may represent exceptions to the norm (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) and describe the subjective experience of the study participants.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) articulated that we live in an ever more visually image-saturated world. Thus, I regarded visual documents, such as flyers, brochures, and web sites in the same way as written texts. Hitchcock and Hughes also recommended that the questions, Who, When, Where, What, and Why be leveled at documentary sources. Answers to such questions provided me with data that I analyzed and incorporated into the theory that I developed.

Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability

Generally speaking, scientific researchers have identified three criteria by which research can be evaluated. These criteria are validity, reliability, and generalizability (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). However, as Hammersley (1992) highlighted, there remains considerable divergence of opinion as to what exactly and precisely these three terms mean in qualitative research. Hammersley articulated that the use of these terms derives from a concern with measurement in science and Hitchcock and Hughes posited that such criteria might be inappropriate as ways of assessing and evaluating qualitative research. Rather, authenticity, trustworthiness, and transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) are the qualitative equivalents of reliability, validity, and generalizability respectively.

Validity

Validity (i.e. trustworthiness) has to do with instruments/techniques, data, findings, and explanations and is concerned with the extent to which the descriptions of events accurately capture these events (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Descriptive validity
refers to the extent to which a researcher describes what, in fact, the study set out to do and describe, and whether this description was accurate and trustworthy. Explanatory validity refers to the extent to which any explanations offered are justified in the evidence presented. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), “essentially, [triangulation] establishes the validity of an ethnographer’s observations” (p. 521).

Through my holistic perspective and multiple methods of triangulation, I secured an in-depth understanding of the fraternity culture that allowed me to make conclusions and recommendations for practitioners and undergraduate fraternity chapter members. To control for a location threat and possible researcher effects on interview sites I utilized unobtrusive measures when possible. Thus, I kept my observation locations constant with the fraternity community informational fairs, recruitment presentations, and by holding interviews at locations of the participants’ choosing such as congenial local restaurants.

Through the standardization of all procedures and the establishment in advance of semi-structured interview questions (Appendix A), I was able to limit threats to internal validity. In addition, interviewing participants more than once and triangulating their responses confirmed the reliability of the information provided.

Using both manifest and latent content analysis of the same written communication and comparing differing documents assisted in establishing both validity and reliability. Since I could not influence through my presence the inanimate contents I analyzed, validity was also improved, and the readily available nature of the data makes reliable replication by other researchers practical.

I also established dependability and confirmability through the construction of an audit trail of transcribed interviews, analytical memos, emergent themes, and findings to allow an external auditor to examine both the processes and products of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Reliability**

Reliability (i.e. authenticity) refers to the extent to which any particular method of data collection is replicable and the extent to which different observers of an event would produce similar kinds of observations of that event (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). The all-encompassing role of the qualitative researcher who both collects and analyses the data
means that it is the researcher’s personal experience that predominates. The question of reliability therefore raises the issues of the influence of the researcher. The fundamental misunderstanding here is that it will be possible to replicate situations (Hitchcock & Hughes). However, situations will never remain the same and two researchers will view the same event in different ways. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 288) recommended that researchers consider the “dependability” or “consistency” of the results obtained from the data. That is, rather than demanding that other researchers get the same results, I merely desire that they concur that, given the data presented, my results and conclusions make sense, namely that they are consistent and dependable. The question then becomes not whether my findings can be replicated but whether my results and conclusions are consistent with the data collected. Consequently, I followed contemporary ethnographic practice and provide a detailed account of the personal experiences and background I brought to this study. In addition, triangulation and data auditing reinforced reliability of this study.

**Generalization**

The value of generalization (i.e. transferability) is that it allows researchers to have expectations about the future, and sometimes allows them to make predictions. Although a generalization may not be true in every case, it describes, more often than not, what researchers would expect to find. Fraenkel & Wallen (2003) suggested a limitation of qualitative research is that there is seldom methodological justification for generalizing the findings of a particular study to the population. However, I concur with Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) who believed that

Qualitative methodology is right to insist that theories be applicable to people other than the particular sample on which they were developed. The question is how to balance the two requirements of simultaneously extending beyond your sample and respecting cultural diversity (p. 86).

Consequently, practitioners will judge the applicability of my findings and conclusions to determine whether my findings fit their own situations. Indeed, Auerbach and Silverstein suggested utilizing the term “transferability of theoretical constructs” (p. 78), rather than generalizability because “the theoretical constructs … are transferable, in that you can expect the more abstract patterns that they describe to be found in different subcultures.
The specific content of those patterns, in contrast, will depend on the specific subculture being studied” (p. 87).

I accomplished transferability for my study through two means: (1) purposive sampling “intended to maximize the range of information collected and to provide most stringent conditions for theory grounding” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 248), and (2) Geertz’s (1973) “thick description” through which readers determine how closely their situations match my research and hence whether my findings and conclusions may be transferred.

Fraternity life flourishes at both public and private universities of various sizes throughout the U.S. and Canada. Participation in fraternity communities also takes on a regional flavor based on the location and demographics of a student body. Therefore, the fraternity community at Southeastern State University cannot be fully representative of all North American campuses. However, local fraternity chapters have always been defined by their inter/national governing bodies with standardized rituals, organizational procedures, and financial operations. Thus, there is some level of similarity between all fraternity chapters and fraternity communities.

**Role of the Researcher**

Merriam (1998) articulated, “In a qualitative study the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data” (p. 20). Smith and Deemer (2003) stated, “there can be no “God’s-eye view” [in qualitative research] in that any claim to knowledge must take into account the perspective of the person making the claim” (p. 432). Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) suggested, “It is justifiable, even inevitable, for a researcher to use his subjectivity in analyzing and interpreting data. However, it is not justifiable for him to impose his own subjectivity in an arbitrary manner” (p. 83). Thus, I have included my personal experience and empathic insight as a gay man as part of the relevant data, while taking a nonjudgmental stance to the content that emerged. Tierney and Rhoads (1993) warned that in the quest to construct meaning from this study, I must acknowledge that theory and a priori assumptions shaped the way in which I collected and analyzed the data.
I am a member of a national fraternity but I did not involve my own organization in this project, nor did I know any participant before his involvement in this study. I have been a national volunteer for my own organization for a number of years as well as a campus based fraternity/sorority advisor at three colleges, and an active leader within the Association of Fraternity Advisors and the NASPA Fraternity/Sorority Knowledge Community. I am a doctoral candidate at Florida State University and acknowledge a gay sexual orientation.

While an undergraduate member of my own fraternity I remained closeted, using a passing strategy and not coming out until after my master’s degree. A peer fraternity brother, however, chose to disaffiliate from our chapter while an undergraduate when he acknowledged his own gay sexual orientation and he decided that the two were incompatible. I vowed then that I would do what I could to prevent the loss of other brothers due to their recognition of their sexual orientation and belief in the incompatibility with fraternity life.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I described qualitative methodology, its concepts, and phases. I showed how each interacted and was appropriate to my study. At all times, it is important to remember that I did not consider the espoused research questions restrictive or limiting since their purpose was only to provide direction and serve as a guide during the initial stages of the study.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings of this study and attempts to answer the three research questions that have guided this inquiry. Every participant in this research communicated to me his experience as an undergraduate college student at Southeastern State University. Four participants were current fraternity members with gay sexual orientation (either blended through public acknowledgment or using some level of passing or covering); two were current fraternity members who were heterosexual; and one was a blended male who rushed a fraternity but did not receive a bid. All participants communicated to me their experiences with the campus fraternity subculture and the effects that sexual orientation (of either themselves or others) had on the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of fraternity chapter members. I analyzed the verbatim transcript(s) of each participant and any other materials presented to me. I transformed the data (Wolcott, 1990) to protect the confidentiality and identity of the participants.

Analysis provided significant insights and a rich description of how six chapter-member participants perceived gay sexual orientation within their fraternity chapters and how one blended participant, who was denied membership in a chapter, viewed fraternity life. As I analyzed each participant’s taped interview(s) and transcript(s), some core themes and patterns slowly began to emerge. Some themes were relevant to more than one research question and I discuss these inter relationships in this chapter.

I organized my findings from this research by my theoretical constructs and I present the findings through segments of transcripts and verbatim quotes from participants. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) called this process a theoretical narrative, namely “the process that the research participants reported in terms of your theoretical constructs. It uses your theoretical constructs to organize people’s subjective experience
into a coherent story. It employs people’s own language to make their story vivid and real” (p. 73).

**Participant Biographies**

I present a brief overview of the history and characteristics that each participant brought to my study to provide some background information that may explain some of the thoughts and opinions they expressed to me:

**Participant 1 – “James”**

James was a 21-year-old White senior from Cocoa Beach, Florida. He is now entirely blended, but when he joined the campus of Southeastern State University and Alpha Fraternity, he adopted passing and covering strategies. James was seeking a dual degree in English and communications and was investigating pursuing a career in higher education administration. He had one younger brother whom he described as his polar opposite: “he’s about six foot four, 260 linebacker, blond hair, blue eyes, freckles, dumb as a box of rocks. Genius when it comes to cars and mechanics. Can’t do school at all.” James applied to Southeastern State University because “we had to apply to a [state] school, and [Southeastern State] was the furthest away” from home. He readily admitted that he loved his family but “after two weeks of being there I’m ready to go…. When you move out, it’s hard to go back.”

James rushed in the spring of his first year after spending his first semester doing nothing because he was “just so burned out from high school.” He never planned to check out fraternity life but joined to get more involved on the campus. He joined a chapter that was in the process of being re-chartered on campus after a hiatus. In addition to his fraternity involvement, James had been a member of the Student Government Association and involved with a campus-based community service organization.

**Participant 2 – “Jay”**

Jay was a 19-year-old White sophomore from Key Largo, Florida. He had been openly gay since high school and majored in theater, with a minor in political science,
while also seeking a leadership certificate. Jay’s parents were divorced and he had one older sister. His on-campus involvement included assisting with theater productions, serving as an officer in a Pagan student group, being a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Student Union (LGBTSU), and the campus circus. He readily admitted that he was “definitely overcommitted [but] socially didn’t feel accepted on campus.” He went through fraternity recruitment during fall of his sophomore year and

By the end of the week, I found myself really wanting to be in and really wanting to be part of the group because I saw how much fun they were having. I found that I already had friends in the group and that I just wanted to be a part of it.

Jay only rushed Beta Fraternity but did not receive a bid.

Participant 3 – “Rod”

Rod was also a 19-year-old sophomore, of Hispanic origin, and was originally from Boston, Massachusetts. A self-identified “PBS [public broadcasting] brat,” his family regularly moved around and he “didn’t have a lot of friends and was just very isolated from a lot of people” around him. Rod had blended his life and gay sexual orientation since high school and came to Southeastern State University because it was “just far enough – four hours from my parents – that it would be a comfortable distance without being too far.” Originally wanting to be a gynecologist, he fell in love with his religion classes so much so that he became a religion major. Rod rushed in fall 2005 as a sophomore, visiting only Beta Fraternity chapter. This was because he previously met one Beta brother who was a teaching assistant in one of his first year classes and shared a room with another Beta brother at the Southeastern State University’s summer LeaderShape program. While Rod had not yet held any chapter-wide leadership positions, he assisted with chapter philanthropy projects during his pledging semester.

Participant 4 – “Frank”

Frank was a 20-year-old White junior who just revealed his gay sexual orientation to his family and friends at the end of fall 2005. He was from Niceville, Florida and had a younger brother who revealed his own gay sexual orientation to his parents during the course of our interviews. Frank’s parents were divorced and he was a first-generation college student. Frank was a public relations major and wanted to go into higher
education administration. Frank readily admitted that he “definitely went from being the weird kid that wasn’t involved to the kid that makes a name for himself on campus.” During his time on campus, he had been a peer leader for the First Year Experience and emerging leader classes, served as a summer orientation leader, and on several campus-wide committees. Frank worked in a private off-campus residence hall and in a campus office. He joined Southeastern State University during the summer semester and joined Alpha Fraternity at the earliest opportunity in the fall of his first year, even though he initially had no interest or desire in joining a fraternity. Frank confessed he was “kinda the kid that stayed in and watched TV” and on the “very last day with like three hours total left in rush” he went with five members of his on-campus residence hall living learning community to Alpha Fraternity and received a bid. According to his recollection,

I still have no idea why I went out, why I accepted my bid [laughs]. I think it was kind of peer pressure; kinda the expected thing because other people had put themselves out there for me and I really wanted to have a group that I was really close with.

After two years of membership, and shortly after revealing his gay sexual orientation to his chapter brothers, Frank voluntarily withdrew from Alpha Fraternity.

**Participant 5 – “Paul”**

Paul was a 22-year-old White senior from Port Charlotte, Florida, majoring in music education – instrumental. He revealed his gay sexual orientation the end of his senior year in high school and rushed Gamma Fraternity openly gay. Paul actually went through the rush process twice even though he confessed he was not “gung ho about it. [He] didn’t really have a strong desire to be in one but had always been interested.” He had a negative experience with fraternity rush during his first experience the spring semester of his first year, “because the way they were talking about women was very degrading; not chivalrous.” However, “I just kinda pulled myself together one more time at the end of my sophomore year and was like, ‘Okay, we’re doing it!’ because I knew there had to be one for me.” While an undergraduate, Paul served on the chapter’s executive board and as campus relations chair overseeing the chapter’s Homecoming activities.
Participant 6 – “Neal”

Neal was a 22-year-old, first-generation, White college student senior from Northeast Ohio. He was an only child, majoring in interdisciplinary social science. While not employed at the time of our discussions, he previously held two student leader positions on campus. Neal rushed in the fall of his first year but did not feel a connection with any of the chapters he visited. While he felt more comfortable with the chapters in the spring, he still did not affiliate with any fraternity. After spending the remainder of the spring semester of his first year and the summer actively researching the Southeastern State University fraternity community, he joined Alpha Fraternity in the fall of his sophomore year. Neal was, “looking for that family away from home” and felt that his fraternity chapter is “where I found my family.” Neal served his fraternity as president.

Participant 7 – “Gary”

Gary was a 21-year-old White junior majoring in interdisciplinary humanities. His intent was to attend graduate school and remain involved with his fraternity, Beta, as an alumnus volunteer. Gary was a legacy of both the university and his fraternity chapter and held several concurrent on-campus jobs. He rushed his first semester on campus and felt an instant connection with the members of the Beta Fraternity chapter, irrespective of the legacy connection. Gary held a couple of appointed positions in his chapter but preferred to enable others to step up to be leaders since this allowed him to “challenge the process” if events and decisions were not in accordance with the fraternity’s core purpose. He was a self-professed liberal, with open-mindedness and acceptance of other ideas.

Figure 4 provides a graphical representation of the relationships among participants.
Out on Fraternity Row: Themes Emerging from the Data

The Cultural Norms of Maleness and Gentlemanly Behavior

In this study, participants repeatedly acknowledged gentlemanly behavior as a founding principle of fraternal organizations. James saw Alpha Fraternity as an organization just to bring together an educational bond of guys. Back in 1906, they were a bunch of braniacs and they just wanted to hang out and build brotherhood, integrity, and that whole idea of becoming a gentleman. I would definitely say chivalry is a huge aspect of our fraternity. We’re always talked about as the Gentlemen of [Alpha Fraternity]; it's always the ‘gentlemen’ in everything that we do. Respect, integrity,
knowledge, those are all aspects that compose a gentleman. Living up to what you were created on this planet to be.

Rod agreed that, “The one quality that’s at the center of all that is truly being a gentleman; living your life as a gentleman.” He also found a convergence of Beta Fraternity’s values and beliefs with his own:

I found the morals and ethics they were trying to teach as something I could agree with. It wasn't something I was headstrong about like ‘Let's go out and let's hit on women,’ but something about being a gentleman, being kind to others. The principles of our fraternity were just something I connected with, something that rang true, not something that I felt would be against my beliefs. Yeah, I had to lay my hand on a bible and there's one person there I know, his hand's gonna burn, but it's something that ... I believe in God, which is something I feel is exceedingly rare in the gay community, but it's not a Christian god, which is okay with [the brothers]; there is a Buddhist in the fraternity. I have found that the things they were trying to live in their lives and exemplify, I was also trying to live in mine: live as a gentleman, live with love in my heart, do charity work. Through the rush process and also through my pledge process it was things I could agree with. I told myself while I rushed, if there's something I can't agree with then I'm gone. If there's something I don't feel is right and something that is wrong with my moral and ethical code, I was gone. Chalk it up to an expensive experience and leave.

Gary agreed that while some of his brothers personally affirmed the founding principles of Beta Fraternity some others did not adhere to them, but he also suggested that some Beta Fraternity brothers at Southeastern State University sometimes distilled the educational purpose, guiding values, and beliefs of the inter/national fraternity at the local level:

Some of the guys might not uphold some of the values and beliefs in their everyday lives. But, I feel I personally strive for those beliefs and ideals, not just because they’re the ideals of the fraternity I’m in, but that they’re good ideals for any decent citizen to have. And those guys who don’t live with those values, I call them out on it. I like to think of myself as a good role model for others to follow and I’ll say, ‘Hey guys, that’s not what we’re all about, that’s not a good characteristic so think about doing it some other way.’ I’m not gonna call them out and be mean about it, but I would definitely speak up.

Sometimes, the disconnect between the espoused values of the inter/national fraternity and the behaviors of brothers at the local chapter level resulted in non-fraternity members viewing chapter membership as nothing more than buying friendship. Jay commented, “All of my friends joke that it's paying for your friends. I don't think it's that
cynical but it's a place for a lot of people to get together.” Frank warned that sometimes a large brotherhood could become based on cliques and that this caused him not to be fully open and authentic with all of his chapter brothers:

You need to pay attention to what you're saying, who you're saying it to, you have to doublethink what you're going to say and then double-check who you're saying it to. There are so many cliques and groups within big groups. Like within fraternities they all have families, so you've got to watch out what you're doing, watch your back, in that aspect, about what you say.

However, Rod expressed the importance of experiencing connection to a brotherhood throughout the country and learning of the support system that comes from such a familial relationship. The concept of familial/brotherly support is one I revisit in-depth later:

I'm learning what it means to be a part of the chapter. I hate to be a cliché but it's a bond. I drove from here to D.C. and I saw [an Alpha Fraternity] sticker and I thought, ‘Sweet!' It's something where there's a connection, and with your chapter, you're even more connected. It's more than just a club where you go and you see people once a week, and say 'hey, how's it going?’ you discuss whatever and move on. These are people you see all the time, people you can turn to. I can honestly say I've been intoxicated twice in my life. The first time was my freshman year, with my Indie subgroup people. I had it there in my mind the fact that I was going to get drunk because I wanted to see how long it would take. I found out how much it would take; way too expensive for my tastes. But, those group of friends left me at an apartment with no way of getting home. The next morning I had to wake up and walk to campus. I got intoxicated the other time with my brothers and they took care of me. They made sure I was fine; they made sure that nothing was going to happen to me; that I got home safely; that my car was there when I woke up. It was just something where, regardless whether I see them every single day and I have these big in depth conversations with them, I know I can count on them; I know I can trust them.

He went on to explain that he would also reciprocate and offer assistance to a brother in need, “being there for the people you should be caring about, in any capacity you're comfortable doing that suits you.” Gary commented that Beta Fraternity was founded on “love your brother, accept him for who he is regardless of anything; be slow to censure their faults; give to others regardless, and always be accepting.” James stressed the importance of brotherhood in Alpha Fraternity, expressed as the support and love of his
brothers, especially during emotionally trying times, and when he least expected such actions:

Brothers are like my best friends in the world. [Long pause] They've been very supportive [pause]. When me and Ryan were breaking up – our relationship - they would come take me and were just really, really supportive about it. Basically, all things girls do for girls [sic] when they get dumped, they did for me. I was really shocked, just because they saw that I was in a lot of pain and wanted to take my mind off of it. Because going into it I never expected that.

As a key part of authentic behavior in concert with the inter/national fraternity values, Neal suggested that brotherhood based on the familial bonds of honesty, openness, and acceptance is what makes a fraternity special and different from other student organizations:

First and foremost and we're not going to be that chapter with 200 guys – we want to stick around 100, keep it manageable so we all know each other and we're all really tight and cohesive, which we definitely are right now. Diversity: One of the things we push during rush is that we are a diverse group, everything from religion, sexual orientation, race, blah, blah, blah, everything, [and] integrity: we try to be those nice guys on campus

Fraternities are specifically excluded from the equal opportunity statutes of Title IX of the Higher Education Acts and based on my personal experience, some fraternity brothers state that this same-gender structure and exclusivity provide a comfort zone for members. I believe this comfort zone can be attributed to the breakdown of each member’s façade of hyper-masculinity, a direct result of the absence of women. Lacking the dynamic of predator (male) and prey (female), a fraternity chapter may thus provide a location where even the most macho brother is able to relax his guard. Without women around, perhaps brothers can be more authentic to themselves, whether that means feeling free to behave without fear of offending anyone, or alternatively, more emotionally open without worrying about any negative effects on the impressions women might hold of them. Such behavior could result in a sense of non-sexualized intimacy between chapter brothers that may appear foreign to outsiders by the deviation from the traditional notions of what it means to be a man and a fraternity brother.

This theme identified the importance of the support system and familial relationship of a fraternity brotherhood. Participants stressed the need for brotherhood to be grounded in honesty, openness, and acceptance. A question for this study was how did
the attitudes of brothers – both heterosexual and gay (blended, passing, or covering) – change when a chapter member revealed a gay sexual orientation after having previously lived a passing or covering lifestyle in the chapter? Would the chapter brothers view the now blended gay brother as someone who had lied to them?

**Research Question 1: The experiences of blended undergraduate gay fraternity members in historically White chapters**

Homosexual identity development theory can be useful in helping us understand differences in the blended participants. Using Cass (1979), the most popular theory of gay identity development, I examined the identity development of the participants. Each gay participant disclosed his gay sexual orientation at different times during his life and all appeared to have progressed through the identity development stages differently. James appeared to have experienced identity foreclosure during the resolution of his personal sexual identity. On the other hand, once Rod realized he was gay, he seemed to move through the stages in the Cass model without experiencing identity foreclosure. All of the blended gay brothers appeared to be in Cass’ Identity Synthesis stage of development (stage six) where they were likely to disclose their sexual orientation in some situations, but not in others. This was not due to any embarrassment about their gay identity, but purely because their sexual orientation was for them now a mere part of who they were and not the defining characteristic. This compares to Jay, the potential member who did not receive a bid, who was in Identity Pride – the fifth stage – where he focused special attention on his gay identity.

James joined Alpha Fraternity to prove to both himself and others that he could: “My whole thing, my whole idea is just because I’m gay doesn't mean I have any handicaps whatsoever.” He explained that he was so good at passing that he “didn’t have to pretend to be someone else, [because] no one would know.” He stated that he wanted to be treated the same as all the other potential members going through the rush process and that “the only thing different from me … was my orientation.” Interestingly, he also questioned whether he would have rushed if that meant he actively had to construct a false persona to be someone else, “like to try to butch up or something like that.” This was interesting because by virtue of using a passing strategy he was in reality hiding a
major part of who he was. If he had met someone during rush who knew he was gay, James said he

definitely wouldn’t have come out to the chapter there and then but I think that I would have been even more comfortable with rushing just because I would know that if it ever did come up I wouldn’t be the lone [gay] guy in there.

When he rushed Alpha Fraternity, James knew of an openly gay chapter brother but he viewed this brother’s interaction with some other chapter brothers negatively. However, this did not prevent James from rushing and subsequently joining the chapter. Perhaps when James eventually revealed his gay sexual orientation to his brothers, exposure to a second openly gay brother affected in a positive way the manner in which his brothers reacted to him, especially in terms of their use of language:

Everyone got along with him but I think he got the blunt of a lot more jokes, a lot more. There was definitely a cluster of guys that were just not cool with it at all at the time, so that kinda hindered me because I wasn’t out and no one suspected me at all. So they said all kinds of things in front of me.

Rod joined Beta Fraternity for social interaction with what he called “guy friends” as opposed to his female allies. I believe such desire for male social interaction connected with the concept of fraternities allowing men to be more authentic in showing their emotions, as I discussed earlier.

I never had a group of guy friends I could hang out with; to watch football and drink a beer with. It’s something that I wanted to experience and was seeking and I found that and I found a fraternity that I felt I could actually be a part of and not just be a wallflower for. I found people I had stuff in common with. If I hadn't found friends that were a part of that fraternity, I probably wouldn't have rushed. Me and the alphabet soup never really got along [LGBTSU]. It's too, it's too much…. I hate saying this and I feel really, really bad saying it but it's just a little bit too much gay for me. There's only so much I can take at one time. It's a good thing and I like it and I love my gays, but it was just too much gay for me to handle. I just felt comfortable in the fraternity environment and I felt comfortable establishing that kind of friendship with people. I can't play sports so I'm not going to play intramurals, and it's just hard to sit back and watch a movie with a group of gay friends without someone dating someone else or someone trying to flirt with someone; playing the game of who's hooked up with who. It just gets tiresome. I enjoy being in an environment where I know I'm not going to get hit on and I know I'm just there to hang out and relax. And no one's gonna walk up that I've hooked up with, have a history with.
Rod expanded on the topic of disclosure and mentioned that even though he joined Beta Fraternity as a blended male “I never went out and said, ‘Hi, I’m Rod. I’m gay and I want to be in your fraternity.’ Instead

With certain people, it just kinda came up in conversation, like when somebody was asking what my ideal mate looks like, or who I've dated so far. It just comes up in daily conversation. Then there was half-laughter. No one freaked out, or was confused. They nodded their heads and said, ‘Okay.’ It wasn’t a big deal, at least not outwardly.

Despite this (or maybe because of this) there was:

One person that just didn't like me, and I've no idea why. He's not a senior, so he has to be either a sophomore or a junior. I don't know why he doesn't like me. He needed a ride from Atlanta to [city] and I offered him a ride but he never answered me back on it. I've no idea why he doesn't like me. This is something where that particular person had a vendetta against me, apparently for XYZ reasons. I don't know whether it's because I'm gay or not, but at the end of the day, when he spoke up against me, it was a resounding, ‘We like him.’ Or at least that's what I'm being told.

Frank suggested that the topic of sexual orientation of brothers frequently occurred, especially about his Alpha Fraternity brother, James: “There was a member of our fraternity who was openly gay and there was a lot of conversation about that. There were a couple of other people who weren't openly gay but were openly gay in other situations.” Frank intimated that these discussions regarding the passing and covering members occurred because the other brothers felt that in a true, sincere, and authentic familial environment, no secrets between brothers would exist:

That was something that was discussed because people felt everything should be out on the table and that everyone should know something about everyone. You're supposed to be a purely transparent individual within the fraternity, even though no one likes pure transparency in anything, so to enforce it through the social things they were doing just didn't work out at all.

This opinion reiterated a comment made by Gary who said brothers forced to cover or pass their sexual orientation negated the true meaning and authenticity of brotherhood: “No one in their brotherhood knows that they’re gay which to me isn’t really a brotherhood because you’re not supposed to have secrets.”

In this theme, the blended participants mentioned they joined their fraternity chapters for “guy friends” in a similar manner to heterosexual brothers. However, even the participants who were blended when they rushed did not automatically reveal their
gay sexual orientation to the heterosexual brothers. In addition, the heterosexual brothers felt that brothers who used passing or covering strategies negated the authenticity of brotherhood.

**Coming Out Experiences**

James mentioned that he began to blend his gay sexual orientation into the rest of his life during his sophomore year but it took his big brother, participant Neal, positively confronting him on the issue, to actually get him to begin to acknowledge it to chapter brothers. James mentioned how those experiences gave him positive reinforcement for coming out to others:

[Neal] came up to me at some event and he goes ‘hey, you don't have to hide it, I know.’

I was like ‘what?’ He said, ‘You don't have to hide it, I know.’ And I was like, ‘What the hell are you talking about?’ He said, ‘I always had the idea because one of my best friends in high school was.... It's awesome.’ So that made me a lot more comfortable with it.

Despite such positive acknowledgement, James’ immediate concerns became “Who else did he tell? What’s going to happen?” When James received a second little brother the next semester, “I told him as well because they were the two guys closest to me.” James readily admitted that, “it was always easier to tell brothers at 3 o’clock in the morning drunk without thinking about it and planning it out.” However, it took another incident being thrust upon him to take the step to reveal his gay sexual identity to the rest of his brothers:

So they were the only two [in the fraternity] that knew for a year until really end of fall semester, beginning of spring semester junior year. One of the fall pledges, [name], who's like my best friend, who's also gay, and I had known that because we had briefly dated before he rushed my fraternity, he came out in spring. He didn't really come out it was just that everyone had assumptions; he was much more out there. I think for some reason people just knew because of who he knew on campus, or whatever. I was living with him at the time so everyone started asking questions about me and then the rumors started and people were assuming. And for the longest time everyone was like ‘he's bi,’ everyone just thought I was bisexual, they were like ‘he's not gay; there's no way in hell he's gay, we've seen him with so many girls [sic].’ No one really believed that I was gay. And then, I never made a formal coming out, it was just kinda during conversations someone would make a joke about it and I'd snap right back; I'd joke right back. People would throw things at me and I'd throw it right back. And so it was very much that I'm very
comfortable with the situation; they know that. They'd give me a hard time but I'd give
them a hard time, so it was all in jest. So there was not a problem with anyone
disrespecting me. Because of that, one person tells one person, it was more hearsay as to
how I came out.

Despite the fact that he had blended his life since high school, Paul advised me he
never planned to discuss his sexual orientation during the rush and pledging process with
Gamma Fraternity, “because they never asked.” This was a prime example of the Don’t
Ask, Don’t Tell philosophy of the U.S. military being put into practice within the
fraternity chapter (see Halley, 1999). Paul expressed that he was also initially concerned
for his own safety: “If I told them I was gay, were they gonna do something to me or was
it going to be okay?” However, he did discuss his gay sexual orientation with an openly
gay brother already in Gamma Fraternity and received a surprising response grounded
somewhat in jealousy that possibly could have prevented him from getting a bid:

So I asked him [about rushing and pledging] and he kinda had a bad feeling toward it
because, you might find this funny, but a lot of gay guys don't like other gay guys joining
their group of friends, they get jealous…. So he told me not to do it. After I talked to him
he gave me this long spiel on 'you should drop, you shouldn't do it.' Mine was really
messed up. It didn't go the way I planned it because the guy that I talked to about how is
it being gay, and everything, he told the whole chapter that I was gay. That's how
everybody found out. But I still got a bid.

Frank had a unique experience among the gay participants in that he joined Alpha
Fraternity as a covering new member who by his own volition “had done a very good job
of hiding in the closet.” He also was the only participant who discussed having a physical
sexual interaction with a fellow undergraduate fraternity brother:

We were both initiated and we were actually both slightly intoxicated. I really don’t
know how we connected, since he was straight and I was closeted. We just ended up
going to his room; I didn’t think anything of it when he said you can just pass out on my
bed, but it just kinda progressed from there; it just happened. It was pretty much just a
one-time thing; one of those things we weren’t gonna talk about and tell other people, but
we didn’t have to pretend it didn’t happen. And as far as I know, he’s now closeted and
the rest of the chapter has no clue. You’re the first person I’ve ever told; you ought to feel
glad about that [laughs].
In a theme similar to other participants, alcohol was also involved in Frank’s various conversations in which he began to reveal his gay sexual orientation, thereby lubricating his ability to talk about the subject:

So I first came out to one of my best friends and it was easy because he was gay too. We were actually at a hayride, a social event. Again, a little bit of alcohol was involved. And I thought, ‘you know, there’s a time that I’ve gotta start telling people,’ so I told him and he was amazingly [emphasis his] shocked. I had done a very good job of hiding in the closet. He was openly gay and hung out in the same circles so if anybody would have known it, it would have been him and he was shocked and amazed. But then I told my best friend Sarah and she was, ‘And? [laughs], I know you wanted to tell me before.’ And alcohol was involved when I told her; lowering my inhibitions and standards.

In reflection, Frank ultimately believed that revealing his gay sexual orientation to his chapter brothers was a non-event, perhaps due to the fact that Alpha Fraternity had already accepted James:

I think that the people who cared, cared and the people who didn't, still didn't care. There was no shocking revelations or people who went and freaked out. And you never record the positive reactions, you only can remember the negative ones, and there weren't any real negative ones. I think that with an existing openly gay brother and not being the first makes it a lot easier because people already had their opinions on that before hand so it was very unchanging, finding out someone else was too.

By coming out and acknowledging his gay sexual orientation, Frank stopped living a secret and double life and he “got back a lot of free time by not having to live two lives; making the life I wanted to live be the one I was in.” In fact, Frank even went as far to suggest that if he could go back in time, “I would probably come out a little bit sooner. I wouldn’t see a problem coming out to the chapter at all.” He also never felt any level of guilt about living this secret life, though this viewpoint may have been impacted by his disaffection with the chapter that ultimately resulted in his disaffiliation: “I don’t feel guilty for hiding anything. I don’t feel an obligation for them to tell me everything and I don’t feel there’s an obligation for me to tell them everything.”

James mentioned that he decided whether to reveal his sexual orientation identity to new people with whom he came in contact by asking, “‘Is this an appropriate time and place to bring this up?’” because “people don’t always need to know it to function in a relationship with me. If it’s purely a work relationship, or me teaching a freshman class.
like FYE [First Year Experience], I wouldn’t bring up my sexuality unless it needed to be addressed.” Likewise, Rod suggested, “Until I start building a camaraderie and friendship with my employees or employer I will not discuss it. In an academic setting, I don’t bring it up. For me it’s very removed. Being gay is a part of me but it’s not the [emphasis added] part of me.” Paul commented that by his experience it appeared to be the sorority women on the campus who were most surprised by the acceptance he received from his chapter brothers regarding his gay sexual orientation, not his own brothers or other fraternity men:

When I meet girls [sic] from sororities I don't hide the fact that I'm gay; I'm pretty much open but I'm not going to go up to you and be like ‘hi, I'm gay. My name's Paul.’ I'm going to tell you, ‘Hey, what's up? My name's Paul’ and then if you find that out about me, if I do something, and you're like ‘oh, are you gay?’ I will be like, ‘yeah!’ Or if someone accidentally slips, one of my friends, you know, talks about this guy and then somebody hears it I'm not gonna cover it up. So most sorority girls pretty much, somehow, they find out. A lot of times I tell them, and they ask questions like ‘do your brothers know?’ and I tell them ‘yeah’ and they're like ‘wow! They accept it; they don't have a problem with it?’ And I'm like, ‘no, they love it, you know, because they love me.’ It's just another part of me, like I have brown hair, green eyes, I'm gay. It's just kinda on the same level.

Paul had a unique perspective when it came to anyone choosing to reveal his sexual orientation to chapter brothers, one that likely would have been his preferred way of coming out to the chapter’s membership and one that perhaps covering or passing brothers could utilize if they chose to reveal their gay sexual orientation to their chapter brothers:

I think when somebody comes out it shouldn't be like a big party [laughs], ‘hey, I'm having a couple of kegs, I'm turning gay.’ I don't think it should be like that. I think it should be as seamless as possible. You should make it for yourself and for all the people around you. It would just be a lot smoother, uneventful, which is kind of what you want, if it's really who you are you don’t want to make a big thing about it; you don't want to make it like your Sweet Sixteen [laughs].… But I think if he's in that case where he's already in the fraternity, nobody thinks he's gay, he should probably come out to friends, his best friends, whether they be in the chapter or not in the chapter. But his really closest friends, whether they're in Rio de Janeiro, or they're in [city] in the fraternity, he should call them, talk with them, and let them know, ‘I'm gay.’ Because no matter what, if they're really his good friends they'll be okay with it. So that will give him confidence to
come out to more and more people. And then you kind of go farther and farther away, you reach a little bit farther. ‘This kinda person maybe not my best friend but he's my friend, I'll tell him.’ If that goes okay, you reach out to your quote-unquote acquaintances. And then pretty much, after that everybody else will take care of everything. You only have to tell like 10 people and then everybody knows. If you have many brothers, you're not going to be best friends with all of them; you can't. You can't even probably be friends with that many people. You can be acquaintances and be civil and be ‘what's up brother, good to see you’ but you probably don't hang out with them, not even every week if you have that many because you're going to be working, going to school. Probably hang out with the same 10, 15, maybe 20 guys. I say just tell the people who you want to know and you don't have to tell everybody. Tell people who you want to know and then everything else will take care of itself. And you can tell them not to tell anybody else and if they are really good friends they won’t. Or you can tell them ‘hey, you know what? I don't care. If somebody asks you can tell them.’ That's the option I would go. Because if you tell your best friend and he's cool with it and then somebody asks him that might be a mutual friend, maybe that's his best friend and he's your best friend, but the two guys on the ends, you know, me and the other guy aren't friends, maybe if my best friend, who is also his best friend tells him that I'm gay and he's cool with it maybe that will change his outlook too. So maybe if it comes from him vicariously that I'm gay, or something. But 150 brothers, somebody's always gonna feel left out.

Even though all participants were open in their revelation of gay sexual orientation at the time of our meetings they still expressed times when they felt it necessary or appropriate to cover their gay orientation or pass as a heterosexual. Indeed, some people might view this as a form of going back into the closet. When asked about his level of comfort in disclosing his gay sexual identity, James suggested, “I’m pretty much consistent” and that it was not so much about personal comfort level but more the timing. James suggested that he has used the time delay technique on several occasions as the method with which he chooses to come out:

I don’t try to make anyone uncomfortable. I don’t have to advertise it, it’s so much easier. I give people time to get to know me as a person and then, you know, I let them know I’m gay. I’d rather someone hate me, or not because of my entire being.

When I asked if the members of other fraternities on campus knew about his sexual orientation, James suggested:
The size of our community, it's hard to put a name with a face. I'm sure I've been talked about in multiple arenas but I don't think overall that every single person in this Greek [sic] community does know me. Everyone's consumed with their own lives, we're college students. I'm not viewed as the [emphasis his] gay frat boy, but it's known that [Alpha Fraternity] has a gay guy. That aspect might be known. I've heard stories about houses [sic] having gay guys, like six years ago, so I definitely know that the Greek community knows which houses have a gay guy in and which don't. It might just be a lot of talk, but in this instance, it's true.

Interestingly, James suggested that while it may be accepted throughout the campus fraternity community that Alpha Fraternity has a gay brother, “it would be a scandal if a [fraternity chapter brother] came out” even though “the more traditional chapters … have closeted members. The brothers accept them and they remain as brothers. The issue becomes if they were to come out.” Paul commented:

There are gay guys in almost every fraternity that are out. I'm not going to name them but I know at least seven or eight fraternities that have openly gay guys in them; at least one. And then I know of a couple of others that have closeted or bi, or whatever, but they have feelings for men.

Frank experienced covering and passing fraternity men who behaved in stereotypical hyper-masculine, heterocentric, and misogynistic ways to hide their sexual orientation identity, something he could not condone:

I wouldn’t engage in a conversation if people were critiquing the way a woman looked or a woman walked because it just wasn’t something that interested me. But I know other people who would engage in it because it was a way they could hide who they were from the rest of the crowd and what they did and what they believed in because some people were very closeted but it was known anyways; it was an easy way to cover up. There are a lot of people who are closeted who don’t fall into the traditional stereotypes of the mannerisms, that don’t have the very flamboyant actions, say the very flamboyant things, sound incredibly flamboyant. It really is a person-specific issue.

He went on to expound his challenges and issues specifically with the campus GLBT student organization; that their members’ activities that are more political were perhaps causing a large number of blended, passing, covering, and questioning students to veer away from obtaining help and peer mentoring from them:

I have no problem with my sexual orientation at all and have no problem being a member of an organization that openly admits and advocates that, but I’m not a member of the
GLBTSU [sic] here because I don’t feel they stand for issues that I want them to stand for or that they partake in things that I think an organization should partake in.

Rod concluded by saying:

What has happened and what is happening is that there is same-sex [sic] experimentation in fraternities and that there’s some of those individuals who go and live heterosexual lives and there’s those few that go on and live homosexual lives. Now we’re seeing an emergence of openly gay men in fraternities that aren’t fitting the mold of the ideal fraternity member or the ideal gay member but a hybrid of the two. What’s in the future is that as we become somewhat more comfortable with sexual orientation, so will fraternities; maybe at a slower pace, but acceptance will still grow.

In this section, the gay participants mentioned that they feared what their chapter brothers might think, say, or do when they revealed their gay sexual orientation. However, they felt their coming out experiences were supported by their heterosexual chapter brothers and they typically described their processes as non-events. They also confirmed the literature that stated coming out is an ongoing process with every new person met. Consequently, there were times when the participants chose not to reveal their gay sexual orientation. Finally, the participants introduced the concept that some fraternity chapters on the campus were less accepting of a brother revealing his gay sexual orientation.

* Satisfaction with the Fraternity Experience *

The following section discusses how satisfied study participants were with their membership in their fraternity chapters and what aspects of fraternity culture they experienced as positive and negative. None of the participants of this study intimated that they would change any aspect of their undergraduate fraternity experiences. As a relatively new member, Rod quickly acknowledged the benefits of membership in Beta Fraternity:

It's honestly the best thing I've done since coming to college. There's moments where, like in the pledging process and probably everyone has this moment of, 'Why am I doing this?' but that's just a natural part of it. Honestly, this has been the most satisfying thing that I've done since coming to college. It's something that ... I can already tell that I've grown. People around me, people that know me, they see the changes in me. The fraternity has helped me grow into the person I am, and the person I'm becoming.

He mentioned he was even considering the option of moving into the chapter house to build on the bonds of closeness and family with his brothers:
I'm considering moving in there for my senior year. I know I'll have a light course load, as light as I can get, basically all graduate seminars, so I'll be able to handle more of a playful environment. I've bonded with this group of people; I want to be there; I can foresee myself living in the chapter house. I know this will bring upon a whole new bucket of problems. There's another openly gay member in the chapter - me and him are very much like night and day, even our skin tone – but he lives in the chapter house and there's not any problems with it. I'm there a lot, whether people see me or not. I've been there practically every day since coming back. I hang out with people, play video games – I suck at video games but I play them and have fun anyway. It's just camaraderie that I want to gain by living in the house.

As a longer-term brother, Neal related that he had found his college life and fraternity life complimented and built on each other, and how this evolved into residency in the chapter house:

I feel like college and fraternity life is so much about learning about life in general than it is about anything else. I could go on for hours about everything I've learned; everything from relating to every kind of person there is out there ... I feel that with a group buy in you can't make somebody do something, I'm definitely not a military-style leader at all. If somebody's gonna do something I make them want to do it. If they take ownership over it then they do something at a whole new level. I've definitely learned, one of the most important things, is that leadership and titles don't mean anything. It starts by reading your members. A lot of leadership is what happens after you're gone; teaching new guys and watching them grow. It's just an amazing experience…. I am probably a rare case here, but I definitely picked the right fraternity for me and there's nowhere I would be happier. I've had an amazing time and would not change my three years there at all, hence I've lived in the house for two years. We're kinda a different fraternity. Yes, we throw crazy parties and stuff but if somebody has music blasting you just give a little stomp on the floor and it's off. Living in the house, having the guys around, if you need anything they're right there. It's awesome, I love living in the house. I'm definitely gonna miss it next year; I'm really not ready to go.

Gary’s experiences with his fraternity chapter were so positive that he indicated he might continue his involvement after his graduation, saying he “would love to be a chapter advisor once [he got] to graduate school or a regional advisor or something like that; I think that would be amazing.”

An important area of investigation into the satisfaction of participants with their fraternity experiences revolved around how chapter brothers reacted to situations
involving gay sexual orientation. James told the story of how his membership in Alpha Fraternity, his personal reconciliation and acceptance of his gay sexual orientation, and the support of his brothers all came together and became a powerful and positive experience for him:

It all just worked out exactly the way it should have in my book. Timing was perfect, everything played out well. I was talking to the IFC president when we were in Phoenix; he's a [fraternity chapter] and that was the one other fraternity I was going to. He said, ‘Why didn't you, why didn't you?’ And I said, ‘Chris, you know there's no way I could be publicly out if I was a [fraternity chapter]. I don't care how good friends I am with all you guys, there's no way that it would ever happen.’ And he said, ‘Yeah, you're right.’ It wasn't him, it was a lot to do with their alumni, a lot to do with the fact that they're so nationally recognized and a lot more public of a fraternity than we are on a national level; they're at every college campus [Yet this is the only national organization to dedicate an entire edition of their fraternity magazine to diversity, including interviews with openly gay undergraduate brothers]. They have a strong [group of] alumni that really, at the first inkling of anyone.... They have people that are gay that came out after they graduated but while active on campus, they just couldn't do it. There's a gay member in there now and they all know, they just won't talk about it. I can actually talk about it with [my] brothers, and joke around with it and if people find out, it's not going to hurt the reputation of our fraternity, whereas [fraternity chapter], they still feel like it might hurt their reputation. I think if I had rushed [fraternity chapter] and got initiated I still would have done the same thing, but while I was rushing I knew that was an issue because I never would be able to come out. Whereas at [Alpha Fraternity], I was going to help build it, and if I was helping build it, I could do whatever the hell I wanted, and that was an easier mindset for me to work with. So it all worked out perfect.

While Frank had positive comments about the Southeastern State University fraternity community in general, he explained why he ultimately felt a dichotomy between his personal beliefs and values and the behaviors of some of his chapter brothers. It is important to remember, however, that his dissatisfaction occurred at the same time as he was revealing his gay sexual orientation to his chapter brothers. It could be that his dissatisfaction was also somehow related to the reactions – express or implied – of his Alpha Fraternity brothers to his sexual orientation revelation, especially since he stated that if he had the opportunity to relive his life he would likely still join a fraternity, albeit not Alpha:
At the very beginning, I was really satisfied, really interested, really involved. I had a great group of guys who I really wanted to be with and spend all my time with. As time went on, things started to change. People with what I would consider poor ideals, were able to take over the leadership positions and it steadily got worse to where, right now, I think that it was great that I joined a fraternity and would do it again, I think I would search for a different fraternity. Overall, I was dissatisfied to the point where I withdrew. I just felt that it wasn't for me, there was nothing that I was gaining out of the organization, so I tried to figure out why I was spending the time and money with the people who I didn't feel were giving me anything back.

Thus, the majority of study participants were satisfied with the decisions they made to join the fraternity community and their particular fraternity chapter and this satisfaction ranged from participants who gained membership as blended students and those who used a passing or covering strategy. Frank was the only participant who expressed a level of dissatisfaction that resulted in his ultimate withdrawal from Alpha Fraternity.

Dalton and Petrie (1997) suggested that student peers convey their experiences through frequent interaction, social emphasis, and shared values and attitudes. Thus, organization members who most closely resemble the dominant values of the majority environment are the ones most likely to exhibit satisfaction and stability with the group. Those who differ significantly from the dominant values of the group are most likely to leave the organization and seek a more congruent environment. If leaving is not possible, Strange (1986) suggested individuals might attempt to remake or adapt themselves to fit their environment.

The culture in a fraternity chapter is a dynamic entity that either attracts or repels individuals based on how closely they identify with the group’s norms, behaviors, and values. Participants felt that fraternity involvement was a positive aspect of their undergraduate college experiences and that they were accepted and shared values with their heterosexual brothers. My data are similar to over 70% of the 524 respondents to Case’s (1996) exploratory study who reported that they had encountered homophobic or heterosexist attitudes within their chapters and cited homophobia as frequently occurring in member selection.

Nonetheless, almost 85% of respondents felt that they were at least somewhat satisfied with their undergraduate fraternal experience. This compares to an 88%
satisfaction rate on the AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment Survey for a sample of all fraternity members (Vestal & Butler, 2005). In my study, Frank expressed dissatisfaction with his fraternity experience upon the election of new chapter leaders who had different ideals and values and this led to his disaffiliation from the fraternity.

**Guys Like Us: The Influence of Rush and Recruitment on the Perception of Fraternity Life**

As wider varieties of students enroll in higher education, they have begun to take advantage of all a college offers. The ranks of fraternities are growing with first-generation students and those who in previous generations would not have sought or would not have been granted membership (Binder, 2003). With perhaps a quarter of a chapter’s membership graduating each year, recruitment is the lifeblood of a fraternity. Rush is the most visible and coordinated process by which fraternities most clearly communicate their espoused values and expectations of potential new members.

James stressed that Alpha Fraternity had certain expectations of behavior, appearance, and dress for prospective and new members. He suggested that heterosexual brothers would look negatively at any deviations from these standards even though he felt more important issues should take precedence:

- We almost didn't take this guy because he had his eyebrows shaved off on his birthday.
- Everything was just fine; great kid, funny as hell. They'll grow back, but the fraternity had a huge issue that he'd be walking around with a pledge pin on and no eyebrows. And that's really stupid.

Gentlemanly behavior was another expectation stressed during rush as James reported: “Chivalry is a huge thing for us so if we see any disrespect to girls [sic] at all during the process, they're usually gone. Respect for the brothers is obviously a huge thing.” Likewise, alcohol misuse was an issue for each participant and was not looked upon favorably. James commented, “We've blackballed pledges when they've got drunk and they cuss out a brother, just rude. Then they're gone.” Another cause for removal from Alpha Fraternity during the new member education period was, “not carrying their load of the work, not showing up to events … not taking pledging seriously.”

Frank suggested that Alpha Fraternity rush consisted of

- Scouts, the bid committee, and then bid teams. I was on a bid team once ... there are different bid teams depending on who's the officer, who's in power. If you were on the
bid team, you could veto someone and then what they would do is axe that person unless someone stood up and fought for them. We would then send the Sergeant-at-Arms to tell them, ‘We think there’s a fraternity out there that’s better suited for you, and while you’re more than welcome to stay here for the process, we don’t anticipate being able to admit you into our fraternity.’ Sometimes people that we knew just wouldn’t fit in at all; we'd just send them away right away. The people that got the bid, we ask the chapter if anyone had a problem. Problems typically stemmed from the way they looked, the way they spoke, the way they approached people. Some people could have personal vendettas against some people. Ninety percent of the time we're arguing because one person had a really bad encounter and was vehemently opposed to that person being allowed in and other people would stand up and say, ‘He's a really good guy, He's changed, He's great, blah, blah, blah;' it's kinda like a parole hearing.

The rush chair establishes the actual criteria. He's the end all guy, the rush chair can single-handedly let people in or not let people in. He's the almighty in this process and the only person who can overrule him is the executive VP or the president. He establishes what we're going to do, the process, what we're looking for, how we're going to rate them. And that normally changed every semester. The rush chair is an elected position so the chapter gives that person authority to speak on behalf of the chapter. Thus, it's really important that the chair is someone that everybody really trusts, but it really is the chapter giving it out because there's like 10 people who sit in on these meetings that represent almost all the different families inside the fraternity. If it came down to people who didn't come through unanimously then it would go to the full chapter and we'd talk about them at night.

The decision-making process regarding which potential members going through rush successfully received a bid reflected the chapter leadership hierarchy, with chapter presidents appearing to hold the ultimate decision:

We’ve got a rush committee and they write recommendations to the rush chairman. Usually me and him sit down and … I trust him … but if there was a guy I had an issue with, ya know, I could overvote him or overrank him. But I haven’t had that, luckily.

Interestingly, none of the participants I interviewed came to the campus with the firm intention to participate in rush and join a fraternal organization. Paul summed up the thoughts of them all: “I was interested, but I wasn’t really gung-ho about it. I didn’t really have a strong desire to be in one but I had always been interested,” whereas Gary, as a legacy of Beta Fraternity, said,
It just seemed like the right thing to do. It wasn’t a sure thing, even with my dad’s involvement, but I thought I would do it and if I liked it I would stick with it; but it wasn’t going to break my heart if I didn’t do it.

Typically, the participants ended up rushing and joining their particular fraternity chapters because of party invites, phone calls, and interpersonal interaction that made them feel special and wanted. Even after a bad rush experience with one chapter Paul “knew there had to be one for me” and expressed anxiety that he might miss the process: “I didn’t know about going into it, you know? Who do I talk to? Where do I go? I’d get really anxious about it.” Frank’s story as to how he came to participate in rush and join Alpha Fraternity highlighted the importance of interpersonal interactions:

I have an interesting story because I didn't want to join at all. I was in a living-learning community my freshman year and five guys from my floor had all gone and got bids and really enjoyed it. I was kinda the kid that stayed in and watched TV. So I went and really was like a fish out of water at about 10 PM on the last day of rush. I was wearing Velcro shoes [laughs] which is very different from what I'm wearing now. I got invited out to that one chapter by the new pledges of that fraternity, the associate members as we call them. I went out there and met the guys and they were a really good group of guys. Even though I was very different, they very much accepted me for who I was.

The president of the fraternity I joined was from my hometown as well and he also kinda did the same thing that I did: I was president of my residence hall my freshman year, so I kinda had a really big connection. So, I ended up getting a bid out of the blue. I went the very last day with like three hours total left in rush, and I got a bid. I still have no idea why I went out, why I accepted my bid [laughs]. I think it was kind of peer pressure; kinda the expected thing because other people had put themselves out there for me, and I really wanted to have a group that I was really close with and I thought it would be cool to join a fraternity, to be able to say, ‘Hey, I'm in a fraternity.’

While chapter brothers may have dressed in a similar fashion, study participants were eager to explain that they did not attempt to recruit carbon copies of existing members during the rush process. Neal said, “I think the chapter would argue for two hours and I don’t know if I could [describe him]…. Appearance to me is weighed but not compared to anything else.” However, Frank countered this argument and suggested potential members did have to have a certain look and bring positive attributes to Alpha Fraternity. If they were to be successful in rush, he posited they

have to be remotely good looking; physical appearance has a lot to do with it, the way you carry yourself, the way you dress, the way you talk. There were a lot of people ...
talk of the meetings would be not about the qualities they presented but how they presented themselves, like did they look gay, did they look like they fit in, did they look like they were athletic, would they be able to bring things in on multiple fronts. We didn't care if you were the most involved person in the university and you were going to be Valedictorian. If you didn't bring that in with good looks or good physical ability, you're not going to get in.

The look is clean cut, or very, for lack of a better word, manicured. The girls [sic] at the front desk [during rush events], whenever they check you in would write your name down and if they thought you were attractive they would put a capital letter for the first letter of your first name; if they thought you weren't they put a lowercase letter. That way, the guys would see how the girls would see the guys within the fraternity. Someone who looked like they had money, or who looked like they would be able to afford it, who didn't hold themselves to a lower level than that of the fraternity … if you didn't have confidence you shouldn't walk in the door, is basically what we felt. In addition, being able to communicate effectively. If you could BS and pretend you knew how everything worked, then you could definitely make it. Just being able to look like you're being yourself, without being yourself.

He went on to suggest a successful potential member for Alpha Fraternity would be very clean cut, someone who is going to put out a positive image of the fraternity, enjoys himself, has fun, can bring some form of notable positive difference to the fraternity, like athletically or physically, or socially, and then someone who's going to say they want to do all the other things. The fact that we had very few non-Caucasian members ... we had two Black guys and one they referred to as the token Black guy because he was the first one so the only one there for a while, and then we had a couple of Hispanic guys, but pretty much the rest were Caucasian. So if I had to bet my money, he'd probably be a Caucasian, freshman, clean cut, kind of well built, and someone who dressed well, spoke well, and could perform well.

Rod stressed that attire would also be taken into consideration during the rush process for Beta Fraternity and that any excessively flamboyant dress would likely result in the prospective member not receiving a bid:

If the person walks in wearing glitter pants and an ‘I heart [love] Cher’ t-shirt I don't really see him getting a bid, because that's too, smack you across the face. Then again, I also can't see someone walking in with gang symbols getting a bid.

Gary suggested that the informality of dress of potential members might be more of the issue for Beta Fraternity rather than what the shirts were actually promoting:
As far as if a guy came in wearing a gay pride shirt, if it was a t-shirt it might be an issue because rush is a more formal event and you should at least have on a polo. I think it might make some of the guys question whether he would dress like that all the time and impact our name. It would definitely come up in the one-on-one talks with him. But if he was just for gay rights, I don’t see a problem with that, just as there wouldn’t be a problem with a gay who was all about African American rights.

Frank believed that a blended potential member likely needed to have positive characteristics that the heterosexual fraternity brothers would feel outweighed his gay sexual orientation. Alternatively, Frank suggested a blended potential member should limit the brothers to whom he revealed his sexual identity in order to be successful in his attempt to receive a bid:

If that person didn't exhibit gay traits and gay characteristics, then they would be able to make it through, but people that had effeminate voices, effeminate body walk, effeminate handshakes, would not [emphasis his] be allowed in. There would be such an uproar and outcry against it that it just wouldn't be allowed. If someone had the looks, and athleticism, the GPA, all those things I talked about, there's a chance he might get a bid. It depends on who he tells and how it gets played. If he tells one or two people he's gay and those people just don't care then he's probably going to be fine. But if he tells our most homophobic member, odds are he will raise hell until he can figure out a way to not let you in. Basically, if others from the outside can't tell without you telling them, then it's pretty easy.

James expanded this Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell concept when he issued a warning as to the extent the topic of sexual orientation could be taken during rush activities. He suggested openly gay men, “Don’t take it too far; don’t talk about it too much with certain members. They don’t want to know the details.” He also said that even the most accepting chapters would never advertise their openness and that they might still contain brothers who would feel uncomfortable with a gay member:

I don't think any fraternity would advertise or say ‘it's okay to be gay and come to our fraternity,’ ever. But there are certain ones that, if you don't blow it up, Don't Ask, Don't Tell kinda situations. I think mine's probably the most cool with it because it's me and they've known me for so long as a person. There are definitely guys who have a huge problem with it still, in there, I'm sure, but they've always had a huge problem with me anyways, as a person, so me being gay would never really change that.
James agreed with Frank and strongly believed that Alpha Fraternity would not issue a bid to an effeminate prospective member. However, he also felt that such a prospective member would likely be successful in finding a match in another chapter on the campus:

If he was openly gay, people [in the chapter] would probably ask me when he rushed, ‘Is he gay?’ just wanting to know. At that point, he'd have to do well in his interview, and it would take a really strong recommendation for him to come into our fraternity because it is harder to be openly gay and rush versus coming out when in the chapter because in all that time before people are getting to know you. It also matters, is he openly gay and an athlete and not a tool at a party, or is he openly gay and like, kinda, extremely effeminate. Those are two big issues. If he was effeminate, he probably would never get a shot of getting in, just because, it's nothing to do with the fact he sleeps with men, it's just the fact that he wouldn't get along. He wouldn't want to come to the house and watch football, or take salt and shots of tequila. Overall, he just would not fit in [to Alpha Fraternity] and I think that doesn't necessarily become an issue of the fact he's gay or not, it's the fact that it's not a match. I would just keep him aware of all that…. If he was asking my advice as to where he would fit in [pause], I would talk about some other houses [sic]. Just say that we're a southern fraternity.

But, I would still say rush every house, find the house you want. Maybe you'll hit it off with a house you never expected…. It happened this fall where this guy I know decided to rush. He's very effeminate, came to my house. I didn't know he was rushing until he came to my house, I didn't ask ahead of time. I was like, ‘Hey, get a nametag, go inside, meet some people.’ Immediately, I was asked, ‘Is he gay?’ and I was like, ‘Yeah, he's gay.’ He continued with rush, went to [fraternity], mind you, they're new on campus and they're building the chapter but he did find a place.

One of the important ways in which students learned about the fraternity rush process was through information tables at the campus-wide new student orientation programs in the Student Union of Southeastern State University. As I observed fraternity members staff tables during the summer orientation program, one fraternity member said such information tables “help fight stereotypes, ya know? Parents come up and ask questions.” While a cross-section of fraternity members worked at the information tables, I noticed that members who were chapter participants for a longer time were more vocal, stood in front of the tables, and were willing to both approach passers by as well as engage in conversations with individuals perceived as showing an interest in the chapter display and information.
Jay commented that during his recent rush experience, the brothers of Beta Fraternity “seemed like cool brothers and they gave me some paper and a DVD about their group.” During such rush conversations, Neal suggested, “I’d definitely push the scholarship, push the diversity, push the campus involvement, the athletic achievements.” Countering Frank’s philosophy, James suggested that during rush Alpha Fraternity wanted

Guys that stand out. The reason why we’re diverse is because we go on character and we don’t go solely on looks. A lot of guys with a certain look get into a certain fraternity, or a certain mentality, or a certain GPA, or whatever. We’re more of a certain mindset. We want guys that are laid back, motivated, extremely social, outgoing, and fun loving…. We want guys that are passionate about the fraternity, that wanna be there, because those are the guys that want to be in our fraternity. If you ask him how bad he wants to be there and he’s like, ‘oh, well …’ we’re not going to give him a bid. We don’t just give everyone a bid. It really takes dedication, character, a sense of morality.

None of the gay study participants felt that they would be restricted from discussing gay sexual orientation with potential members during rush events and at the information tables for their respective chapters. However, Rod summed up the collective opinion that none of them would be first to bring up the topic. In addition, their responses would be couched more in the generic topic of diversity rather than openly suggesting their chapters were welcoming of gay potential members: “If they brought it up, I would have no problem talking about it; I myself wouldn’t bring it up…. I’m not going to go there unless the other person really wants me to.”

Many fraternity members stressed high school leadership roles and athletic participation as important for prospective new members: “One of the first questions I ask is, ‘What did you do in high school? What were you involved in sports wise, SGA wise?’” When I asked the members of a fraternity with a glossy, full-color informational booklet how they decided who received a copy, the response was “kids that you know you want to recruit hard: 4.0 students, All State Football, All State Basketball. Or a kid that is very outgoing, presents himself well. He’s like SGA President in high school.”

Interestingly, however, many participants also suggested that leadership did not necessarily come from appointed or elected positions. Gary articulated, “I’m definitely not a positional leader, I’m kinda like the silent guy in the back challenging the process if
we’re going in a direction I don’t like; I’m more about enabling others to step up to become leaders themselves.”

However, Neal pictured himself as a future chapter leader as soon as he joined Alpha Fraternity:

Well, I'm a past president [laughs], my first exec experience, and I'm sorority relations right now, so I think I did. I lost the race for new member educator my pledge semester by one vote, was IFC delegate, had a lot of appointed positions. I never wanted to go to college at first and in high school was in ski club; that was it. I came here and had sort of an awakening: I can continue doing the same thing I've been doing my same life, which is nothing or I could make a mark. My pledge semester I wanted to be student body president and make my fraternity the best fraternity on campus. Going in, I was pledge class president and set the example. Actually, Orientation really helped me out by going through all the training that made me want to be a leader. However, I'm a big advocate that you don't need a title to be a leader. If I had my way, titles would be ixnayed from my fraternity and people would be doing what they should be doing.

Paul posited that leadership and sexual orientation were somehow linked:

I'm on executive board and I think that's where you're gonna find most, and this is my opinion, that's where you're gonna find most of your homosexual guys. They're gonna rise to the top because, I think this because they kinda feel like they have to overcompensate.

A lot of times I've felt like this too, I'm not going to deny it. I've kinda felt like I have to make up for, you know, being gay. I have to show the chapter, prove to the chapter that I can lead them in this aspect…. I just think that you're gonna find a higher percentage of gay guys in leadership positions in fraternities because they feel like they have to compensate or prove something to the chapter. And honestly, I think that the chapter, even though they did love me from the get go, it's only gotten better….

At first, I would run for a position and they didn't really think that I could do it. It's really cliquey even within the fraternity, like the same five guys. And then we'd have discussions afterwards and they'll make fun of the people that were up there. I know that they're just kidding around but, like, we had a Black guy run for a position, he talked like slang, kind of Ebonics, and they'll make fun of him afterwards and I'm like, ‘oh, do they do that about me, do they talk about me?’ Like, I couldn't really care less. I know they don't, because I've asked a couple of people. I've been like, ‘do you guys…?’ He's like, ‘no bro' we love you.’ I think that you will find, like my friend who was the president of his fraternity, they kind of rise to the top; they have to prove it. They have to make up for something that they can't help.
Such “tendency toward ‘overachievement,’” Case (1996) reasoned, “may reflect a desire for validation and acceptance by the group” (p. 2). Desiring acceptance appeared to be a distinct possibility as to why the participants of my study attained leader status within their fraternities (i.e. fusing identities, see Trump, 2003). Neal reiterated the philosophy that gay fraternity members tended to also be leaders in their chapters:

Just to be stereotypical, I guess, the [gay fraternity members] that I know are all some of the really strong guys in their chapters, the guys that will step up when something needs done, the guys that are running exec., the guys that are involved outside the fraternity. It's like a microcosm of the gay population so it's hard to judge but the [gay] guys that I know that are involved in Greek [sic] life in general are the guys that step up a lot of times. I guess maybe they feel that they will be more accepted if they come in and accomplish a lot of things.

Contrary to the standard of only actively recruiting first-year men, Neal articulated that Alpha Fraternity had “a lot of upperclassmen rush because they’ve seen us around campus, know our reputation. For them to see us is a whole new world.” Perhaps the difference of a couple of years of maturity helped explain the greater level of acceptance and openness to diversity that I witnessed in Alpha Fraternity.

Another criterion stressed by fraternity members during the rush process was the ability to relate positively with females. However, I feel such forced, heterocentric interaction could make gay members or potential members uncomfortable. During a particularly slow day at the informational tables, I heard one chapter member suggest to his brothers to get some “good looking girls [sic]” to work the table since he believed this would encourage potential members to stop by. What he failed to realize with this comment was that it would not necessarily draw gay males to the table but might also inhibit less-socially inclined heterosexual males. Even the cover of the marketing brochure published by one fraternity chapter featured a chapter member in a swimming pool with a thin woman with long, blond hair (Figure 5). Of the 12 internal pages of the brochure containing both text and photographs and aimed at marketing specific aspects of the fraternity chapter, 9 pages contained photographs of women, some without any connection or reference to the chapter (see Figure 6). In addition, the narrative in the brochure suggested joining the chapter in question would give you 150 close friends and
“the company of the most beautiful women” (see Martin & Hummer, 1989 for an examination as to the extent to which women are used as “bait” in fraternity rush.)

Figure 5. Cover picture of chapter marketing booklet
Figure 6. Internal picture of chapter marketing booklet

When I asked for reasons why someone would not get a bid, many participants cited inappropriate interactions with women. James said, “Chivalry is a huge thing for us, so if we see any disrespect for girls [sic] at all during the process, they’re usually gone.” Interestingly, Paul joined Gamma Fraternity because of negative interactions with a different fraternity chapter, which he believed treated women inappropriately:

I actually went to rush twice. The first time I kinda had a bad experience because I went to a couple of houses on one side of campus. One of the houses I got a really bad feeling from because the way they were talking about women was very degrading; not chivalrous. The fraternity that I'm in right now, we uphold chivalry very much; it's a big thing. Things have changed a lot now, I have a lot of friends in there [the original chapter] now, and I think I just talked to the wrong people. Maybe it was just because they were all guys and they were trying to impress the other guys, but they were, ‘oh yeah, we do this to girls [sic]’ and I was, like, ‘oh wow!’ Even if I was heterosexual, I wouldn't treat people like that in general; they're not sex objects. That just gave me a bad vibe and I was like, ‘okay, I'm not doing it.’ Then I just kinda pulled myself together one more time at the end of my sophomore year and I was like, ‘Okay, we're doing it!’ because I knew that there had to be one for me. I knew from other people, because I have friends in other ones, and I had friends that were girls who knew guys in other ones and
specifically one [female] friend told me that it's not like that in every fraternity and she
told me specifically to go check out the one that I'm in now. So I did and I ended up
loving it. The guys were awesome, very diverse. There was no stereotypical mold. The
way that they treated each other and looked at girls was totally different. So I decided to
give it a shot, and I'm in it.

Despite the obvious importance of several selection criteria, there did not appear
to be a set formula or listing of rush criteria in any of the fraternity chapters in this study
to determine which prospective members would receive bids and which did not. Often,
chapter members used their own perceived specific attributes in a potential member and
therefore asked him to join. It appeared the reverse occurred if a chapter’s members
deemed a prospective member not suitable. For Gamma Fraternity, Paul suggested
positive public relations were important, even if a prospective member was not receiving
an invitation for membership:

We have the saying, no matter what happens we want everyone leaving our fraternity
after rush week saying 'I wish I had gotten a bid.' We try to be nice and just let everyone
know it’s a business and nothing personal. We are not singling you out that we don’t like
you. It’s a business and we’re trying to pick the best guys to help our business grow and
help our business run.

Baier and Whipple (1990) concluded that “students who join fraternities … are
predisposed to peer conformity” (p. 48) and Maisel (1990) noted, “Fraternities … are
exclusionary by practice, sexist in nature, and gender specific by design” (p. 8). Baier and
Whipple also posited “the fraternity’s welfare is always more important than that of an
individual, reinforcing conformity … not bringing “unfavorable attention” to the
fraternity” (p. 52). This theme discussed the expectations of behavior as a potential
member and an initiated brother. Participants agreed with the literature that deviation
from the established standards was viewed negatively. Blended potential members were
expected to have positive characteristics that could outweigh their gay sexual orientation
even though the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell philosophy suggested that potential members not
bring up sexual orientation during rush. Women were used to encourage men to
participate in rush activities and it was unlikely that an effeminate man would get a bid
from the majority of the campus fraternity chapters. However, participants did posit that
chapter leadership and sexual orientation were linked with gay brothers (blended,
passing, and covering) achieving more leadership roles.
The Pledging Experience and Familial Environment of Fraternities

Baier and Whipple (1990) suggested that a fraternity experience provides a quasi-familial environment emphasized and maintained from the outset as new members learn that the fraternity is like a “family” (p. 52). Fraternity chapters perpetuate this idea with familial language such as “brother” and “pledge dad” (Jakobsen, 1986, p. 524). Jakobsen further hypothesized that there also existed a set of behavioral expectations regarding the ideal of preservation from outside influencers of values, fraternity, and family ideals and that if these expectations are too strict, allowing little deviation, fraternity chapters may hinder the emotional autonomy of members. This section explains the importance study participants attached to the familial feature of their fraternity chapters, the inculcation that they underwent during their new member pledging periods, and how they quickly learned that the chapter leadership hierarchy was not based solely on elected positions. This section also articulates how study participants began to learn the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors their heterosexual fraternity brothers held toward gay sexual orientation through the pledging structure and experience.

Many of the participants of this study articulated the importance of the close family environment within a fraternity and that developed during the pledging experience. James talked about the seriousness with which the selection of little brothers by older members occurred during this time:

He's extremely close to his little. He's close to my other little, his twin. We're a really close family, which I think is the coolest aspect of the fraternity, the part that I take away from the most, the family aspect. We don't just take random guys as littles; we care a lot about who we get and why they're in our family and stuff.

Neal mentioned that he joined Alpha Fraternity specifically because he lacked a familial environment at home. He explained, “I didn't have any brothers or sisters growing up so I guess I was looking for that family away from home and I felt like the house [sic] I joined was definitely where I found my family.” However, he also suggested that the closeness of the familial environment had affected the relationship between him and his big brother, participant James based on James’ lack of openness and authenticity regarding his gay sexual orientation:

There was this communication breakdown and I wasn't sure what it was at first but then I realized he was gay and I said, ‘Hey, I know you're gay and it's not a big deal.’ And he
was, ‘Oh, okay.’ It was like this enlightening burst and we talked about it and things got a lot better; he's like my best friend now. Once that communication barrier was broken down, it changed a lot.

Gary further discussed the power and influence of the familial relationships. He articulated that the family bond within Beta Fraternity was strong enough to prevent the chapter from issuing a bid to Jay when he was a prospective member since he was viewed as a potential threat to the brothers’ existing relationship with Rod who had already received and accepted a bid earlier that same rush week. Importantly, he stated this denial had nothing to do with Jay’s gay sexual orientation:

I know that we did not give him a bid mostly because my little brother [Rod] came around first and said, ‘Hey, that guy’s creepy. He tries to molest me whenever he sees me.’ And our response was, ‘Well, you’re here and you’ve already got a bid and that’s not going to be good for our chapter, so he’s not getting a bid.’ And I personally made sure that he didn’t get a bid, not because he was wild and out but because it was going to make the other guy feel uncomfortable.

During the assimilation and inculcation process of the new member program, James was attracted by “the support that comes with [brotherhood] and stuff like that” but questioned the authenticity of all he was learning, “definitely wondering would that [brotherhood] still hold true if they knew.” Since no brother of Alpha Fraternity ever asked him about his sexual identity, James never felt that he was lying during this passing phase. However, he did state:

Just conveniently, I wouldn't participate in certain conversations [Pause]. I always had girls [sic] around me, I always had girls come out, so no one really assumed, especially when you're dancing, having a good time, and with friends.

When I asked him how he would have handled a brother asking him directly about his sexual identity, James became reflective and the tone of his voice downbeat when he said, “I would have denied it [Pause] especially during pledging, especially during pledging I would have definitely denied it, no doubt about that.” There is no doubt that, at least in James’ case, he was definitely not being authentic in his relationship with his brothers during this period of membership.

In contrast and perhaps because Rod joined Beta Fraternity as a blended new member, throughout Rod’s pledging period it appeared that chapter members did what they could
to accommodate his gay sexual orientation, even to the extent of changing one of the
tasks required of new members:

When they assigned my big brother, it didn't become an issue but it was taken into
consideration…. When I pledged, the whole pledge committee knew. By the time I was
going to get initiated, pretty much everybody knew…. Sometimes, like during our pledge
process, one goal was to hit on a girl [sic] and get her phone number. My pledge
educator, who knew I was gay, just looked at me and said, ‘Okay, it can be a guy's
number.’ It was a non-issue.

Despite this acceptance by the majority of his chapter brothers, Rod still felt that some
initiated chapter brothers held him to a higher standard of behavior than the heterosexual
new members in the pledge class due to him being a blended pledging member. They
used his absence from some events as their reasoning, despite the fact that other brothers
were equally or more absent:

I have to prove the fact that I want to be here, since I couldn't come around the house
every day, since I couldn't make it to a few events, I have to prove I want to be there, I
have to prove that I want to be a part of this. And I'm trying to do this through different
actions like helping out with philanthropies and stuff like that; I'm having to put myself
out there. It's something where I think the chapter is waiting to see what I can do and
what I'm willing to do. While I may be less active than some of the brothers, I'm also
more active than some of the other brothers. There's a lot of members that just aren't
active right now. I want to be more active, but I can only be as active as my schedule
allows.

Frank commented that a chapter’s leadership often dictated the values and
attitudes for the chapter and thereby the culture of the group. This was especially true in
the pledging process. Thus, the choice of leaders was very important in the inculcation of
new members since they articulated the values and attitudes of the chapter:

You could have 120 people who look exactly the same, same style, same ideals, think the
same but very differently. Everybody wants the fraternity to be the best. Some people
think the fraternity being the best is by community service and outreach projects, and
other people think the fraternity being the best is having the best socials with the pretty
sororities. It was also dictated very much by whoever the president was, how they
allowed people to get into the process, and become involved in the rest of things, and
how diverse they spread out. Because if they put people in positions because they thought
they would do a good job or if they did it because they felt obligated because they were
friends.
Gary expressed some concern about the level of social conservative attitudes and beliefs within the fraternity community, especially if brothers with such social conservative attitudes and beliefs communicated their core values and beliefs to new members during pledging since this could establish the cultural philosophy that new members believe to be the norm and expected standard of behavior. This could be a challenge for non-elected fraternity chapter leaders should there be an attempt to effect a cultural shift due to the autocratic (elected) leadership Frank experienced and the fact that like attracts like. Neal said, “If you get a group of guys that just want to party, then those values are going to be pushed in the fraternity. You have to make sure that the class you recruit has the same basis as the core values.”

Socialization is cultural learning (Louis, 1983; Merton, 1957). Fraternity brothers teach new members the culture of their organizations through intentionally designed and carefully orchestrated pledging experiences. During this inculcation period, new members have frequent contact with one another and they develop strong loyalty to each other and the already-initiated chapter brothers. As this study showed, all of these actions make the pledging members susceptible to the influences of the collective group (Leemon, 1972).

This section explained the importance study participants attached to the familial feature of their fraternity chapters, the inculcation that they underwent during their new member pledging periods, and how they quickly learned that the chapter leadership hierarchy was not based solely on elected positions. This section also articulated how study participants began to learn the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors their heterosexual fraternity brothers held toward gay sexual orientation through the pledging structure and experience.

Diversity and Brotherhood

Pascarella et al., (1996) discovered that belonging to a fraternity had a significant negative impact on openness to diversity, specifically for White students. Thus, if the campus fraternity community became more diverse, especially with gay sexual orientation, there could be positive effects for acceptance by heterosexual fraternity members. The more students interact with diverse peers and the greater the extent to which such interactions focus on issues that engender a change in perspective or opinion,
the greater the development of openness to diversity. The literature suggested chapter brothers could be directly affected by the recruitment of a blended new member or an existing passing or covering brother revealing his gay sexual identity. The data provided under this theme revealed an inherent paradox between what was promised in terms of closeness and familial relations during the rush process and the lack of real diversity and tolerance for difference in fraternity chapter life in terms of race, religion, and sexual orientation.

The marketing brochure of one fraternity suggested that joining that chapter would give a potential member 150 close friends. However, a brother of this same chapter also stated, “Not everyone hangs out all the time.” While this is understandable and even acceptable, he also suggested, “Everyone doesn’t know everyone’s first and last names.” When asked for his ideal improvements for the chapter, he wished that he could find a way to entice people to come around more. This was countered by a representative of a smaller fraternity who posited that he could not see his chapter having 150 brothers and still being as close as it was at that time. He even suggested a smaller chapter equaled increased diversity: “That’s what we pride ourselves on, diversity, and a tight-knit brotherhood. I don’t think it can happen if we double, triple the size of our fraternity.”

When I looked at particular chapters’ members, however, the only visible difference appeared to be the length of their hair which ranged from shaved short to long (hanging over the collar) and ‘shaggy.’ Brothers actively involved in the rush process suggested chapter diversity based on having “guys that look like South Florida kids with earrings and gelled hair” and “kids that look like the Southern Gentlemen with shaggy hair, backwards cap, polos, and khaki shorts.” James suggested Alpha Fraternity followed this same path:

I would just say [we’re] Florida’s fraternity, because you know how Florida is diverse in itself; we have every element of Florida: We have southern guys, hardcore southern [as in] Georgia; we have Miami-looking boys, and then there’s [me], I’m a beach bum; we have the rich kids from Boca. Yeah, it just very much epitomizes the whole diversity.

However, Rod reflected on how he was free to dress reflective of his personal style in Beta Fraternity, but that he was challenged by a brother who was an elected leader of the chapter. Interestingly, despite coming from another chapter leader, the Beta Fraternity
president overruled the sanctions imposed on Rod and reiterated the openness and acceptance that Rod had previously felt:

I'm a very t-shirt and jeans, but what I wear might also be considered quite flamboyant. I wear tight t-shirts and occasionally I'll wear girls' jeans [sic]. The biggest deal has been my hair. There was quote-unquote legit reasons for kicking me out of rush [this semester] but it was done very backhandedly without the proper authorization by the E-Board. Basically, what it came down to was my hair was just a little bit too flamboyant [collar-length extension, black, straight]. I was really, really pissed off for a solid two days. I was really pissed off and I was really hurt. I actually spoke out during this past chapter.

There's been one person that since day one has wanted me gone. He's never given me an underlying reason; he keeps trying to make up reasons: ‘You're not around the house any more.’ I'm around the house at least five times a week now. I'm not in the same rooms as him, but I'm around the house and around brothers. He keeps trying to find ways for me not to be there but I still keep on being there. As a new candidate member, he tried to get me removed; it was very vocally turned down. I pretty much have gauged where his dislike of me has come from, but it has yet to be confirmed. We do have a very diverse group of guys so it would be very ignorant of me to think that there would not be a guy or two that was homophobic in my fraternity; I'm very much aware of that. He's now on the executive board; he wasn't when I was a new candidate member. Ironically, he's in charge of brotherhood.

When I was kicked out, it became a big deal around the people I'm closer with because everyone basically knows he does not like me, for XYZ reasons. XYZ reason is kinda pretty obvious but no one wants to touch on that special word. When I spoke out in chapter there was basically a hush and the president after chapter took me aside and wanted to know the details of what had happened. He said it should never have happened, and that ‘If we didn't want you here, we wouldn't have you here. You wouldn't have gotten through the pledge process.’ I felt very backed up after speaking with the president.

Two participants cited examples of a single African American member in their chapter out of 50 plus total brothers as proof of diversity of the brotherhood. However, Rod suggested Beta Fraternity countered this idea of chapters being diverse purely based on geography and fashion by saying

In my pledge class, we had a guy that was about 6-7, very big and very wide; undeclared major just there to have fun. We also had a guy who was African American with dreadlocks and into art and art history and all that. We also had two people that don’t have Green Cards. And then there’s little ol’ me, so it totally ranges…. If you walked
across campus and were trying to pick out my chapter members without them wearing letters, I don’t think it would be possible to do it just by looks. I do think a lot of other Greek-lettered [sic] organizations on campus do have their molds…. People do look the same. I really think that they all went to the exact same barber and got the exact same haircut.

Rod’s opinion on diversity was reinforced with my observations of a rush information table in the Student Union courtyard. Out of six brothers of Alpha Fraternity who were at the table over the course of an hour, four were either Hispanic looking or African American.

Rod also suggested that even though Beta Fraternity was founded in Christian principles – as were the majority of fraternities – his chapter brothers were open to his beliefs in a divine being, “not a Christian god … [and that] there is a Buddhist in the fraternity.” To him, it was more important that he “found that the things they were trying to live in their lives and exemplify, I was also trying to live in mine: live as a gentleman, live with love in my heart, do charity work.”

Paul posited that a sense of homogeneity within fraternity chapters could be related to the fact that, “a lot of people like being around the exact same kind of people. Some people are just like that and they like flocking to their own kind.” He concluded his thoughts recommending potential members “find a group where you can fit in, comfortably. And if it happens to be that there are three gay guys, two Black guys, five Puerto Ricans, six Canadians, and eight Japanese people then cool.” However, he also articulated that potential members should never change themselves merely to fit into a particular chapter:

Some people change themselves and I don't agree with that…. So, if you've always worn camo and hunted deer then that's cool, go to [chapter name], if that's what you do. But don't be this guy, that maybe enjoys other things, like you enjoy movies and golfing and wearing Abercrombie and Fitch and then all of a sudden [you're] not. You can [still] get along with these guys all wearing camo and hunting deer, but don't change to be like that.

When asked specifically about sexual orientation within the fraternity community, James posited that “it kinda depends on the chapter” but he went on to suggest that, “a lot of chapters are beginning to realize that they have brothers that are gay, it’s just a matter of whether or not they want to admit it or not.” Frank suggested that homogeneity could extend to sexual orientation and that a situation might be created sometime in the
immediate future whereby some fraternity chapters would become very open to differing sexual orientations whereas others would openly prohibit gay members:

I think you'll see the establishment of more organizations that are focused, kinda like KK Psi is all the band people, I think that will be established for all-gay people. I think that it will turn into an issue in some fraternities where it will be ruled for or against by their national organizations. Right now, this is such a hot-button topic that no one is going to take it on either way. I could see the possibility of outlawing the initiation of gay members in an incredibly conservative organization, but I don't see it as a true thing that will probably happen. I think eventually we will get to the point where some organizations will start adding sexual orientation to a non-discrimination clause [many inter/national organizations already have sexual orientation specifically articulated in their non-discrimination clauses].

Gary reinforced the concept of a possible split within the fraternity community based on sexual orientation when I asked him what the next 10 years holds for gay males in fraternities:

It’s either gonna get a lot better or a lot worse. I think more gay men are coming out to rush and a lot more are coming out and they’re either gonna find acceptance in some chapters, as I hope they do in my chapter – provided they’re not total jerks, anyways – or no one is gonna want them. I hope for the former because that would be a whole lot better to get them accepted. There’s already a dichotomy on racial lines, with some chapters where it’s very well known that if you’re not a WASP, stay the hell out of their chapter house, and I see the same happening with gay men.

There’s now more Black men in different chapters and I think it will go the same way for gay men. They’ve just got to speak up and actually want it, and want it for the right reasons. I don’t think a decent chapter that’s worth its credo is gonna turn them away. And it’s up to the discretion of the individual chapters as to whether they uphold these principles. I think it will be more accepted to come out and I hope these guys feel more safe and secure to come out.

James was quick to explain that even with Alpha Fraternity having two openly gay members at one time, they were never regarded by others as the campus’ so-called gay fraternity: “We’re definitely not looked at as the chapter with all the gay guys in it; not the gay fraternity. We’re just like the diverse fraternity; we’ve got everyone.”

However, Rod suggested that within the campus and city gay communities, Beta Fraternity might have developed some reputation as the so-called gay fraternity on the campus, much to the dislike of the brothers: “Some people do mistake the fact that there’s
two openly gay members and I heard someone say – the [gay] guy who didn’t get a bid [Jay] – that my chapter was the openly gay chapter, the gay chapter on campus.” This difference in attitudes toward sexual orientation in Alpha and Beta Fraternities likely stemmed from the type of gay brothers in each chapter. James articulated that Alpha Fraternity “guys aren’t afraid of the sexual orientation, they’re afraid of the loss of masculinity. They don’t have a problem with gay people, but with sissies.” Extending this logic, he posited that heterosexual men who were effeminate would not receive a bid to join the chapter due to “the whole machismo thing fraternities try to portray.” Thus, they accepted him even though the brothers

   Might not like gay people, but they like me, if that makes sense; they’re not against homosexuals, they just don’t like the lifestyle. But they love me as a person and they accept me as a person because they know who I am and they understand.

However, even a chapter such as Beta Fraternity that could be regarded as even more accepting of all aspects and levels of difference, diversity, and gay sexual orientation of members contained some brothers who rejected such difference and openness, especially when it infringed on chapter rush activities. Gary cited his version of the so-called effeminate behavior of Rod that was different from the established chapter norms as reason why some chapter brothers removed him from the spring rush activities:

   He got hair extensions so he had shoulder-length jet-black hair for a while. He did it because he liked it, not because he was trying to be a drag queen or anything like that. It’s something I would consider doing but my hair’s just way too curly to do it [laughs]. So he goes and pays the $80 for extensions and some of the guys who didn’t like him even when he was a candidate and tried to get us to drop him and one of them is now an officer said he couldn’t be in the house for rush because he hadn’t paid dues. It was total BS because they said at chapter even if you haven’t paid dues you need to be at rush.

When I asked Paul as the senior blended participant in the study for advice for a gay potential member – blended, passing, or covering – he replied, “If he enjoys sports and he is masculine, and he’s like a guy … then I really don’t think it matters if he’s gay or straight.” When I pressed him why masculinity mattered, he agreed with James’ comment and said, “I think fraternity guys are turned off to the effeminate kind of gay guys” since “it makes the chapter uncomfortable. They feel like their name might be in jeopardy, probably.”
James concluded our discussion by reiterating that personal interaction is the best form of education for teaching understanding and acceptance of gay sexual orientation:

A lot of people come with a certain perception of homosexuality their freshman year, including me, but that evolves. But then for some people, their perception is because of religion or upbringing and those don't always shift. It depends on where he places himself, depends on how we come across. A lot of my friends had their perceptions changed because they met me. For a lot of people I was the first [gay] person they'd ever met, that they knew of. So we have the opportunity to change their perceptions, to change their opinions, whereas not everyone had that opportunity.

This section showed the dichotomy between what was promised in terms of closeness and family during the rush process and the reality within a chapter and the lack of real diversity in fraternity chapter life in terms of race, religion, and sexual orientation. It also introduced the concept of the importance of perception and views and beliefs of others outside a particular fraternity as well as the type of blended potential member a fraternity chapter’s rush leaders might recruit.

**Threats and Taboos for Gay Brothers in the Fraternity Culture**

Participants discussed how passing/covering members exuded very visible heterosexual personas while also setting up personal roadblocks that they perceived could have created future difficulties within their chapters. Participants also discussed intra-chapter dating, limitations on blended brothers’ social activities within their chapters, feelings of safety within the fraternity community and from their own brothers, the heterosexism and heteronormality of rush, and the perceptions of GLB non-members toward the gay fraternity members (blended or passing/covering).

James highlighted internalized homophobia as an issue for those fraternity members who were passing or covering their gay sexual orientation, suggesting these brothers were likely to project a far more active and visible heterosexual image to the members of their chapters and the fraternity community:

Closeted fraternity members who are gay, they immerse themselves in the fraternity culture much, much more; the same as a heterosexual fraternity member, if not more. Much more flashy about it, letting everyone know they're going to all these functions. They want to be seen at the crushes and socials. They want to reaffirm the fact that they're heterosexual because they're in the closet. Like the person I'm pseudo-dating now.
James said a passing or covering individual often sets up internal “road blocks” to prevent him from achieving goals and that in order to be successful, such an individual needs to overcome this internal homophobia:

Because someone's gay, they feel that they can't rush, or they can't run for this office, or if they do that, they feel that they can't come out; it's one or the other. If they have the drive to actually get the positions, they don't have the courage to actually come out; if they have the courage to come out, they lose the drive to get the positions because they start doing the, ‘Well, it's impossible,’ questions in their heads. I just never cared [laughs], which is probably why I get into as much trouble as I do, but at the same time it worked for me.

There has to be people with the similar mindset, and similar lack of a social life, and quote-unquote dorks, yeah. More people like that, and more visible people in the arena who manage to climb the ladder without pissing too many people off, it will become easier for more to come through. Sexuality is becoming blurred and people are starting to look more at actual leadership qualities and that type of thing, I'm hoping. It's not necessarily because I'm doing anything, but my generation, that's the way we feel.

It wouldn't matter how stubborn I was or how much drive I had 10 years ago, I doubt I would have done it. I at least felt a little bit comfortable enough to where I could, because I really didn't have a huge amount of trouble getting in. I just made the choice, dealt with myself, and the rest actually came along more easier than I thought it would. When people find out they're gay, they think it's the end of the world until they realize that it's not. I think it actually takes coming out to understand that.

Such internalized homophobia, grounded in the fear of exposure of sexual orientation, extended to interactions between James as a blended gay fraternity member and other gay fraternity men who were passing or covering:

Say someone in the bar knows I'm gay and I run into a guy that I know is closeted, then he will obviously have the fear of, ‘If anyone here knows he's gay, and I'm talking to him, they're gonna think I'm gay too.’ So therefore, he has to act as heterosexual as possible so that he's just another of my buddies who's straight. And I play along, I don't care. It would definitely be something that would hugely [emphasis his] get in the way of dating. That's why I don't date closeted guys.

Because of the familial bond that I discussed previously, fraternity members viewed intra-chapter dating as somewhat incestuous:

I think it would be kinda weird, even for me. I just can't picture dating one of my brothers; it's just a different relationship. I think it would be maybe frowned down upon because it's a different connection than what brotherhood is and what brotherhood entails.
I don’t think anyone would know what to say or how to react; a lot of people would just be confused and not know what to do.

Gary and James expressed concern over two undergraduate chapter brothers dating. James suggested “We take the ideals of brotherhood so seriously; two brothers dating would be borderline ‘I’m throwing this in your face’ kinda thing.” I believe this concern is very logical and not grounded in heteronormality, heterosexism, or homophobia as it might be viewed initially. By extending his example to include alumni brothers, Gary explained that such a situation would be acceptable, since maturity and distance from the day-to-day operations of the chapter would provide enough of a buffer:

If Joe and Jim started dating and then had a bad break up, they’re still brothers and they’ve still gotta attend everything we do and it would just cause a fissure within our brotherhood. If two guys were committed to each other and ended up becoming life partners, that’s totally cool with me and I’ve got no issue with that. But, if it’s just a fling it could cause repercussions afterwards which would hurt the brotherhood in general. I would like to think that’s the same thoughts the other guys would have because just generally being weirded out would be kinda lame, immature, and sophomoric.

Thus, there was some indication that chapter brothers accepted intra-chapter dating outside of the undergraduate experience. Rod recounted the experience of two chapter alumni who “were openly gay and they started dating and moved away and apparently are still living together.” Rod also suggested, “I just can’t picture dating one of my brothers; it’s just a different relationship.” Neal summed up the general feeling by saying, “That’s a big no-no…. I think the chapter would be more worried about what other people thought and our reputation.”

In an all-male environment, this situation caused a challenge for gay brothers since the possibility of emotional and romantic relationships among brothers was considered during the membership process, whereas it obviously was not a concern regarding heterosexual potential members. Thus, it was highly unlikely that a chapter would issue a bid to a same-gender partner of an undergraduate brother or issue bids to two partnered blended potential members who rushed concurrently. Even more interesting, it was unlikely that an existing blended undergraduate brother would want his same-gender partner to join his fraternity chapter. As Rod articulated:

Even if I was dating someone and he wanted to join the chapter, I think that would be taken into consideration. I’m very much open with the fact that I’m dating people so a
bunch of people in the fraternity who I'm really close with would know about that. If that person decides to go out and rush, I'd feel kinda bad that that would be taken into consideration but I think it would. I really think it would be a negative thing to be dating someone rushing.

Gary also suggested that heterosexual chapter brothers might place some limitations on the behavior of gay brothers, limitations that were not in place for heterosexual couples. Interestingly, he phrased this social sanctioning more as a protection for the gay brother and his date and the dates of other chapter brothers than labeling it as the homophobia and heteronormality of the heterosexual chapter members:

I think they might say no gratuitous making out, hopefully moreso that people who aren’t in my chapter aren’t weirded out. I’d like to think it’s people not in our chapter but also at the same time, guys making out is going to make people uncomfortable, particularly the people who aren’t used to that sort of thing.

As a relatively new member in the fraternity community, Rod struggled with the heterosexist nature of Beta Fraternity, especially regarding bringing a same-gender date to a chapter activity:

It would take a person I'm in a committed relationship with for a while for me to bring them to something that formal, unless I'm about to be engaged to that person. It's one thing to know that someone's gay but it's also totally different to see that someone's gay. They might not realize I'm dating that person. To them, it's just another guy that's at our event that shouldn't be there. They don't see it as someone I'm in a relationship with; they would see it as just another guy. If everybody knew him, and everybody knew I was with him, it might be different. I just know I wouldn't do it because something like that would cause a wave…. When does the boyfriend of a chapter member become the boyfriend of the chapter member versus just another non-member guy?

Frank articulated that certain behaviors between two people of the same gender might not be accepted by other students throughout campus and suggested that this could result in gay and lesbian people feeling that the campus might not be an entirely safe place:

You can be comfortable with who you are but there’s no place that people get together and proclaim their sexuality either way. I don’t think you could stand on the library steps, two girls [sic], and make out and have it be something where people think, ‘Okay, that’s cool,’ but you see people doing it all the time that are straight. So there’s not a safe place where [gay] people can truly express and do what they want to do, if they wanted.
Social relations in public between same-gender couples may be related to the progression of showing affection between people over time. Early in the 20th century, polite society frowned upon any display of affection between a man and a woman—even if they were married. Today, such displays of affection are much less formal, even casual. As change occurs in the ways the majority society shows affection, change can also occur between same-gender couples, but at a slower rate of change.

I also witnessed heterocentric behavior as I observed on several occasions the chapter brothers staffing the informational tables in the Student Union. Even though fraternities consist only of males and the event was specifically to generate interest from potential members, it was obvious that the majority of chapter brothers working the tables were more interested in attracting the attention of women than potential members. During an observation of the recruitment effort of Alpha Fraternity, I noticed one member talking with a female from another information table and acknowledging women as they walked by. I specifically noticed one male student walk past the table twice and a father and son pair walk by slowly while directly looking at the information on the table but without any form of acknowledgement by the brothers supposedly recruiting new members.

James expressed surprise at a situation that developed with a senior administrator on campus. While he discounted it from being heterosexist, it certainly displayed characteristics of heteronormality and was an example of how even developmentally trained and accepting allies sometimes fall into societal stereotypes:

[Name], I was … driving her back to campus she was asking if I had a long-term girlfriend. And I was just like, ‘Oh shit,’ trying to find my way out of that one. I thought she knew for sure, because I’d been around her plenty times. I think she does and was playing devil’s advocate because she’s crazy like that and a gossip queen. If she doesn’t know, it’s a positive comment mixed in with the negative attributes of asking a gender-based question. She just assumed I was straight and I don't think she did it intentionally to be heterosexist or anything like that…. So she’s cool with it, but she just thought that I was straight for whatever reason, and that’s normal society because that’s what the dominant sexuality is. So, unless you know, the first question is always, ‘Do you have a girlfriend?’ And if I’m drunk, I'll give an answer like, ‘Yeah, his name’s [male name],’ or something like that…. So all I said [to administrator] was ‘no,’ which is the truth. I didn't feel the need, with that high administration and that short of a conversation; it was just a little awkward. I backed it up by saying, ‘It's a hard job dating what with being always
busy. There's just not a lot of people in this town for me.’ And then she switched words
on me, that makes me wonder. She said, ‘When the right time comes, you'll find the right
person [emphasis his]’ it wasn't ‘the right girl [sic]’ any more, it was right person. I was
curious about that. Maybe she read between the lines, she's a smart woman.

When faced with the hypothetical situation of a hate crime occurring on the
campus due to sexual orientation, James felt that some fraternity members might have the
opinion that the attack would be somehow justified, though it would be unlikely to be
vocalized in a fraternity chapter situation. This is deeply concerning since men
outnumber women as the victims of violence in every category except sexual assault
(Farrell, 1993) and disproportionately cause community disturbances related to hate
cries and bigotry (D’Augelli, 1999; Qualls, Cox, & Schehr, 1992). James also indicated
that he would challenge the articulation of such an opinion if it were raised:

I think there would be people, but not chapters as a whole. I think there's people
everywhere that have those feelings, but I don't think they would be vocal about it in their
chapter, I don't know. It would depend on how much of a group mindset they have. I've
come across people, not just regarding sexuality but race, who've made comments like,
‘They've had it coming’ or something like that, and I just think, ‘What the hell? Those
people still exist?’ I feel almost embarrassed for them because I feel like they're on their
own all the time with that viewpoint. You just have to wonder what education they came
from, what background gave them that mindset. I pity them. I really do, I don't know how
else to feel for them. I usually am pretty vocal in class, especially when there's debate. I
have no problem arguing anything, even if it's just for the sake of arguing. I would
definitely challenge that person. I just pity them.

Frank confirmed this reaction for the brothers of Alpha Fraternity:

I think that a couple of people might say that he deserved it. I don’t think that would be
the majority of the fraternity and I don’t think that would be the fraternity’s reaction
either publicly or privately. I think that if that was ever to be brought up in a general
chapter setting they would be very much yelled at, for lack of a better term. You are your
brother’s keeper, period, end of story. It doesn’t say, in times you agree with him and not
in the times you don’t.

Rod also posited that individual Beta brothers might hold condoning opinions regarding a
hate crime based on sexual orientation but that they also would not articulate their
feelings to the entire chapter:

Even if they felt it, I don't think anyone would come out and say, ‘He deserved it.’ They
know that there's at least two other people would be very not with that. They might feel
that way, but I don't think they'd voice it, at least in a group setting; they might say it in a small group. If it was a fraternity member, it might make a difference, depending on the fraternity. If it was me, or the other [gay] guy, I think there'd be less people who'd say, ‘He deserved it,’ but I still think there'd be some people.

Expanding this concept, Rod felt safe not because anyone told him Beta Fraternity was gay-friendly but through establishing positive relationships with the chapter brothers. He readily stated, “These people are friendly; these people are friendly to me and I'm a gay man; I'm a gay man safe with these people. My safety in my fraternity isn't based on me being gay or straight.” However, he also stated:

There’s some people that, if I was just any other gay person, would probably call me a faggot and walk away. But because I’m a brother, they’re not going to. They got to know me for who I am and then slowly found out I was gay. They got to see who I was regardless of the gay thing. Some of them might think gay people are weird but [Rod] is okay. So there’s that percentage … who don’t like me because I’m gay and there’s probably some more who don’t like gay people in general.

Rod also intimated that while he did not feel threatened by his Beta Fraternity brothers, he could not guarantee that a couple of them would not “do something to a random gay guy on the street [and] that really pisses me off but that’s part of who they are.”

Frank felt that questioning the leadership of Alpha Fraternity was negative because, “anybody that speaks out against the fraternity for any reason is always, kinda like, silenced…. Anytime you dissented in any way, it was always negative, [with] repercussions: you weren’t a valued member or a member who valued their membership.” He suggested this sense of control was enforced through the cliques of fraternity ‘families,’ “so you’ve got to watch out what you’re doing, watch your back … about what you say.” Likewise, Frank felt uncomfortable as a covering gay male in Alpha Fraternity: “I felt uncomfortable in my chapter house whenever people are having these conversations or making fun of people because they looked gay or whatnot. That was something that was incredibly uncomfortable for me.” Paul mentioned that he was emotionally hurt at one time by the comments of one of his brothers:

We used to have a guy in our fraternity whose Grandparents or Great-Grandparents used to own a plantation in the South, and they still do. Of course they just don't have slaves, but they still own the land and the house and everything and he was like, he came up to me during rush and he was like ‘I'm cool with you being gay I just don't want you to bring any of that around the house.’ And he said it like that. And it kinda hurt, because
that was the only thing that anyone ever said to me that might have been on the border of being ignorant or mean – which it was.

James continued the earlier hypothesis of himself and Paul, in that fraternity members are not against all gay brothers but possibly have issues with a subset of the gay population:

I think that racism, sexism, and homophobia have taken a different stance – and this might be my thesis. I don't think societies any more are racist, they're anti-ghetto. I don't think people are sexist anymore, they are anti-feminism dominance. I don't think they are anti-gay, but anti-flaming; it's like sissy-phobia is really what it is. I think that as long as you can relate to us and act like us, then it's okay. It's when you distinguish yourself as a completely different culture that it's not okay.

This viewpoint is interesting since Gary recounted the experiences of a blended non-fraternity friend of his whom apparently regularly had various levels of physical sexual interaction with fraternity members throughout the community:

I have a gay friend who is not in a fraternity but he’s hooked up with several men in fraternities. I have no idea where they meet each other but he’s very flamboyant and really, he’s the stereotype [emphasis his]. I think sometimes he does it on purpose so I know that it would be easy if I was a closeted gay man I could talk with him and become friends with him and come out to him. When he meets closeted fraternity men they say, ‘If you ever tell anyone what chapter I’m in, or my name, or what have you, I’ll kill you.’ No one in their brotherhood knows that they’re gay which to me isn’t really a brotherhood because you’re not supposed to have secrets.

Boies (1997) suggested such sexual interaction is a first form of social interaction for many gay men, particularly in the early phases of their identity development. Hetrick and Martin (1987) proposed that sexual activity could allow questioning men to express their gay sexual identity while also developing interpersonal skills. Such exploratory sexual behavior, which may be both exciting and confusing to the participant, is also likely to challenge a questioning man’s self-perception, values, attitudes, and beliefs. In this context, integrating sexuality may be an additional task – compared to heterosexuals – for those men experimenting with different aspects of their lives (Kimmel, 1993; Levinson, 1978). A desire to have sex with men might be the only characteristic one perceives to share with other questioning, passing, and covering gay men (Boies). When that is the case, such sexual activity may increase the sense of belonging to the group of
questioning, passing, and covering gay men. If such activity also occurs between fraternity men, an even greater bond may result.

Rod felt he faced the added issue of challenge and rejection from his existing friends, many of whom were also gay, or at minimum his GLB allies. Should his fraternity experience not have worked out, this could have meant his isolation on the campus:

A lot of people stopped talking to me. A lot of people said, ‘Why are you going to demean yourself, why are you doing this? This is ridiculous, you’re not going to get in, you’re too gay, you’re too flamboyant, you’re too feminine. Why would you do something like that? You don’t even want to do this.’ It was just something where by saying I was joining a fraternity, a lot of people just didn’t like the fact I was doing that and just stopped talking. I wore my rush shirt to class one time, to one of my graduate level classes, and it erupted into a huge debate during our 15 minute break in between sessions. It was why was I doing this, it’s demeaning, degrading, why would I want to degrade women? They even said I was probably closeted to them and that they had no idea and that I was just trying to be masculine. I was like, ‘If the fact that I’m in a fraternity deters you from wanting to be my friend and wanting to hang out, you probably weren’t a true friend to begin with.’ The people who were with me through the process from both subcultures are people I’m still friends with today. But there’s a lot of people who just don’t talk to me, don’t call me any more just for that simple reason.

James also highlighted the reactions of members of the gay community on and off campus who were not members of fraternity chapters. Generally, these individuals were negative to the fraternity community and questioned why a gay man would join what they perceived as a heterosexist and homophobic institution. Typically, these comments appeared to come from younger gay males who potentially could become undergraduate members of college fraternities and could have been reflective of their feelings of reverse discrimination or internal homophobia:

I’ve been challenged by members of the gay community, like, ‘Why would you join a fraternity? What’s the point? Why are you Greek? [sic] What do you get out of it?’ that kind of thing. And they always say, ‘You don’t even hang out with them on the weekends anyway, because you’re coming out to the gay club,’ and I would say, ‘not true.’ So yeah, they ask questions. I think they look down upon it. I feel like there’s two different people who ask; there’s people who ask because they are genuinely 100 percent comfortable with the gay community; that’s their family, that’s their fraternity of sorts and they just wonder, ‘why do you need more?’ They’re curious, they’re asking not out of hostility they want to
know, ‘What do you guys do? Philanthropies, community service?’ And I tell them, ‘I enjoy the entire scene because it’s an entirely different scene. I enjoy sports and I enjoy that social atmosphere with socials and crushes.’ And then there’s those that ask because they are, jealous is a strong word, but they know that they would feel awkward in that situation. They know it is something they would not fit into, and therefore they challenge it because they think that if they can’t, why should I be able to.

Rod blamed media stereotypes for the perceptions some members of the gay community held of fraternity members:

I know personally, I faced a lot of scrutiny from my gay friends for joining a fraternity; they were very opposed to it. They were very vehemently against the fact. They said I was demeaning myself; that if I joined a fraternity I wouldn't be able to be my true self and know who I really was, which very much obviously is not the case. It's something where they had this stigma what it meant to be a frat guy [sic]. I guess they got this from basic television, the stereotype of what it's like to be in a fraternity; that it's very he-man, woman hating.

Rod also felt that joining a fraternity did not mean he was rejecting gay culture and the gay community; merely that he was looking for an environment that he felt matched his personality:

I don't think me joining the fraternity was me rejecting the gay culture. I'm not the type of person to go down to [the local gay club] and have a grand old time. Yeah, I have Madonna in my CD collection but it's not playing constantly. The gay culture is nice to be around, every once in a while, for me and to have one or two gay friends, but it was never something that I was immersed in, and that happened ever since I entered the quote-unquote gay culture. In searching out a fraternity, I was searching for a place where I could find interesting people who I could talk to, have things in common with, that there was a sense of diversity. That’s something that I feel is lacking in the gay subculture, diversity. You walk around any major city and you can pass by all the clubs and you know which one is the gay club by the techno beat; all this amazing diversity and amazing individual men and women all focused to one view, this one picture, this Will and Grace, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy view. It took a lot to realize that I'm not that.

I'm gay, but I'm not always going to be your stereotype.

Gary discussed the experiences of Rod, his gay Beta Fraternity brother, from the viewpoint of an accepting heterosexual ally who interacted with both the heterosexual chapter brothers and Rod’s gay non-member friends:

He has like two separate sets of friends and I’m one of the few people that goes in between, back and forth. When he joined the fraternity, most of his gay and more liberal
friends, his more open minded friends, open minded in quotation marks because obviously they’re not very open minded if they think everyone in a fraternity are closed minded pricks, they asked, ‘What are you doing? That’s a conservative hotbed.’

When looking forward to the next 10 years, Rod hoped that “the gay community can be accepting of the fact that there’s so many different ways to be gay; that it’s okay to be in a fraternity and be gay.”

I believe this section contained some of the most important themes from this study. External homophobia refers to homophobia that is displayed at the cultural and societal level (Blinde & Taub, 1992). Research shows gay men benefit from the social support of the gay community (Hays, Catania, McKusick, & Coates, 1990; Kurdeck, 1988; Rabkin, Williams, Neugebauer, Remien, & Goetz, 1990) but for passing and covering men, such support is not readily and easily accessible likely due to their own internal homophobia and the personal challenges of coming to terms with their sexual identity. How support relates to the ways passing or covering individuals chose to participate in the gay community is unknown, however (Boies, 1997), thought it was probable that increased interpersonal contacts with other gay men were beneficial.

Participants discussed how passing/covering fraternity members exuded very visible heterosexual images to overcome the personal internal roadblocks surrounding their gay sexual orientation that they perceived would prevent future successes for them within their chapters. Passing/covering chapter members also felt that to overcome their own internalized homophobia and to ensure their brothers continued to accept them after revealing their gay sexual orientation there was a need for overachievement within their chapters.

Participants were against intra-chapter dating between undergraduates but accepted that the distance from day-to-day chapter operations likely meant it was acceptable for gay alumni to date. Participants appeared remarkably accepting of the limitations on blended brothers’ social activities within their chapters and felt safe from violence within the fraternity community and from their own brothers. The heterosexism and heteronormality of rush also appeared to be accepted, perhaps because the majority of participants had successfully navigated the process. Participants did not believe that joining a fraternity meant any rejection of their gay identity and, therefore, did not
understand the perceptions of GLB non-members toward the gay fraternity members (blended or passing/coversing).

**How Language Communicates Values in Fraternity Culture**

The language used in fraternity life was brought up by many participants in this study and Rod reflected the general view that some terms regarding gay sexual orientation were deemed more acceptable by the gay fraternity members in the study than others and that the circumstances of the usage affected the level of acceptance:

Most of them [chapter brothers] know not to use faggot around me and I’ve never heard it used, unless it’s in my close-knit circle of friends that know me well enough to where it’s an inside joke. They’ll never use faggot but they might use fag, or fairy, and in a more jokingly way. But it’s also one of those things that’s understood between close friends. “That’s so gay” you can hear at least 20 times a day around the chapter house. If I’m around, usually people acknowledge the fact that I’m around and say something like, ‘Not in the cool way like you, but in the bad gay way.’ So I ask them what the bad gay way is. I hate saying this, but I feel like I’ve become kinda callous; I’ve heard stuff like that since middle school. There’s nothing in the book that someone can call me that I haven’t heard before. I understand that there’s certain words and terminologies that have been adapted into the American college student or high school vernacular that are not meant to be taken as a deliberate offence or insult. If someone’s outlandishly insulting another gay person then I would get greatly offended and I’ll get quite pissed off. But, ‘That’s so gay,’ it still irritates me but unfortunately I have gotten used to it. Why are gay people allowed to call each other flamers and faggots and African Americans allowed to call each other niggers? I think that the social minority that’s being insulted tend to adapt the insult to be an inside joke. So gay men will call each other fag or fairy and that in turn gets adopted by their sub group of friends in a more humorous way. It’s a way of coping with the fact that you’ve been insulted before by that insult. I’m not saying that it’s a good thing for people to use these terms within their own social group, but I’m aware that it happens. There’s certain times when I’ll correct people but my nature, I’m not a very big confrontational person. It takes a lot to make me become confrontational. If I feel that you are being deliberately insulting of myself and another gay person, yeah, I’m going to respond. But if it’s just because you’re part of a culture that has adopted that term, I’m not gonna pounce on you.

As James increasingly accepted his own sexual orientation identity, he became less sensitive to negative terminology, instead preferring to react with humor and spinning the comments back to those who spoke. He suggested that his Alpha Fraternity brothers were
more concerned with saying what they assumed would be the wrong thing even though he deemed such language usage as merely natural and innocent interaction between brothers:

They’ll say ‘that’s so gay’ or call someone a faggot and they immediately feel really bad and start apologizing to me. But I’m not really offended by that, never have been. It’s human nature; it’s how society was built. Certain words have a certain connotation … becomes habit. I just go along with it. No one’s ever maliciously bashed me. They crack on me in chapter all the time now.

Just like Rod, James also suggested today’s generation of Millennial students grew up with the phrase ‘That’s so gay’ and have used it for as long as they can remember. However, he also posited that rarely did they mean to use it in a negative or prejudicial manner:

The use of the word gay, queer comes up all the time. I think more around IFC and other chapters that don't know me as well. I don't know if that's my fraternity being conscious because they know I am, I would say it's more unconscious. With one of my brothers, I don't get offended at all [emphatic answer] because I say it too. I just think it's one of those social norms that has shifted in what it means. My generation, we knew to say ‘That's so gay’ before we knew what gay was. It's kinda just something we grew up with. I don't think we mean it in an intentional attack on the homosexual community. Is it politically correct? Obviously not. I used to say, ‘That's so Jewish’ which I realize is not so politically correct either, so now I just say, ‘That's so Al Qaeda’ and I figure I'm not gonna offend anyone. So I don't get offended at that. Sometimes it's funny, because a guy's, ‘Oh, I'm sorry’ especially if he just found out. I was out with a [fraternity chapter] friend last night and we were talking about golf and he said, ‘Golf is so queer’ and he was, ‘Oh, oh, I'm sorry, no offense ...I don't mean it in a ....’ It's funny to watch because it doesn't make me uncomfortable but it makes them uncomfortable which I think is good, because if that's the reaction then I'm fine with it. At something like an IFC meeting, I usually don't say anything. Unless it's a personal attack on me, I don't care. I just feel you should choose your battles and that's not a battle I even want to bother with. Personally, I just don't care. If it was directed about a friend of mine, by somebody I knew, well, I doubt they would say it in front of me, but if they did, I would definitely say something. If it was by somebody I didn't know, I would switch gears to make them feel like an idiot and say something like, ‘Oh yeah, me too’ or something like that; I've done it before, especially with a bunch of people I know and one person I don't know that makes the comment. I have a lot of fun with that, just because they're not expecting it. I don't care; I've always had the attitude so it's easy for me.
If comments came in the form of an attack or from a non-brother, however, James readily acknowledged “it would be a little awkward” and that he would “probably say something like ‘Well I am’ just to get a rise out of them, because then they feel bad.” Frank also felt that language in the fraternity community ran the gamut from acceptable through terms that he also would confront:

People say it and use it in joking references, very rarely directed to someone. It was normally done in a joking term. It was never used as a verbal bash on someone. Now there's certain fraternities that pretty much are not accepting or as appreciating. It all depends on what they're saying and the situation. If they say, ‘That's so gay,’ that doesn't bother me, I don't care, that's just a term or slogan, whatever. Whenever they would be, ‘Oh man, he's a f-ing faggot,’ that's something that would upset me and I'd call them on it, saying, ‘That doesn't make any sense,’ or, ‘Stop.’ Now before I came out I was passive. I didn't engage in that type of rhetoric at all, but I definitely did not give any discourse against it. After I came out, if it had a negative connotation in the way it was being used then I would most likely say something about it.

Paul discussed verbal situations that occurred while playing interfraternal intramurals:

I think only one time during a volleyball game somebody said 'faggot.' I don't know if it was [specifically directed to me] but I assumed that it was. But, when we're out at other fraternity games, when we're out at soccer games they call each other that too, you know, like, a lot of fraternity guys just say that. ‘Faggot,’ ‘douche bag,’ ‘that's so gay,’ so I don't know if it was directed toward me but it could have been. It didn't bother me though.

Unique among the blended participants, Paul commented that while he did not appreciate the terminology of ‘That’s so gay,’ he accepted the usage because of his perception of the way his brothers used it as a discriminator between masculine-acting gay men and effeminate gay men. Such opinion may be indicative of his maturity and progressive stage of sexual identity development and reflected the earlier discussion regarding masculine-acting and effeminate-acting men:

I still do get offended by it but I know that the way they are using, and this might sound ignorant on my part, but there's White people, and there's white trash. There's Black people and there's [head nod], okay? I think there are gay people and then there are faggots. I know that's really harsh but I think it's true because I think a lot of gay people specifically say that they're gay for attention, or they might really be gay but they heighten it, you know, just to try and gain attention from it; they try to use it in their favor where I don't believe in that. Just be yourself, you know? I mean if that's who you are,
then that's cool. I know a lot of straight guys that are effeminate. They don't shy away from it, you know.

To expand this concept, Paul used an example from Gamma Fraternity’s rush where a visibly flamboyant blended student visited the chapter as a potential new member:

He [was] kinda going out of his way to let it be known that he was and it's just not attractive [laughs]. And you just don't want that; it's kind of annoying, whether it would have been something else it just happened to be that, and it was annoying; kind of repulsive. [The brothers] were calling him all these slang terms; I kind of agree with them. I mean, I wouldn't have called him that but I agree with why they were saying that, you know? He was kind of intruding upon our brotherhood, trying to make a joke about it, I guess. He wasn't mocking us, but he definitely was making everybody feel uncomfortable. Nobody asked him to leave; he came around pretty much every night; he just didn't get a bid. I think he did get a bid from somewhere else….

I was in line, actually this is a good story, I was in line at the bagel store the next day, or like a week after rush, and I saw him there, he was working. I was like, 'oh Jesus Christ' [laughs] I thought he was going to recognize me and the guys behind me were talking and they were like ‘there's that kid that came around to our house.’ And they're not in my fraternity they are in another fraternity. And I just kind of listened in. And then I was ‘yeah, he came to my house too’ I was like ‘what did you guys think about him?’ And they pretty much told me the way he was acting was really annoying, repulsive and I was ‘yeah, we thought the same thing.’ I guess he went around all the houses like that. So from all of my fraternity's standpoint and other fraternities stand point it probably wouldn't happen to a current openly gay guy who's done that, to get a bid.

The cultural values of an organization are likely to be linked tightly to the basic beliefs and assumptions of group members. In this regard, values provide the basis for a system of beliefs and these values sometimes surface as exhortations as to what is right or wrong and what is encouraged or discouraged (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). The significance of the fraternity chapter lies in its ability to influence the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of chapter members.

The effects of language was brought up by many participants in this study and Rod reflected their general view that terms such as ‘That’s so gay’ were deemed more acceptable by the gay fraternity members in the study than others. The circumstances of the usage affected the level of acceptance, since the study participants never heard such terms as the basis for a verbal attack by chapter brothers. Indeed, participants stated their
brothers apologized for using such terms, but that such language had entered the subconscious of the millennial generation.

Perhaps most importantly, the gay participants felt such language was used as a positive discriminator between masculine-acting gay men (as which they all classified themselves) and effeminate-acting gay men. However, these comments came from blended participants with advanced identity development. It would be interesting to learn how a passing/covering brother just coming to internal acceptance of his gay sexual orientation was affected by such language, especially a brother with no allies with whom to discuss his fears.

Social Interaction

As fraternities evolved on American campuses, the primary function of fraternal organizations deviated from their original academic focus and began to stress the social aspects of college life. The common behaviors of members came to define fraternities moreso than the informal statements of ideals, but both are important to fraternity life and culture. As Horowitz (1987) stated, “although rhetoric paid tribute to serious, high-minded purpose, the real concern of each fraternity was to create within the larger college a small group of compatible fellows for friendship, mutual protection, and good times” (p. 29). Consequently, the nature of social interaction was another important theme derived from this study. Often the first association prospective members had with fraternity men was social in nature and often with the involvement of women. Such social activities appeared to test the potential members’ social skills and behaviors, with acceptable social traits being defined by the existing brothers although not necessarily based on their own social behaviors. This section details how participants behaved when they encountered a fraternity community member in social settings such as a gay bar, club, or online environment, relationships with fraternity members of different chapters, and the importance of the Internet for socializing. Finally, participants also discussed the heteronormality of their chapters’ social activities.

It was typical for the first association prospective members had with the majority of the membership of a chapter to be social in nature. Jay commented that

As a freshman, I came in with the only idea about fraternities from what TV offers you and movies offer you: that they are these great drinking organizations and that’s all they do. Then my roommate decided to rush and I was like, ‘Hey, I’ll just rush just to say to
myself that I did it and see if I can get in.’ By the end of the week I found myself really wanting to be in and really wanting to be part of the group because I saw how much fun they were having. I found that I already had friends in the group and that I just wanted to be a part of it. After I didn’t get in I found out from my friend that movies don’t lie; they are drinking organizations because my roommate, who’s 19, drinks every night of the week, at least 5 or 6 nights a week, and that’s all they do: they go to the clubs and they go to parties, and that’s all fraternity is.

James reinforced this opinion when he said social interaction between brothers involved

Ten guys in one room playing Halo, a video game on Play Station, drinking a beer.

Usually, we're talking about [pause] the day, because we see each other so often we just talk about what happened that day, what's going on, what people are stressed about, and the weekend if one of the guys missed it. Very much just laid back, shooting the shit, kinda thing. At a party, there's always a crap load of people in our room just talking to everybody. We're a very competitive fraternity, there’s always beer pong going on, and that always brings out the best in everyone because we have teams going. So, we're always talking smack to each other, more like a ‘you can't throw’ kinda thing, that kinda smack. It's really just a bunch of your buddies hanging out.

He went on to suggest that rush is “two nights of hard-core social interaction [to] see if they screw up at all.” Jay defined social as, “Talking and doing things like going to the movies and hanging out together” but what he experienced at Beta Fraternity left him feeling disenchanted with the entire fraternity community: “It seems to them that alcohol is the binder that binds them together. I see this in other fraternities. I have friends in other fraternities and that’s what it seems to be, one big kegger.” Frank reinforced this fraternity definition of social by suggesting that when brothers get together they talk about

Sports, girls [sic], jobs, class, normally how much class sucks, professors. I think that you could go to a fraternity party at 2 o'clock in the morning and find groups of people talking about the exact same things, except maybe a fraternity issue that just occurred or something they're going to address at the next meeting.

Neal summed up the social aspect of fraternity membership, by describing it as “work hard, play hard…. We all get our stuff done but we also have fun.”

While fraternities may espouse the development of social skills during the pledging process and personal growth of members as one of their tenets, James stressed the importance of joining Alpha Fraternity with a certain level of highly developed social
skills. He suggested, “Strong social skills, outgoing, are important things to us. We don’t take a lot of shy guys, which sucks because some guys will open up later on. We usually go for the outgoing ones because that’s who we are.” Frank reiterated this opinion regarding Alpha Fraternity even going as far to suggest that a potential member who was able to project a positive image that might be fake (such as from passing or covering) would be taken over a more introverted student who was honest:

If you didn't have confidence, you shouldn't walk in the door is basically what we felt. In addition, being able to communicate effectively: If you could BS and pretend you knew how everything worked, then you could definitely make it. Just being able to look like you're being yourself, without being yourself.

Neal mentioned an incident at Alpha Fraternity where a member was removed from the chapter supposedly due to lack of social skills and his inability to learn what the chapter members deemed was necessary:

We just removed a guy, two weeks ago I wanna say. If somebody's gonna be able to contribute to the chapter and they're good guys, we're gonna keep them around. But this guy, there wasn't too much he could bring to the table and he wasn't very social, so even if he could bring it to the table it wasn't like he was going to vocalize that. It's kinda hard not to fit into our chapter, it really is, so to find somebody that you know is not going to fit in is a big tell-tale sign for us. We have a really good retention rate and don't drop too many guys. We have a thorough screening process before they get in so it was very controversial. His roommate had gotten a bid in fall and was a brother in the spring so we gave him a bid even though we didn't give him a bid last semester. The kid is not only shy but he's almost socially inept, really, really quiet. We tried so hard to break him out of it. I'm a big fan of facing your fears. If there's something you're afraid of then go battle it, figure out what it is and go smack it across the face. We put him in social situations, we coached him, we did anything we could possibly do, but nothing was working, nothing.

Rod mentioned that he joined Beta Fraternity in order to develop his social skills that he readily acknowledged were weak:

I can be very extroverted at times, but I can be very introverted at times, so that's something where I'm finding where I can speak out, where I'm not as comfortable speaking out and trying to speak out to prove and be seen as a productive member of the chapter. Being in a fraternity was a whole different world for me, it was very much unchartered territory; I'm still learning how to interact, especially with guys since I'm used to interacting with women or lesbians, and gay men.
Later in our discussions, he commented on the growth in self-esteem he had already undergone during his brief time in that chapter up until that point: “I can already tell that I’ve grown. People around me, people that know me, they see the changes in me. The fraternity has helped me grow into the person I am, and the person I'm becoming.” James mentioned that members of Alpha Fraternity were able to be somewhat autonomous in their outgoing social interactions and that maybe this attracted potential members who could have been turned away from their stereotyped images of what a fraternity chapter would be:

A lot of the guys we have are all the guys that never would have gone Greek [sic]. They were so turned off by the idea of fraternity [pause] and then they hang out with us. We’re like a different kind of fraternity.

Later, James articulated that such independence in social interaction also extended to the social dichotomy of heterosexual chapter events and activities with gay friends. He suggested, “Every activity that takes place in the fraternity, you attend as much as you want and when you want to go to the gay club, you go to the gay club and have a good time doing it.”

When coming across passing or covering gay fraternity men in a social setting, James suggested, “I would acknowledge them but I’m not going to make them feel uncomfortable. Online, it depends who it is, how well I know him, and if they’re attractive [laughs].” However, he did suggest that an interfraternal social bond could develop between two gay men from different chapters. Such a friendship could possibly overcome the concerns all study participants raised regarding undergraduate chapter brothers dating, should the relationship develop in that way:

If it's somebody I don't know and we start talking and the fraternity thing comes up, I'll just say, ‘Cool.’ I'd probably tell him I'm a member of [Alpha Fraternity] and they'd ask, ‘Do your brothers know?’ and I'd be like, ‘Yes,’ ‘Mine don’t.’ It's a weird conversation. I'd be like, ‘I have no reason to out you, I have no reason, I don't care. Thanks for sharing’ [laughs]. It doesn't faze me one way or another. I know there's gay people in every fraternity so when they tell me it doesn't shock me. But it does add another layer of camaraderie, brotherhood-type because it shows at least one line of similar interest. You find a lot of people out of college, two guys who are dating both were Greek [sic] in college, just because they had those similar bonds.
Frank concurred, suggesting, “We’re fraternity men so we need to have this special bond.” Since Frank spent most of his time as an undergraduate member of Alpha Fraternity passing, he had a unique perspective among the participants regarding meeting other fraternity men online or in social situations:

The thing is, if you're there, they're there, so I don't think that anyone would use that against you or hold it against you. If it was a gay brother that was there, I'm pretty sure he would have been understanding enough that he wouldn't have gone and spread it around.… I used to go into [Internet chat rooms] just to get a feel for things and talk to other people in similar situations; a random generic screen name, no photograph, no identifying marker. Now I have no need for it, I don't do it at all because I don't need anonymity any more and I don't feel that I have a need that's not being met right now.

Paul suggested that in a social setting, he would extend friendship to a covering or passing fraternity member in an effort to quell the nervousness the covering or passing member would likely feel:

I go up to him and I'm like ‘hey what's up? You remember me?’ Or maybe I didn't know him and I'd be like ‘hey, I recognize you. Did you go to [Southeastern State University]?’ Even though I know that he did, or he's here right now. I would go up to him; I'd make him feel comfortable, you know? Maybe be his friend that he can confide in and relate, because probably he doesn't have anybody else like that. Because what happens is, he'll see you and probably freak out … and I would have ran and stopped him. That's just me. I would have been like ‘where do you think you're going? It's cool.’ I would have made him feel comfortable, but that's just who I am. Nobody's gonna ever know, you're gonna live your whole life as somebody that you're not, and I just think you only live once; why are you going to be fake for half of it, or for a third of it, or a fourth of it. Come out as soon as you can and be comfortable with it; you'll be a much happier person.

In contrast, Rod suggested, “Even if he said that no one could know, I would probably tell my closer friends just because, unfortunately, that’s the type of person I am, but if he reached out for help and counsel that’s different. If he just tried to intimidate me to not tell a soul, ‘Please honey, I don’t get intimidated by that shit.’” Rod also recounted a story of a high school associate who covered his orientation both in high school and at college, yet was observed at a gay bar:

I’ve run into a closeted fraternity guy that I knew in high school when he called me faggot and I saw him at the bar in Orlando in the summer and I see him here on campus all the time. It’s not unlikely. I didn’t say anything to him. Instead, I turned to my friend and laughed. He clearly saw me, but just looked at me blankly.
James suggested that he was a member of a cohort of gay fraternity men from various campus chapters who provided mutual support: “As far as friendships go, there are so few that are out that we have a bond when we see each other out, we know who each other are, it's always good to see the other person.” He agreed with Frank and suggested that gay fraternity members who were passing or covering their sexual identity behaved much more open in the anonymous online environment of gay bulletin boards and chat rooms than in public settings. This especially applied to settings that were fraternity and sorority related, even though “every time you talk to someone online you’re taking a chance if you’re in the closet”:

They’re much more willing to talk about sexually related things. They’ll talk about, ‘Yeah, we should go hang out, and I'll come spend the night and we’ll cuddle,’ something like that, online. But if you see them out at a straight bar, it's much more punch each other, ‘What's up man? How ya doing? I want you to meet my girl [sic]’. Just because of fear of anyone knowing.

Rod talked about “some of my heterosexual fraternity members who, in conversation with me, have admitted to trying gay things. They wanted to find out whether they were gay or not. They tried it, and it didn't quite happen; not to their liking [laughs].” Despite his comment about not dating closeted guys, it appeared that alcohol changed James’ stance. The web site, Facebook.com, enabled him to meet a gay member of another chapter who was “in some closet in Georgia, it’s [that] far” who had since turned into some level of regular sexual partner:

I don't even know how we met; it was all a lot of alcohol. I say I'm dating him just because he's my steady, hookup, weekends we normally see each other. Apparently, when I was intoxicated, three weeks ago I decided to go online to Facebook, went home and went through this certain chapter's house that has a reputation for having gay members to see if I had friends in common with any of them; to see if they knew any other gay people. Found one of them and added him as a friend for the hell of it; I don't even remember doing this. Next week comes around and my birth brother comes into town and we have this big Pimps and Hoes party with the fraternity and I get completely obliterated. 2:30 in the morning I have this phone call, because my phone number's on Facebook, and he's like, ‘hey man, you added me as a friend and I didn't know who you were. I just left [local college bar], been drinking, and, err, do I know who you are?’ And I was like, ‘No, I don't think so.’ Then I realized who it was and I was like, oh shit. ‘I think we met at a crush, somewhere like that,’ making up some excuse, thinking he's
gonna be pissed. He was like, ‘Oh, it's cool man. What are you doing?’ And I said, ‘Pimps and Hoes party.’ So he came over to the party and we kept drinking and ended up hooking up that night, completely random. He was all, ‘I've never done this before,’ freaking out, but he felt a comfort because on my Facebook it says I'm Greek and he's Greek, so it's okay [sic]. And we only do it when we're wasted, which makes it okay too. He even told me, ‘I'm not gay, I'm not bi, I'm just in college, curious.’ And I said, ‘Dude, you can call me Lisa, whatever makes you feel better, I don't care.’

Similarly, Rod suggested:

If anyone wants to meet a gay man just go on the Internet. There's groups and organizations, even on Facebook, and everyone knows the majority of [Southeastern State University] are on Facebook right now. You can find a gay man with similar interests as you. Maybe you want to get an interaction with the gay community that isn't always on campus, there's always that connection. If I ever want to know if someone's gay or not, I look at the friends we have in common; I look at their Friends List and if they're friends with more than five gay men, it's pretty much a good indication that they're either gay or they hang around with a lot of gay men. Even if they're not gay, if they have a lot of gay friends on MySpace or Facebook, they can at least introduce you to a gay friend. It can be done in a very roundabout way.

When I first came to campus I was playing Hunt the Gay Men. It's something where you can find people. It can be the most obscure person you don't know, but just by hanging out with them once or twice you could possibly run into someone you could meet. Even if you were a closeted gay fraternity member and you were attracted to one of your own - which I know has happened in the past - and that person is out, you are more inclined to be friends with that person. I know one of my exceedingly close friends who was in a fraternity at another university, transferred here and his fraternity doesn't exist here, he had a two-year relationship with his fraternity brother. I know in my own fraternity in our refounding class there were two openly gay men that now live together. I don't think it's unheard of. If you wanted to reach out to someone who was openly gay, or possibly closeted gay in your fraternity system, you can find it. And if it's not within your fraternity system, you can find it elsewhere. I know plenty of my friends who have met people who are in fraternities and who are quote-unquote straight and going out and banging the ladies every night but have met them, been together a month, and no one else knows about them.

Rod also went on to suggest that

Having the Internet and already knowing people that are gay can make it easier to come out to yourself. On the converse, you can be anonymously gay online and no one in your real life gets to know that and you can have all the gay experience you want without having the label of being a gay man. In a way, it's a great tool for coming out but also it's
the best way to stay in the closet. And that happens in the [campus] Greek community
[sic]. I think there's a high likelihood of straight frat guys having gay profiles online and
hooking up anonymously. If there's a sense of anonymity and the fact you don't have to
be openly gay to meet a gay guy online. I haven't heard of anyone being outed as result of
it, but I wouldn't doubt it happens. If you screw the wrong person, it can come and bite
you in the ass. There's a friend of mine who's had encounters with multiple members of
the same fraternity and he's kept his mouth shut. It depends; on who your encounter's
with and whether it's a sexual exchange or an emotional exchange.

Frank also felt that the Internet allowed passing and covering fraternity men to undertake
gay experiences both physically sexual intimate and non-sexual:

   Instant messaging has made it a lot easier for closeted people in general. You can create a
random screen name and nobody’s gonna know who you are, and pretend to be someone
else and just go through the steps: I like your profile, yadda, yadda, yadda; it’s an easy
way to check out other people. And you can randomly Facebook somebody or poke
someone, do any of those things. So I think it makes it a lot easier to go through the steps
of learning what its like to be gay without actually having to be. It’s private anonymity
that comes from knowing only you and the person you sent to can talk to you. A lot of
people are very defensive about who they are and what they do, so I think you find it a lot
more on Instant Messenger because you can create 4,300 profiles. It’s just interesting to
see how those things develop…. But they use Instant Messenger and Facebook to scope
out people they think they might be able to hang around with or fool around with, without
actually having to face-to-face a person; finding them on Facebook and then using the
anonymous, random instant messenger to contact them.

Frank explained that as a passing fraternity member, the distance provided by
online communication made it easier for him to reveal his gay sexual identity in the
anonymous Internet environment, but that he also knew of other situations whereby
closeted and passing men had been outed:

   I’ve found the medium to be very effective for telling people or coming out because if
that person has an upset reaction they have a time to control themselves and think about it
without having to make an instant reaction. But, of course, it’s resulted in outing of some
people. You’ll go to a party and think that nothing’s happened at all, and then somebody’ll
take a picture and that picture will make it up on the web or a blog and someone will tell
the story to someone who’ll tell the story to someone who’ll tell the story, everything gets
around. Basically, expect anything you do to be heard by anyone who has ears,
particularly in a Greek environment [sic].
Perhaps the biggest issue for Beta Fraternity members that Gary brought up was when a non-fraternity member male attended a social event as the guest of a brother. Since fraternity chapter events are grounded in heteronormality, such a male would stand out and if brothers have not been acclimatized to the fact that a gay brother could bring a same-gender date, a challenge could occur:

Well, the older of the two gay guys currently in the chapter invited, at the time a guy he was seeing, now his boyfriend, to a crush that we had last semester. He hadn’t told anyone and if some random guy comes into our crash, someone will say, ‘This is a chapter only event, please leave.’ Well, one guy did that and was very belligerent about it; not nice at all, even when the guy said, ‘I’m Joe’s boyfriend.’ But our guy was, ‘Whatever, you’re lying, get out.’ Obviously, he was very upset and very rightfully so. You know, we have gay guys in our chapter and they may have some guys they’re interested in, and can bring a male date to our date events. Don’t mess with them. I think that’s the only thing we can do. A lot of times, the homosexual guys don’t want to do that; they feel uncomfortable bringing a guy around maybe because their dates aren’t members of the Greek system [sic], so more often than not they just bring a girl friend. I’d like to be able to see them bring their dates. That would be great for them because I know it’s always exciting to bring someone you’re actually seeing on a date event.

James thought that the only issue his Alpha Fraternity brothers might have with gay brothers would be “on the social level as far as people talking about it and throwing their two cents in; not necessarily in a bad way or a good way, just in conversation.” Despite his strong openness and acceptance of gay brothers, even Gary expressed some heteronormal concerns over a gay brother at a more public event such as Beta Fraternity’s formal dance; concerns and behavioral expectations that certainly are not in existence for heterosexual couples:

If they pass around the dates’ names list and they put Bob on there instead of Sally, I don’t know how they would deal with that. I think they’d be cool with it. I think they might say no gratuitous making out, hopefully moreso that people who aren’t in my chapter aren’t weirded out. I’d like to think it’s people not in our chapter but also at the same time, guys making out is going to make people uncomfortable, particularly the people who aren’t used to that sort of thing.

When it came to taking another male to a fraternity event, James felt that their relationship would need to be serious and in depth before he would do that, and even then certain Alpha Fraternity brothers would feel uncomfortable and that certain rules would
be imposed upon him and his date. This contrasts to a heterosexual fraternity brother who is permitted to take a female date to chapter social events without any level of commitment between the two of them. As James noted, “For a guy to bring a girl [sic] to formal, it doesn't have to be serious,” whereas:

I would have to be with them for a really long time. It would have to be a serious relationship, someone I had already brought around to a good chunk of the brothers, some party he was with me; so they knew who he was. Then, maybe yes. How would the fraternity handle it? The people I care about wouldn't care. The people I don't care about, who cares, that's pretty much my opinion. All my friends in the fraternity would be cool with it, obviously, so long as I'm not hooking up on the living room floor.

James, Rod, and Paul each mentioned that they regularly brought gay friends to their respective fraternity houses. James said:

I'll bring just a regular friend to the house and the next day, everyone's like, ‘So that guy's your boyfriend?’ and I'm like, ‘No! God! I have friends!’ That's the only downside I have: Every guy I bring to the house ends up my boyfriend!

Are the heterosexual fraternity brothers under study so misogynistic to believe that every woman a brother brings to the house is his date, girlfriend, or a one-night stand? In a similar manner, Paul said:

I do take my gay friends around the house. I take them to a party at the house or I'll take them just to chill. And my friends will ask the next day, or when they're in the bathroom or something ‘is he gay?’ And I'll be like, ‘yeah, he is.’ And they're like, ‘ok, okay.’ They're cool with it. I've thought about it: taking a guy to formal, or taking a guy to a social or a crush or whatever, but, I dunno, I just, I don't crave attention like that. Like, I have fun at them. If I had someone that I was deeply in love with, I think they would understand, but I think they just don't want me to do it to seek attention. And I don't want to do it to seek attention either

Rod’s experience regarding bringing male friends to Beta Fraternity events was even more positive and affirming. He commented, “A guy that I was quasi-seeing for a time came to the house for a friend of mine's birthday party and it was not given another thought.” Interestingly, when asked how he hoped Beta Fraternity would change over the next two years, Neal said:

I would like to see our gay members bringing their male dates to events as a more accepted thing. As hard as it might be, I think gay members need to stand up for what they believe and what they want to do and brothers should respect that.
Social interaction was an important theme in this study. This section detailed that often the first association potential members had with fraternity men was social in nature, often with the involvement of women. Such social activities appeared to test the potential members’ social skills, with acceptable being defined by the individual judgments of chapter brothers. This section also detailed how participants behaved when they encountered a fraternity community member in a gay bar, club, or online environment and the support that most gay participants would give to a questioning, passing, or covering fraternity member they encountered. Participants also cited the existence of a possible gay cohort of fraternity members of different chapters and the need for such a special support bond across fraternity chapters. Participants also discussed the importance of the Internet in terms of connecting with other gay people (both sexually and non-sexual) for support and education. Finally, participants discussed the heteronormality of their chapters’ social activities, whereby gay chapter members believed explicit behavioral expectations would be put in place and that male guests would automatically be presumed by heterosexual brothers to be partners of gay brothers.

**Research Question 2: The Values, Attitudes, Behaviors, and Beliefs of Fraternity Members when a Prospective Member with a Blended Sexual Identity Attempts to Join**

Tajfel (1978) asserted that people choose groups that maximize their positive social identity. Thus, when a positive group such as a fraternity chapter provides expected and anticipated rewards, an individual’s commitment to the group increases. In this section, I examine the effect of blended men on the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of fraternity members. In particular, I examine the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors associated with masculinity.

In this study, both Paul and Rod had a blended sexual orientation (i.e. openly gay) when they rushed and joined Gamma Fraternity and Beta Fraternity respectively. Interestingly, Rod suggested the other blended member of Beta Fraternity “seems to be a very strict Republican…. Very Express, fashionable, chic.” For this reason, “other fraternity members ask him, ‘does this look right?’” Perhaps this has to do with his conservative behavior that some might believe is more masculine. Indeed, Rod
articulated, “there is a very strong pull to be very manly and to be a man's man. It's personal to you to decide if being a gay man is less manly than being a straight man.”

Perhaps such an open display of gay sexuality is what turned off the brothers of Beta Fraternity from Jay when he attempted to join the chapter. Rod recounted his version of the situation as:

One of the people, and I say friend in the loose sense of the word, rushed with me and a large part of his personality is wrapped up in his sexuality and his identity as a gay man. People in the fraternity very much shied away from and were rubbed the wrong way. I hate saying this, but there’s kinda like a level of gay, how much gay can you take?

In a similar vein, James suggested, “I don't think any fraternity would advertise or say ‘that it's okay to be gay and come to our fraternity,’ ever” and that more flamboyant potential members would likely be overlooked for membership:

It would be based on the guy. If he was flamboyant guy probably not because if he was a flamboyant straight guy he wouldn't fit in as a brother. Really what it is, with homosexuality in fraternities, is that guys aren’t afraid of the sexual orientation, they're afraid of the loss of masculinity. They don't have a problem with gay people, but with sissies. Straight men who are effeminate. There's this whole machismo thing that fraternities try to portray, especially when there's so many fraternities on campus and you're constantly in competition you don't want to be the fraternity that lets in these guys that don't have that character.

Frank also suggested that effeminate men, even with so-called masculine traits such as athleticism would unlikely receive a bid:

If they walked up, shook hands, and said, Hey I'm Rick, I'm gay, then no. If that person didn't exhibit gay traits and gay characteristics, then they would be able to make it through, but people that had effeminate voices, effeminate body walk, effeminate handshakes, would not [emphasis his] be allowed in. There would be such an uproar and outcry against it that it just wouldn't be allowed. If someone had the looks, and athleticism, the GPA, all those things I talked about, there's a chance he might get a bid.

James suggested that Alpha Fraternity chapter members equated effeminate behavior as the antithesis of the masculine behavior that was required for successful assimilation into the chapter:

If he was effeminate, he probably would never get a shot of getting in, just because. It's nothing to do with the fact he sleeps with men, it's just the fact that he wouldn't get along. He wouldn't want to come to the house and watch football, or take salt and shots of
tequila. Overall, he just would not fit in and I think that doesn't necessarily become an
issue of the fact he's gay or not, it's the fact that it's not a match.

That said, Rod suggested, “there’s nothing that’s said openly about a cap,” indicating that
gay sexual orientation is not the issue, merely the manner of expressing that identity
though behavior that some determined to be less masculine than might be expected or
required. James stressed that during the rush process Alpha Fraternity was selective and
did not “take a lot of people, but [that] it’s not based entirely on your first appearance …
it’s more based on your interaction.” Rod expressed that potential members needed to
have a strong desire to join Beta Fraternity and discussed the steps it takes to become a
member:

My chapter has an exceedingly diverse population; it's something where part of it is
personality and character, but part of it is will and determination. It's really a process; you
have to learn our history, and our code and creed, and all that stuff. It's something where
if you don't learn it you're not gonna make it. You have to bring that sense of brotherhood
to the table; that sense of wanting to be there.

James recounted a story of two passing/covering gay males who wanted to join a
particular fraternity chapter and how he discussed the situation with the president of the
chapter under consideration who allowed the men to join under the condition that they
could not reveal their sexual identity. James also explained that he would not be prepared
to go back to covering his identity (i.e. back into the closet), yet this was something a
friend did in order to ensure acceptance by his fraternity of choice:

I have a friend that really wanted to rush [fraternity chapter], and my good friend was the
president and he knows I'm gay. I introduced them both – that's happened twice now –
and they're basically told if you want to be a [fraternity chapter member], you can't be
out. If I was in their shoes I would wait until I was initiated and then come out, but they
would never listen to me. If you're willing to go though that, and go in the closet for that,
you establish what your priority is. So people go back into the closet after maybe being
out in high school. My buddy was in a one-year relationship with a guy his first year of
college, and then his sophomore year he was straight and rushing. A one-year
relationship; pretty in-depth. The guy's definitely gay and all of a sudden he's talking
about girls [sic] and he's straight. I think it has to do with his upbringing. I think he had a
bad break up and he was like, ‘I don't want to be gay.’
Paul suggested it would actually be harder for the chapter not to issue a bid to a blended potential member because of the issues among brothers that could develop in the chapter:

On a scale of 1 to 10, the chances of the kid getting a bid if he came in openly gay, I would say probably 8. I don't know how many guys would actually vote against him getting a bid. I think they would try to find some alternative reason because it would take a lot of balls in our chapter to stand up and say you're not giving him a bid just because he's gay; they'd probably find some other reason for it. And with that, I don't think they'd do any kinda campaigning to try and get the no votes.

James said he would reveal his gay sexual orientation to the Alpha Fraternity new members each semester, so while he was already out to his brothers, he had to go through the process of coming out twice a year. Frank recounted what happened when he was one of those new members:

He’d be like, ‘Hey, yadda, yadda, yadda, I’m gay. I currently do or do not have a boyfriend and I don’t appreciate gay jokes.’ And people respected that. Now some people were like, ‘Oh my God,’ but other people were, ‘we respect it and now that we know it makes it a lot easier.’

Thus, study participants debated the role of masculinity within the fraternity community and all agreed that it would be unlikely for a membership bid to be issued to more-effeminate acting potential members. For this reason, some previously blended potential members are believed to have regressed to passing/covering in order to be admitted to particular fraternity chapters.

Research Question 3: The Reactions of Fraternity Members when the Disclosure of Homosexuality is after a Gay Student had Received a Bid

This section details the reactions of heterosexual brothers to the disclosure of homosexuality by another brother and how the heterosexual brothers related the passing or covering that the newly open brother previously undertook to the authenticity of brotherhood.

Neal commented that in his experience as a heterosexual brother in Alpha Fraternity, “only one of our guys has ever officially come out in chapter.” He also indicated that “I would rather hear it one-on-one and not in the chapter meeting” even if this meant that time would pass between the first and last brothers learning the news. This
intimate approach would allow the gay brother to tell his close friends first “and then it would just trickle out to everyone else” and this meant, “we just find out and it’s not a big deal.” Neal felt that brothers passing or covering could be viewed by heterosexual brothers as breaking part of the authentic and familial bond of brotherhood and the secrecy that goes along with fraternity membership: “For them to feel like they had to hide that would hurt me and I know a lot of the guys would be upset about it that he didn’t just come out and tell us.”

As the other heterosexual study participant, Gary suggested that chapters where such covering occurred challenged the authenticity and founding bonds of fraternity life: “No one in their brotherhood knows that they’re gay which to me isn’t a brotherhood, because you’re not supposed to have secrets.” However, he also commented that “it’s really not our business, so if someone else [from outside the chapter] told us I don’t think any of us would prod him and ask him outright.”

From the viewpoint of a current blended gay male who rushed hiding his gay sexual orientation, James suggested that a pledging member revealing his gay sexual orientation during the new member period likely would be not be an incident for the brothers of Alpha Fraternity:

I think the vast majority probably wouldn't care; I think it would be okay. There'd be some commotion, there'd be some questions asked, I guess. I wouldn't see him getting balled for something like that. If he openly stands up and says it, they're gonna have a really hard time balling him without being in a lot of trouble.

Through pathos, James mentioned the positive attributes of behavior similar to the U.S. military’s Don’t ask, Don’t Tell philosophy:

They're always, ‘Be on the lookout, we don't want any more gay guys,’ kinda thing. Like I'm the token and one's enough. But I don't think it's really an issue. It's not like it's one of the questions we ask in their interview. If we can tell right away during rush, without having to ask, he probably won't get a bid. If we have no idea, then we have no idea.

This led into the topic of effeminate behavior and how many chapter members would view this as a negative, especially if involving a covering pledging member who is not yet initiated into the full secrets of the brotherhood:

If the rumor's he's gay and he's flamboyant about it, not in good character with it, then he has a good chance of getting balled. But they would never say, ‘You're being balled because you're gay.’ They would probably say it was because he didn't fit in, which to an
extent might be true. If he's outwardly flamboyant and doesn't mesh well with the fraternity, if he doesn't mesh, regardless of sexuality….

Based on earlier comments, this raised the question as to how such a flamboyant person made it through the rush process. Perhaps he covered his true behavior with a hyper-masculine façade and projected an image to the chapter brothers that was not authentic.

Neal recounted the incident involving James in which he first revealed his gay sexual orientation to his Alpha Fraternity brothers:

Guys that are close to him would probably let him know that they knew. I did that when I found out that James was gay. He's my big brother and he wasn't very active my pledge semester and there was this communication breakdown and I wasn't sure what it was at first but then I realized he was gay and I said, ‘Hey, I know you're gay and it's not a big deal.’ And he was, ‘Oh, okay.’ It was like this enlightening burst and we talked about it and things got a lot better; he's like my best friend now. Once that communication barrier was broken down, it changed a lot…. I don't think we had that family relationship until he realized that I knew. It took that barrier to breakdown before we had that tighter bond.

Neal also commented that the one occasion when a gay brother announced his gay sexual orientation in a chapter meeting “it was more, ‘I knew it! [emphasis his] and ‘why didn’t you tell us before?’” Gary suggested that if a Beta Fraternity brother made his announcement in the chapter meeting it would depend on the extent to which the brother had gone to cover or pass his gay sexual orientation. Even so, most brothers would consider the revelation a non-event and any brothers who did not positively accept the news would likely not make their feelings public:

I guess if some random guy that you never would have thought came out it would be a shock at first, especially if you saw him hook up with Jane three weeks ago, that’s a little weird now. I don’t foresee any of the people he was friends with being any different towards him. I don’t see there being an issue. If any guy had an issue, I’d like to see someone call him out on that issue.

James posited that by making an announcement in a chapter meeting, some brothers might view this as gay sexual orientation being “thrown in their face” which could result in a negative reaction. Such behavior would be contrary to the norm of the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell philosophy because “As much as it’s accepted in my fraternity, it’s still very much ‘don’t take it too far; don’t talk about it too much’ with certain members; they don’t want to know the details.” Similarly, Frank suggested the heterosexual brothers of
Alpha Fraternity adopted a position of “You are who you are; just don’t find a way to bring it up.”

When asked about brothers revealing their gay sexual orientation as alumni, Neal suggested that the lack of daily interaction and physical distance from the undergraduate chapter would make such revelation even less of an issue: “Last Homecoming an alumnus from last spring came back and brought his boyfriend, but the chapter already knew about him. If they didn't know about him, I don't think they would think any differently about him.” Frank also suggested that the lack of daily interaction with alumni would help, coupled with the strength of authentic brotherhood within Alpha Fraternity:

We’re really, ‘You’re a brother, you’re a brother, you’re a brother, you’re a brother,’ no matter what you are, no matter who you are; if you’re in, you’re in. Some people might be, ‘That’s weird, that’s gross,’ but I think the leadership of the fraternity would be, ‘They’re a brother and if you have a problem with it just don’t be here; they’re not going to be here for that long.’

Interestingly, Neal suggested that after an undergraduate brother came out to his chapter brothers, there would be an increase in what might be viewed as negative terminology. However, in a similar vein to the opinions of the gay study participants, he suggested such comments were merely meant in jest: “I don't think that much changes. Expect gay jokes to be cracked, not negatively.” Perhaps because of the passage of time, increased maturity, or greater acceptance due to exposure to an additional gay Alpha Fraternity member, when these same brothers now “say ‘that’s so gay’ or call someone a faggot … they immediately feel really bad and start apologizing.” Perhaps James had caused a cultural shift in Alpha Fraternity when he disclosed his gay sexual orientation so that future blended new members or passing/covering brothers may not experience such language.

Neal articulated that Alpha Fraternity had lost some passing or covering members, such as Frank, who revealed their gay sexual orientation and then disaffiliated from the chapter. Such situations challenged Neal and made him ask if the chapter environment was somewhat to blame and what the chapter brothers could do to prevent such situations reoccurring:

We've had a couple of people who pledged then dropped and came out. There's that dual feeling of 'Did he drop because he was gay?' coupled with ‘Why didn't we help him out
to make him more comfortable if that was the reason?’ When it happens I feel like part of
the reason was that he was gay. To break down that barrier, that wall is hard sometimes.
If there was a way to help….

Through the exposure of heterosexual fraternity members to gay brothers like James,
heterosexual members were able to put a human face on a stereotype that they did not
initially understand or accept. While such exposure might not change their opinions on
gay sexual orientation, these brothers were able to accept James as a brother, something
that James viewed as a small victory:

There are guys in my fraternity that might not like gay people, but they like me, if that
makes sense. They’re not against homosexuals; they just don't like the lifestyle. But they
love me as a person, and they accept me as a person because they know who I am and
they understand. They are much better than when they came.

For this reason, James always allowed people to get to know him first before revealing
his gay sexual orientation, thereby preventing him being identified as the gay fraternity
man:

It’s not so much about whether I’m comfortable, it’s more about the timing, when I want
to, and that’s how comfortable I am. I never want to come right out initially because I
don't want that to be what people judge me on. But it’s such an important part of who I
am so eventually I usually do come out no matter what the crowd.

In this regard, James was especially insistent that the new members of Alpha Fraternity
got to know him as a brother first: “When I get pledges every semester, my pledges are
around the first couple of weeks, and they're around my friends, I'm always, ‘Guys, shut
up. They're my pledges’ and they respect that.” However, such behavior in a
heteronormal culture as a fraternity chapter often resulted in misunderstandings based in
gender, such as occurred in the manner in which James first revealed his gay sexual
orientation:

A bunch of the brothers wanted to go drinking with me, so I said to them, ‘Well, we're
going to a house and my ex is going to be there. I have to tell you something about my
ex.’ My brother Alex was joking around asking, ‘Was she fat? Is she this, is she that?’
and each time I said, ‘No!’ He then said, ‘She's probably a guy,’ joking around, only this
time I didn't say no. He was still laughing, but then stopped laughing and asked, ‘Wait,
she's a guy?’ And I said, ‘Well, yeah.’ And his response was, ‘Okay, cool’ and kinda
brushed it off, and that was that [laughs].
When asked about the prevailing culture towards gay sexual orientation in the campus fraternity community, James suggested that he would direct passing or covering potential members both to certain fraternity chapters and away from others, “because I know for a fact they would [black] ball a guy immediately if they found out he was gay.” As a blended fraternity man, Paul said that he would ascertain the true reason for interest in fraternity life and then suggest certain chapters over others, while never actually turning a prospective member away from any of them:

[Long pause] I would ask him why he is doing it? Is he doing it as a dating service? [Laughs] Or is he doing it because he enjoys sports, he enjoys hanging out with guys; like, legitimately hanging out with guys, having beers, or going out to the clubs, not hitting on them but just hanging out with them. And maybe making 60, 70, 80 new friends. If he's doing it for the brotherhood, the friendship, the camaraderie, the love of sports, pride in his school, like kinda stuff like that, then I say ‘go for it.’ But if he's doing it because he thinks that it's going to get him around quote-unquote hot guys or he's gonna do this and that then I say ‘that's ridiculous.’ There are a couple of chapters that it's unheard of for them to even be gay friendly, based on their history; it's just not accepting.

On the other hand, I know of someone that was in [chapter name] and gay. Probably won't be out ever until he's far away from here. And I just, I don't think it's healthy when you have to hide it. I wouldn't even point a potential member away from [chapter name] I would just tell him, because, like, he might be a legacy. Who knows? So I wouldn't want to intrude on his decision. I would tell him ones that, maybe I knew a gay guy in. Maybe it would be easier for him. Other than that, I would pretty much just do the disclaimer I told you about: ‘why are you doing it?’ And if he's doing it for the right reason I would say go for it. Go round to all the houses and then pick the one that you like and they'll pick you and it'll just work out. I wouldn't really tell him which houses to go to. And I wouldn't tell him, ‘Oh you should do my fraternity, because I'm gay.’ I don't believe in that. I believe that every guy should go around to as many houses as he can.

He also articulated that chapters are more likely to issue bids to passing and covering men than those openly gay and agreed with James and Frank that the more flamboyant a potential member, the less likely it would be for him to receive a bid:

A lot of times fraternities won't give guys a bid if they're gay. Like if they're flamboyant and they're openly gay; it makes the chapter uncomfortable; they feel like their name might be in jeopardy, probably. If they have no idea, a lot of guys can't tell. A lot of heterosexual guys don't have the quote-unquote gaydar.
James also recounted an experience when an unknown, but heterosexual, prospective member attempted to join the Alpha Fraternity and the chapter discounted his effeminate behavior as merely metrosexual. Thus, it is important to note that since this individual was not gay, it highlighted the likelihood that an effeminate but heterosexual potential member is more likely to receive a bid than a blended potential member who does not bring assets over and above those required of heterosexual potential members such as extremes in athleticism and leadership. James expanded his example to show the power he and other existing blended fraternity members held over the recruitment and bid process:

If I say I don't know [if he's gay], then they go on as if he's not until otherwise proven guilty. That happened like a year-and-a-half ago. I didn't have the vaguest clue and he ended up not being. He was our first real guy from Miami. This was like our third rush. He was Abercrombie, black spiked hair, looked like he was a [other campus fraternity] [laughs] but he liked [Alpha Fraternity]. Decided it was a lot more laid back. At first, everyone was like, ‘this guy's not gonna fit at all,’ but he does. He fits. He's a great looking guy; he's one of our face guys. It was just, he didn't drive a truck so at the time it was weird because at that time we were really southern. Now, we're like half Miami, half southern.

Despite not receiving a bid when he attempted to join Beta Fraternity as a blended man, Jay still offered advice to passing/covering potential members. This advice reiterated the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell philosophy that James had discussed earlier:

You're not alone … there are other gay members out there, there's other men who may think like you in whatever fraternity you're joining, but know that there are fraternities that may not condone it; that may ostracize you if you ever tell.

From a social construction perspective, masculinity is viewed as developing in a cultural context (see Brod, 1987; Harris, 1995; Kimmel, 1987; Kimmel & Messner, 1992) through the process of gender role socialization whereby men internalize the conceptions of masculinity held by their subculture (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993). According to Erikson (1968), a weak ego seems to be overpowered by a compelling social standard and thus a fake ego identity is established. The ego suppresses those experiences that are a threat to this façade rather than synthesizing or integrating these experiences into a coherent whole.
For example, for a fraternity brother with a weak ego, the dominant standard of masculinity in his fraternity chapter might force him to exclude from his ego identity all that deviates from this role, such as acknowledgement and acceptance of a gay sexual identity, either his own or that of a chapter brother. However, when an individual decides to reveal his gay sexual identity, Coleman (1982a) suggested that the perceived status of the person to whom the disclosure of gay sexual orientation is made greatly affects the self-concept of the individual making the revelation. For example, acceptance from a brother would mean more to a passing or covering fraternity member who chooses to reveal his gay sexual orientation than a stranger’s acceptance. Coleman posited that some people avoid telling their close (and presumably heterosexual) friends of their gay sexual orientation and look for acceptance solely in other GLB individuals. This avoidance could be a missed opportunity in terms of positive identity development. Since the revealing brother’s original conceptions of gay sexual orientation are likely negative, the perceived status of other gay men is usually not very high and thus acceptance from them will probably have limited impact or value upon him.

However, there always remains the negative possibility that the heterosexual male friend to whom the brother is revealing his gay sexual orientation will perceive the news as transforming him from the role of the hypermasculine predator into the prey of the gay brother. This section therefore discussed various coming out experiences and how passing or covering related to the authenticity of brotherhood and, perhaps, broke the bonds of brotherhood of fraternity. Coming out was compared to the philosophy of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, and study participants discussed how a passing/covering brother could reveal his gay sexual identity to his fellow chapter members. Participants concluded by suggesting fraternity members were more likely to issue a membership bid to a covering/passing potential member than to a masculine-acting but blended man, and that they would likely issue a bid to a supposed effeminate-acting man but who was known to be heterosexual (i.e. a metrosexual).
Diversity Education

As a precursor to my recommendations in chapter five, this section details the experiences participants had with educating the members of the Southeastern State University fraternity community in diversity matters. Specifically, they focused on gay sexual orientation.

When I asked participants what could be done to assist in the education of heterosexual brothers in matters of gay sexual orientation, the general feeling was that very little could be imposed upon chapter members. As Jay articulated, “If someone doesn't want to learn, they're not going to learn no matter what a college campus does, no matter what an international organization does. If someone doesn't wanna learn, and doesn't wanna grow, they're not going to.” James, Frank, and Paul each compared mandatory diversity education with the mandatory risk management and alcohol awareness programs that already occurred on the campus of Southeastern State University. James commented:

Sure, they can do a program, just like risk management, but the bottom line is how much good does risk management really do? Yeah, it's mandatory. It talks about ‘don't drink underage, don't get wasted,’ but people still do it. It's more about learning from experience. As far as the national chapter can do, or the school can do, it's just maintaining the policy on non-discrimination and really, really pushing that hard and enforcing that. If circumstances do come up, then actually attacking them and having the courage to do so.

But as far as lectures and programs and things like that, I feel like it would be futile unless the experience actually comes about. Until they are immersed in that situation they're not going to know how to grow or change from that situation until they see it face-to-face. My brothers learned just from being around me. Just interacting with me, they have a new sense of respect and understanding about homosexuality. A program would almost be futile because it would kinda undermine the gay member himself, saying that his presence wasn't education enough, that his interaction wasn't strong enough to change.

It is important to realize that such opinion is only valid if the gay brother is blended. If he is passing or covering, his brothers will never learn tolerance from him because they do not know about his gay sexual orientation. If a campus offered programs on a volunteer basis, James felt that, “The people that are gonna want to come, are the people who are going to come, no matter what. No programming is going to make people
come out.” Gary posited that the “IFC [Interfraternity Council, the campus-level
governing body of the historically White fraternity chapters] is basically homophobic”
and that any attempt to educate the general membership of the fraternity chapters would
result in a negative reaction: “I don’t foresee anything happening through IFC or Greek
Life [sic] at all. If there was a gay awareness, or something like that the reaction would
be ‘Erg, what are you doing?’” Despite these opinions, James felt that student
development professionals still had a duty to expose students to differing options and
lifestyles to which they may not have previously been exposed:

They may be raised in certain beliefs but that doesn't mean they are set in those beliefs.
Those people are the ones who are willing to learn, willing to accept diversity, willing to
actually ask questions because they have ideas. Ignorance is not hate; ignorance is not
racism; ignorance is not homophobia. It's when you refuse to learn, and disregard
education, and disregard the opportunity to ask questions or to learn from some of those
opportunities, that's when it leads to that racism and homophobia because you don't care,
you don't want to know.

Rod agreed with James’ hypothesis regarding education through personal
interaction and said, “The only way I've found to open people's minds to minority
tolerance is through personal contact.” James expanded the thought to suggest the duty
actually fell to the blended gay members: “I think it's more the responsibility of
homosexuals; they really hold the most power. If they have the courage to join
fraternities and then come out, or even rush openly gay, then they have the ability to
make the change from within.” However, he also acknowledged that this meant blended
students constantly needed to traverse a fine line between advertising a gay sexual
orientation while at the same time integrating into the general campus culture and
fraternity community subculture:

It's kinda hypocritical because you don't want to advertise your sexuality, you don't want
to walk around with a flag all the times so people know, but at the same time you have to
be open about it. It's about finding a balance; it's about building relationships and then
making them aware. It's a double-edged sword and I think my experience was fortunate
and I think I just timed everything right. It's a game you have to play, but I feel that by
doing that, I did make an impact and substance. You have to be out but at the same time
be willing to integrate into those circles. You have no idea what you're stepping into with
a group of friends and you're openly gay; how they're going to react. You just have to be
...yourself and hope that somehow they can identify. If not, they're gonna dislike you regardless of your sexuality.

Rod summed up these thoughts by suggesting that living an authentic blended life meant “showing the fact that a gay man can be just as normal as you are.”

James expressed concern that there seemed to be little support for GLB issues on the campus: “If you look in our student planner, it's like Black History Month, Latino History Month, Asian American History Month, there is no LGBTSU month even though there's months that have nothing; we are excluded.” James also felt sexual orientation and identity issues were silenced on the campus of Southeastern State University and was disappointed that, “We used to have a class, it was gay and lesbian something, but in the semester before I got here it was taken off. I think it's important to have. We have women's studies, we have Black studies.”

Very few participants felt some form of certification that a fraternity chapter was a ‘safe space’ or friendly for gay men would be beneficial. James was concerned about stereotyping of fraternity chapters that received certification and what this could do to their recruitment effort, especially of the traditional first-year male students. Rod commented:

I don't think that fraternities in general would want to go out and get that certificate, to get that reputation for XYZ reasons. I especially don't see a fraternity that doesn't have gay members to want that certification unless there was some other benefit that the fraternity would receive for being diversity-friendly. An extra two gay guys at rush would not be enough of an incentive.

Frank was concerned that designating some chapters as ‘safe’ might be interpreted by some that others were not safe:

I think that it would send a bad message because some organizations would purposely not do it because they don’t want to be associated with that and then you start having gay friendly and non gay friendly fraternities. I think that it would be a terrible message to send that we as an institution aren’t united behind all of our fraternities following the same policies and tactics; that there are a couple who are accepting of this while the rest of them don’t get our certificate or our appreciation; I think it okay not being accepting and tolerant.

Once again, James stressed the importance of personal interaction as the preferred method of developing acceptance:
They're just gonna be like, ‘That's the gay fraternity, I don't wanna go there;' especially freshmen. If they're not faced with the actual person, the actual encounter or experience they're not gonna learn. They're just gonna hear stories and rumors and stuff like that and it's not really helping others.

Rod expressed concern that chapters that articulated such ‘safe space’ certification could suffer from a perceived lack of masculinity and continued the thought that such a program would not work. Once again, he cited his preferred step for diversity as personal interaction:

To be the first, second, or even a coalition of chapters that were more accepting to sexual orientation would paint the fraternity as less macho and you could possibly lose a lot of rushees who want to be in a man’s fraternity. If it was a campus wide thing, I don’t think there would be a lot of people for it but I also don’t think there would be a lot against it. I don’t think any program is going to facilitate a more inclusive action to gay fraternity members. I think that’s something that has to be done a lot on the grass roots level with one-on-one conversations, on individuals, where gay people fit in to particular chapters and are openly gay.

Most participants, however, were in agreement that some form of web-based chat program, listserv, or even a support group where new gay (blended, passing, or covering) group members were vetted and the confidentiality of meeting times and places and of the membership roster could be ensured could be beneficial. Frank mentioned that he used gay Internet bulletin boards and chat rooms while he was covering “just to get a feel for things and talk to other people in similar situations.” Gary mentioned:

There’s a web site. I don’t think it’s on our campus and I don’t think it’s anything through Nationals [sic], but they’re all brothers of the same fraternity and they have an online resource, like gay-whatever their chapter is, and they all talk. I found it, stumbled upon it one day when I was looking through Greek YahooGroups [sic] and it had their letters.

However, James was concerned that even a fraternity community the size of the one at Southeastern State University might not be large enough to support such a support organization:

I agree with the idea behind the premise. Do I believe there's enough people to make it work in this town, or this particular college town, maybe not. As it's growing, as it progresses, yes, especially in the Greek [sic] community. I think it’s something that definitely, definitely can be applied to other college campuses, and with time here. I just think a lot of those nine [gay] guys I named, a lot of them don’t think they will ever be
with a guy, they don't have the intention of dating a guy, no intention of being gay, being bi, they just right now are doing the whole college experience.

Jay was concerned about the confidentiality of such a support group since “it's kinda hard to advertise something like that: ‘If you're gay, and closeted, and in a fraternity show up here. We'll be sure to take attendance and write down your frat name [sic].’” Rod was similarly concerned that, “it could be used as a vehicle to out people. Someone who’s homophobic could go to that meeting claiming to be gay and out people” but also that “it could be used as a hook up meeting.” Frank commented that, “If handled in the right way it could work but it would just take one person who was very against those type of people that could ruin it for all those people.” In a somewhat ironical manner, Gary suggested:

You could even give masks before you go in the door so anyone could go in there and be completely anonymous if they wanted to be and those who didn’t want to wear the masks could take them off…. Promoting it could be hard and keeping it a safe space would be hard, because there’s gonna be the right wing wackos who are totally homophobic who are gonna come in and try and destroy the meeting. But, if it was regulated, monitored, and facilitated well it would be beneficial.

James doubted that “any [inter/national] fraternity would have actual legislation that you can look up concerning sexuality [though] I think every fraternity should.” Frank commented that, “As far as my organization was concerned, they might have had some policy or nondiscrimination statement, but it wasn’t something that was talked about or thought of.” Neal acknowledged that Alpha Fraternity actually had a non-discrimination statement, but he incorrectly stated, “I don’t believe it includes sexual orientation.” In reality, Alpha Fraternity has a national policy that encompasses tolerance for sexual orientation that the membership adopted nationally in 1993. Likewise, James doubted that any of Alpha Fraternity’s inter/national staff or key volunteers would be out, “just because they're old. Gay? Yes. No idea who, but I’m sure there are, or at least someone who's dabbled in it.” However, he also questioned whether it would be beneficial for brothers in such high profile positions to be out publicly:

If they're living with their partner and open about it in that context that's great, but they don't need to go to work and say ‘We need to change the charter to say I'm gay,’ that kind of thing. I think we get a lot more accomplished by living by example than living by vocalization. I'm trying to do that on a smaller scale, a much smaller scale.
Rod rejected any form of affirmative action or quota system: “Having a cap where you're basically forced to include a Black guy, a Hispanic, a gay man would be very much not the best way to go about things.” Even though he was not a fraternity member, Jay posited that undergraduate chapter members generally ignored edicts and policy directives from the inter/national headquarters staff. Instead, attempts to generate change should come from “the individual groups, local chapters, saying as a whole, ‘we accept you for whoever the hell you are.’” Interestingly, Jay also reiterated the possible benefit of the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell philosophy that blended study participants had previously discussed: “I hate to say it, but don't ask, don't tell. If it works within a group then you just don't say it.” Neal also felt that any change in philosophy should come from the undergraduate chapter leadership because “the more accepting and understanding the executive board and the president are going to be, then it will make a difference.” Gary expressed concern about group mentality that could occur during a chapter discussion on sexual orientation:

I don’t think chapter wide would be a good way to go about it; perhaps more of a small group, if not one-on-one communication. If someone has a problem with homosexuality or a particular brother, generally the best idea – at least in my chapter – would be to address them one on one. Most of the guys are really laid back and relaxed so if you talk with them one on one about an issue it’s better, and that’s like that for anything, not just gay stuff.

These comments formed the basis for my recommendations that I discuss in length in chapter five.

**Overview**

Similar to findings about gay sexual orientation in the workforce, the fraternity community in this study appeared to be both heterosexist and homophobic to some level. All gay participants experienced homophobic reactions from their brothers at some point or witnessed homophobia against other actual or perceived gay men. However, clearly the gay participants recognized the importance of being authentic and truthful to their brothers and themselves and felt that educating chapter brothers by being more open about their sexual orientation was the best catalyst for social change. When it came to a fraternity man making the step to reveal his gay sexual orientation to his chapter brothers
none of the participants felt this would be an issue for an existing brother “because of the fact that we already gave them a bid” though some participants did say that disclosure would be “a changing issue for our fraternity. We would have to talk about it and we would see how everything would happen” and that “it would probably be the biggest controversy we’ve had in our fraternity since I’ve been here” since “homosexuality is a big controversy in America.” Even when heterosexual fraternity members openly accepted a blended gay brother, there was still an undercurrent that existed, as referenced by Paul:

We used to have a guy in our fraternity . . . . He came up to me during rush and he was like ‘I’m cool with you being gay I just don’t want you to bring any of that around the house [emphasis his].’ And he said it like that. And it kinda hurt, because that was the only thing that anyone ever said to me that might have been on the border of being ignorant or mean – which it was.

Thus, it appeared that the Southeastern State University fraternal community was more likely to respond to an openly gay prospective member with chapter debate and division. It was likely that a blended gay man would not get a bid because of his sexual orientation and that older and more vocal chapter members would have greater influence in such a situation:

It would be an issue to the fraternity and obviously, I wouldn't just give a kid a bid without talking about it with the fraternity but it definitely would split the chapter for a little bit. Not necessarily split it but there would be a lot of guys kind of on the edge about it. And you have to respect their opinion too because some of the guys had powerful positions and you have to respect their opinions but you hope at the same time, they are open-minded about the situation.

Consequently, it was more likely – and more typical – that a chapter would give a bid to a passing or covering male who would then come out after initiation into the fraternity.

**Summary of Findings**

1. While some participants of this study expressed a level of interest in gay-oriented fraternities, few felt they would join such groups because they wanted a traditional fraternity experience based in their belief that gay orientation was just a part of who they were, not the main part;
2. Both heterosexual chapter members in this study would feel more hurt or betrayed if the revelation of gay sexual orientation of a brother came from an outside source such as a non-member or sorority woman;

3. Most blended participants revealed their gay orientation to one brother at a time, and sometimes via electronic formats such as Instant Messaging. However, such a revelation came only after the heterosexual brothers got to know the participant and the revealing brother had established a level of trust with them. Most gay participants were against making a 'big announcement' in a chapter meeting;

4. None of the participants were certain whether their inter/national fraternities had non-discrimination statements that included sexual orientation and those who specifically said their organizations did not have such a statement were, in fact, incorrect in their presumption;

5. Participants stated that the chapter leaders typically set the general tone of the chapter especially in terms of espoused values and attitudes, and that such direction translated into the actual behaviors of chapter brothers. However, they also stated that in many situations, a chapter leader did not necessarily equate to a brother in an elected position;

6. Both heterosexual brothers said they already knew or strongly suspected the orientation of a gay brother before he came out; and

7. Most participants who had revealed their gay sexual identity to members of the campus or city gay community stated that they appeared to experience greater questioning, incredulity, and perhaps more discrimination from members of the GLB community upon joining a fraternity than they experienced from their fraternity brothers when the chapter members learned of their gay sexual orientation.

Some members of the gay community argue that gay pride parades and coming out days hinder rather than help GLB individuals because these events emphasize differences from heterosexuals (Bawer, 1993). At the same time, however, the notion that sexual orientation differences should be ignored to facilitate community and brotherhood is problematic. Many gay students who arrive on college campuses today have already acknowledged their own sexual orientation and live blended lives, but it appears
fraternity culture still inhibits students who want fraternity involvement from revealing their orientation. When asked to comment on this idea, Paul said:

Supposedly ten percent of society is gay…. A lot of times I’ve thought about it and I’m like, ‘oh, there’s only like a couple; it’s more like five percent in fraternities.’ Then there’s been other times to where I’ve been like, ‘it’s a lot more; it might be 15 or 20 percent….’ Sometimes I honestly believe that I’m the only gay guy in a fraternity. And then there’s other times where they’ll do something or they’ll say something and I’m like, ‘okay, yeah. Give him a couple of years kind of thing.’ By fluctuating between those two extremes, I would have to probably converge and go with the 10 percent.

Bryan (1987) claimed that fraternities are “a microcosm of broader society” (p. 38) and since there appeared to be a greater acceptance, if not full understanding of a gay sexual orientation, the number of openly gay fraternity members at Southeastern State University appeared to be increasing. As Paul stated, “I think they’re probably increasing just because more and more every year people are more comfortable, society is accepting gay people more and more every year. And fraternities are just a microcosm of society, pretty much.” Paul gave his explanation as to why the vast majority of gay or questioning fraternity members chose to remain passing or covering, at least during their undergraduate affiliation:

I read once that a lot of people don’t come out until their senior year of college or until after they’re out of college because they want to get over this and just have fun while they’re in college. They don’t want to mess up their college years so they wait ‘til afterwards when they’re an independent person and they don’t have all this stuff going on with school and social interactions to worry about. I think for some of them, and for some people in general in the fraternity, maybe they are and they won’t say anything just because of the fact that they want to wait. Like they know they are, they just want to wait.

Overall, the participants of this study provided a significant amount of rich data pertinent to the initial research questions. Participants claimed that it was almost impossible to avoid hearing homophobic comments or slurs from other fraternity members, but it appeared rare that the participants viewed these comments as negative and derogatory. Only when comments were obviously made in hateful or attacking ways did the participants consider addressing the speaker. Even for the blended participants, they suggested that in order to be accepted and successful in their fraternity chapters they
felt the need to adhere to the established heterosexual norms, such as bringing a female date to functions.

In the final chapter, I explore the contributions of this research to the literature and implications in terms of positive social change for the fraternity subculture and larger campus community. Chapter five summarizes my findings and provides my recommendations for undergraduate fraternity brothers, inter/national fraternity staff and volunteers, and campus-based student development professionals, and suggests additional areas for further research.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS, PROPOSED MODEL, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The intent of this research was to discover the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of undergraduate fraternity men surrounding gay sexual orientation. My desire was to make recommendations to inform higher education professionals and fraternity members (undergraduates, professional staff, and volunteers) about the experiences that gay students confront in fraternity culture. It is my hope that my research recommendations will encourage undergraduate fraternity members and inter/national staff and volunteers to change fraternity culture from within. I also intend this research to provide tools for campus-based student development professionals to initiate institutional changes that reduce the negative effects on college students. Although one cannot generalize from only seven people, the stories of these young men speak persuasively about the problems of heterosexism and homophobia in college fraternities today. Changing the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of just a few fraternity members who then become chapter and campus leaders can have lasting change for a fraternity subculture and campus community (Roby, 1998).

Social science research has long demonstrated that institutions such as fraternities and social change agents do not operate in a vacuum (Lapp, 2000). Social change often begins at the individual level but can also affect the fraternity subculture, larger campus community, and inter/national organization levels. Higher education practitioners especially need to understand the experiences that shape fraternity life and influence the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of chapter members. Members of the larger society need to realize and accept that it takes more than the mere passage of time for social change to occur. Individual actions and social movements translate into significant rather than incremental changes for institutions such as fraternity chapters and college campuses.
There is a continued emphasis on creating higher education campus climates that embrace diversity in its broadest definition (American Council of Education, 1988; Rendón & Hope, 1996; Smith, 1989). At the same time, campus administrators and students are questioning the meaning of community and the characteristics that make a community of learners vibrant, compassionate, respectful, and engaging of all students (Boschini & Thompson, 1998). The most receptive audience to this research may be those already experiencing the negative effects of sexual orientation in their fraternity chapters through either their own sexual orientation, a chapter brother revealing his gay sexual identity, or a blended potential member seeking chapter membership. This study provides strategies for students, campus professionals, and fraternity staff and volunteers to advocate and support change in their fraternity communities without criticizing specific chapters and the individual brothers involved with them. Sanday (1990) noted “as destructive as fraternities can be … they can also be constructive agents for change…. Provid[ing] one of the few surviving examples of a small, face-to-face community where young males can learn responsible … behavior” (pp. 201-202).

The purpose of this study was to describe the experience of gay males in fraternities and the attitudes, beliefs, and possible prejudices among heterosexual fraternity members concerning sexual orientation. The data suggest that there is still a perception of fear and uncertainty of gay individuals within the fraternity community. While certain fraternity chapters extended a bid to a prospective member who was living a blended lifestyle, there was still the likelihood of debate and dissention about sexual orientation between chapter members. In addition, the likelihood of some other fraternity chapters within the community extending a membership invitation remained minimal.

Despite the regard for diversity by a chapter, it appeared that effeminate men, regardless of actual sexual orientation, were least likely to get any offers of membership. However, potential members who were known to be heterosexual but who also acted more metrosexual or even flamboyant were still more likely to receive a membership bid than the most masculine looking and acting openly gay male. How fraternity chapter members reacted to an existing member revealing his gay sexual orientation appeared to offer more hope. As Paul stated, “it’s just another part of me; like I have brown hair, green eyes, I’m gay. It’s just kinda on the same level.” This same person cited the
strength and authenticity of his fraternity chapter brotherhood in reference to a conversation with sorority members: ‘‘do your brothers know?’ I tell them ‘yeah’ and they’re like ‘Wow! They accept it and don’t have a problem with it?’ And I tell them ‘no, they love it, you know. Because they love me.’’

The scope of this study did not examine in depth the reasons why gay males join fraternities. However, it is perplexing to think that someone would purposely put himself in a threatening and hostile environment. Hughes and Winston (1987) reported, “Promoters of the Greek [sic] system praise fraternities for encouraging the formation of same-sex [sic] friendships” (p. 405). Likewise, the participants of my study expressed having a desire to increase their number of male friendships even if it meant keeping their gay sexual orientation concealed. Similarly, Hughes and Winston claimed, “Members through their identification with the fraternity are willing to make sacrifices and contributions to the group at the expense of their own freedoms of action” (p. 409). This may be one explanation of why these study participants were able to endure the open homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormality that I perceived.

Each of the gay participants in this study was unique and distinct from one another. Differences among them included the way each progressed through the stages of gay sexual identity formation, the context of each individual’s blending (i.e. coming out) situation, and the unique circumstances of each fraternity chapter. In telling their stories, these gay participants each experienced different types and levels of homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormality.

The fraternity chapters under study promoted differing levels of heteronormality that sometimes increased the level of internal homophobia of the gay study participants. For example, some gay participants felt it necessary to behave in a more masculine manner or not invite same-gender friends or partners to events where heterosexual fraternity brothers invited women. One way that the gay participants were similar to each other was that they never felt as if they were labeled as gay fraternity members. Rather, each perceived that his brothers viewed him as just another chapter member who happened to be emotionally and sexually attracted to men.

Although initial perceptions of heteronormality within the fraternity were often disconcerting, it appeared the participants’ perceptions evolved over time to seeing their
fraternity brothers as being less homophobic but more heterocentric. In this sense, it
might not be that fraternity members are intolerant of differences, as Bryan (1987)
asserted, but instead just ignorant as to the possibility that some chapter brothers were
gay. Supporting this idea were the reactions the participants’ received from their
fraternity brothers upon revealing their gay sexual orientation. For example, one
participant claimed to be shocked when the one brother he thought to be the most bigoted
was actually very accepting upon hearing the revelation. Other participants reported
similar reactions, claiming to have mostly positive coming out experiences.

Each of the study participants appeared to reconcile (i.e. blend) their sexual
orientation identity and fraternity membership to different levels. The sense of
reconciliation appeared not to be linear or static since each of the students who felt their
identities were seamlessly blended had moments where they experienced lesser degrees
of reconciliation and where the blending of fraternity affiliation and sexual orientation
created some level of dissonance. Nevertheless, each participant employed a variety of
coping strategies in an attempt to keep his sexuality concealed until he internally resolved
the process through which he would announce his gay sexual orientation to his fraternity
brothers.

Mahan (1998) asserted that coping is “contextual” (p. 51) and that, “Individuals
adjust coping efforts from context to context depending on whether they appraise the
stressful event as a harmless threat or a challenge” (p. 52). As perhaps weaker
participants in institutions of power, the gay fraternity members were embedded in
relationships that may have silenced them. As such, heterosexism and homophobia in the
fraternity chapter operated to reinforce the heterosexual norm. There was an assumption
that everyone in the chapter was similar, that differences disturb the norm, and this
reinforced a culture of silence for those who were different (Rankin, 2003). Mahan’s
explanation of coping appeared to be consistent with the findings of this study. For
instance, participants mentioned having friends outside the fraternity who were both
aware of and accepting of their gay sexual orientation. As such, they felt it unnecessary to
employ any coping strategies in this external context. At the same time, however, they
reported using a variety of coping strategies to conceal their orientation from fraternity
brothers.
Woods (1992) reported that the participants in his study of gay males in the corporate world used three basic coping strategies to manage their sexuality: avoiding a sexual identity, counterfeiting an identity, and integrating an identity. He concluded that the work environment was important in determining whether a gay person decided to reveal his gay sexual orientation in the workplace. Friskopp and Silverstein (1995) concluded gay employees were more likely to blend their sexual orientation identity if employed by a gay-friendly company. Badgett (1996) posited that positive treatment of such blended employees meant passing and covering gay employees were more likely to disclose their sexual orientation in the workplace. Recognizing the corporate setting as a microcosm of the larger society (in a manner similar to a way that the fraternity subculture reflects the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of society) my study revealed similar coping mechanisms and processes of sexual orientation revelation by gay fraternity members.

For example, participants in my study would intentionally avoid issues of sexuality or fabricate an image of being heterosexual to dispel any suspicions that others might have had. When gay fraternity members increased their visibility and their voice within the fraternity community, they crossed into what Tierney (1993) called a border zone where they began to confront difference and challenge heteronormality. These differences did not create an inability to understand one another, however, such border zones were merely cultural areas infused with differences or areas where symbolic processes, ideologies, and socio-historical contexts were situated in an arena of struggle and multiple interpretations (Rankin, 2003).

Consistent with Burke’s (1994) study into the British Police Service, my results showed that when a gay fraternity member attempted to conceal his sexual identity, he was more likely to live a double life as opposed to an integrated life. Common strategies for managing and segregating the two life-spheres were consistent: the strategies of hiding, reluctance to self-disclose, and presentation of a façade were ways to prevent a personal experience of discrimination (real or merely perceived). The results of studies such as Burke’s showed that an attempt to live a dual existence might contribute to stress, ineffective performance, and the struggle to form satisfying personal relationships.
The dynamic explored in my study was the interaction between one aspect of the participants’ identities (namely gay sexual orientation) and another aspect of their lives (membership in a fraternity chapter) where the perceived avenues of experience and development involved the rejection of homosexuality. In this vein, there were some similarities to biracial and bisexual identity, because biracial and bisexual people try to blend and reconcile multiple aspects of their identities. The experiences of reconciliation for my participants appeared to have some similarity with other identity development models, while also containing unique elements. The participants’ descriptions of blending and reconciliation appeared similar to the advanced positions in identity development models focused on biracial identity development (i.e. integration) (see Poston, 1990), homosexual identity development (i.e. synthesis) (see Cass, 1979), and ethnic identity development (i.e. achievement) (see Phinney, 1990). Thus, the aspects of identity developments are incorporated with each other and are part of the participant’s overall identity (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005). (For a full discussion of gay fraternity member coping strategies, see Trump, 2003; Trump & Wallace, 2006.)

Case (1996) reported that a large number of participants surveyed in his study of the experiences of gay and lesbian fraternity and sorority members had a “tendency toward ‘overachievement’” (p. 2). Likewise, the majority of participants of my study held at least one leadership position in their fraternity chapters. Furthermore, of the 30 coming out stories chronicled in Windmeyer and Freeman (1998) and Windmeyer (2005), a strong majority contained references to the authors as officers or leaders. This “tendency toward ‘overachievement,’” Case reasoned, “may reflect a desire for validation and acceptance by the group” (p. 2).

Desiring acceptance appeared to be a distinct possibility as to why the participants of my study attained leader status within their fraternities. Participants of my study appeared to follow the “reaction pattern” of what Johnson (1996) called the “best little boy on the face of the earth” (p. 38), in line with what Cox and Gallois (1996) described as a “social change strategy” (p. 20). One social change strategy is to “select new comparison groups against which favorable comparisons can be made” (p. 20). Essentially, the focus of this strategy is on intragroup comparisons, which means that a gay male using this strategy seeks ways in which to compare himself with other gay
males. For example, a gay male who not only gains membership but also attains a high status within his fraternity chapter may look down upon other gay males who are unable to attain fraternity membership. As such, this gay male might perceive himself as being closer to “normal” because he has mastered the ability to assimilate into the dominant group (heterosexual males). Often, there was an air of pretentiousness among the participants of my study as they repeatedly stressed being unlike “the stereotype” which some might view as compromise and conformity, coupled with oppression of others. Supporting this analysis, one of Dilley’s (2002) respondents in his study of non-heterosexual college men from 1945-2000 stated, “Over the years I’ve come to realize that I joined the Greek [sic] system to prove to myself that I wasn’t gay. My being a fraternity member would alleviate anyone’s doubts, if they thought I was gay” (p. 76).

As I discovered in my interviews, the mannerisms exhibited by the participants of this study appeared to be dissimilar to the definition of the stereotypical flamboyant and effeminate gay male. In many ways, these participants’ developmental processes were similar to those outlined by Cass (1979). Cass’ model was based on two assumptions. One assumption was that, “Locus for stability of, and change in, behavior lies in the interactive process that occurs between individuals and their environments” (p. 219). Compared to individuals who may be classified as minorities due to their gay sexual identity, heterosexuals have the luxury of maintaining some degree of separation between their sexual identities and the other parts of their lives and identities, thereby avoiding the dissonance that is often generated for sexual identity minorities (Love, et al., 2005). For the participants in my study, an identity as a gay male was a sexual identity that resulted in their gay sexual orientation interacting with all elements of their experiences. It identified the gay fraternity chapter brothers as sexual beings, in ways that being a heterosexual fraternity brother typically was not identified.

Having a high level of identity development was thought to be the most significant variable that facilitated participants to reveal their gay sexual orientation to their fraternity brothers. This is not surprising, since Cass (1979) explained that it is at stage six when a person’s personal and public sexual identities synthesize into one sexual identity. Moreover, stage six is when people recognize that homosexuality is only one
aspect of who they are. Thus, participants of my study often stated, “being gay is only one part of who I am.”

Reflections of prior coming out experiences facilitated participants to reveal their gay sexual orientation to their fraternity brothers. Cass (1979) explained that reflecting upon one’s own coming out experiences is part of the developmental process. However, what distinguishes this variable from the previously mentioned variable is that participants would often reflect upon their own experiences but also on the specific coming out experiences of others. Prior to coming out, participants reported struggling with mixed views of the authentic meaning of fraternity brotherhood. It was common for the participants to have feelings of guilt because of not being honest with their brothers. This desire to be authentic equated to stage six of Cass’ (1979) model, once more suggesting that these participants were highly developed in their homosexual identity.

On the other hand, participants claimed that while they wanted to believe in the concept of brotherhood, there was only one way to feel certain as to whether their concept of brotherhood was real or not; the participants’ rationale was that acceptance by their brothers of their homosexuality meant proof that brotherhood was authentic. Perhaps more importantly, brotherhood appeared to be used by participants as a positive support in their coming out. Thus, the strength and authenticity of brotherhood emerged as one of the major variables facilitating participants to come out to their fraternity brothers.

Boschini and Thompson (1998) asserted, “If Greek-letter [sic] organizations are to survive and flourish within the modern college and university, it is imperative that they understand the importance of diversity” (p. 19). The participants of my study avowed that a sizable amount of diversity was prevalent in their chapters. Often, participants would assert that being gay was just one more form of diversity. As such, the participants were hopeful that their fraternities would have a similar view if or when they revealed their gay sexual orientation. Interestingly, some participants mentioned that when deciding on which fraternity to join, they purposefully sought out fraternities that included obvious (i.e. visible) diversity, even if it was not specifically based on gay sexual orientation.

Cass (1979) observed coming out as a milestone of development and she posited that coming out to someone signified a higher order of development. However, coming
out to others might be about more than just development; it may also serve as a means of affecting change. Cox and Gallois (1996) asserted that “social competition” was the only way to affect actual change between the minority group (homosexuals) and the dominant group (heterosexuals). They also stated, “Direct competition with the dominant group is required” (p. 20). From this perspective, it may be that a gay brother (representing the minority group) divulged his gay sexual orientation to his fraternity brothers (dominant group) for reasons other than what Case (1996) proposed as the “validation and acceptance by the group” (p. 2). It may be that this gay brother came out to his fraternity brothers in an effort to “level the social status of the minority group with the dominant group” (Cox & Gallois, 1996, p. 9).

While it might be that the participants of my study did not come out to their fraternity brothers for this reason, it certainly appeared to be a distinct possibility. By providing a voice through visible GLB-supportive initiatives on campuses and at the inter/national fraternity programming level, blended fraternity members could engage in dialogue and action with individuals who may have conflicting ideas and perceptions.

Introduced next is a proposed model of heterosexism and homophobia in a fraternity community that focuses on personal factors, institutional factors, and factors from the individual’s fraternity community that arose from the data. This model could form the basis for programmatic and intervention strategies by student development professionals and inter/national fraternity staff and volunteers.

**A Proposed Non-Linear Model of Heterosexism and Homophobia in a Fraternity Community**

As Rhoads discussed in his 1997 research, an important reason to pursue a subcultural study is to offer knowledge about the diversity of the students studied. One of the shortcomings of research on GLB students is that it has failed to come to terms with diversity since it has predominantly sought all-encompassing definitions and explanations for homosexual identity development. While such theories may be the governing standard by which all GLB students are judged, those individuals who do not fit these norms may be inaccurately viewed as marginal members. Rhoads posited that this is nearly as
troubling as the normalization of heterosexuality, which he suggested has contributed to GLB people being situated on the margins of society in the first place. Even Coleman (1982c), while proposing a linear development model with normalizing features, feared this outcome: “There is a danger in any model that oversimplifies the developmental tasks that must be completed to assure an integrated identity. Rigid rules of conformity are sometimes dictated by the gay community, and those can be harmful to many of the men and women who do not comply” (p. 40). This may be the situation faced by gay fraternity members.

Rhoads concluded that researchers need to move away from highly structured linear accounts of identity development to more diverse, localized understandings. He also articulated that knowledge of sexual identity processes must be contextualized. My research provided further evidence of the need to employ nonlinear models of identity development. A linear or stage model of identity development may be helpful if one aspect of an individual’s identity is examined without regard to the context of the other aspects of his identity. However, the complexity of multiple identity elements leads to a breakdown in linear models (Love, et al., 2005).

If we are to understand college men, we must understand the social construction of masculinity and the expectation for men to conform to these social standards. Linear-stage models of development fail to capture the wide range of meanings of masculinity that exist. Using such linear models, student development professionals may be led to the assumption that all men develop in the same way. This non-linear model of heterosexism and homophobia in a fraternity community avoids this problem by focusing on personal factors, institutional factors, and factors from the individual’s fraternity community and is grounded in the data from this study.

I formulated this proposed model by the evidence of my research findings and it helps to consolidate some of the insights I gained from the study. This proposed model provides a practical framework for addressing the problems I examined. The proposed model also connects individual factors with the entire campus culture because of the inextricable relationship between the two variables. Rather than assuming, for example, that sexual orientation is the central aspect of a student’s identity, professionals are encouraged to consider a range of possibilities. This non-linear model differs from other
potential models by placing the student at the center of the model rather than making him an indifferent element in a linear flow chart or structural equation model (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). The purpose of this proposed model is to provide a user-friendly method for discussion and to focus on the attributes that the student brings to campus along with the roles of the institution and fraternity chapter in the sexual identity formation of students. The three sides of the model shown in Figure 7 each represent a particular force on a student who is represented by the area inside the triangle. In a manner similar to Anderson’s (1985) force field analysis, the triangle represents the complex internal processes through which a student develops a positive gay sexual identity. The area external to the triangle represents all outside variables affecting the student’s development and decision-making.

**Elements of the Proposed Non-Linear Model**

*Personal Factors*

Personal factors relate to the individual background a student brings to the college environment. These factors are the variables of family background, family religious beliefs, geographic location, and prior experiences and interaction with GLB people. An important element is the student’s stage of personal sexual identity development.

*Fraternity Community Factors*

The second factor related the experience of a blended, passing, covering, or questioning fraternity member is the affect of the campus fraternity community. Such factors are the visibility of blended fraternity members, statement and enforcement of fraternity community-wide non-discrimination policies, fraternity community reaction to any homophobic actions, and the availability and quality of training and diversity programs relating to sexual orientation and any support groups for gay and questioning brothers, or fraternity community wide diversity training.

*Institutional Factors*

College life is often the biggest social change a traditional-age student has undertaken and presents stresses, at some level, to all students. The institutional side of the proposed model relates to the ability of the institution to provide appropriate support to students both academically and socially, where institution includes both the college
campus and the inter/national governing organization of individual fraternities. Issues related to the espoused and actual culture of the campus and fraternal organization, coupled with the values of both affect the individual fraternity member experience. To successfully address the challenges facing gay fraternity members, there must be a shift of basic assumptions, premises, and beliefs at the higher education institution and inter/national fraternity levels; only then can structures, values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors be changed. This axis can be seen as a flexible set of programs or conditions that a college or inter/national fraternity can mold to meet the diverse needs and attributes of individual students. The significance of setting institutional factors as equal with personal and campus fraternity community factors illustrates the importance of campus and inter/national fraternity participation in a student’s development of a positive sexual identity.

The proposed non-linear model places this set of factors at the base of the triangle because it is the college and inter/national fraternity that are perhaps the most influential factors for the positive sexual identity development of undergraduate collegiate members and the ones most easily changed. It is here that campus-based student development professionals and fraternity headquarters’ staff and volunteers can identify and match the needs of individual students, fraternity chapters, or the campus/fraternal organization as a whole. In transformed institutions, heterosexist assumptions are replaced by assumptions of diverse sexualities and relationships, and these new assumptions govern the design and implementation of any activity, program, or service of the campus institution and/or inter/national fraternity.

The strength of this proposed model is that it allows users to move from a theoretical conversation to a study of practice. The geometric nature of the model helps users understand how the various factors interact and how the two institutions (college and inter/national fraternity) are involved in the process as partners. Through the collection of data related to a specific campus, the campus and fraternity institutions may begin to learn how to act on these theoretical structures. The individuality of each student on a campus necessitates that this model must shift and evolve while still providing some level of stability. Figure 7 also illustrates an element of time, where the innermost triangle represents the present and the outer triangles all prior influences and experiences.
Officials of the fraternity and campus must connect with each student and through the information obtained, modify programs and interactions to meet specific needs over time. It is important to remember, however, that the college years represent the coming-of-age and entrance into adulthood for traditional-aged students. It is important for campus and fraternity officials to remember that a student changes, develops, and grows during his time on campus and strategies must match any changes in a student’s development of sexual identity. This sort of transformative change demands committed leadership in terms of both policy and goal articulation. New approaches to learning, teaching, decision-making, and working in both the campus and fraternity headquarters institutions need to be implemented. Such changes will demand the formation of partnerships and relationships among individuals and entities that may have historically viewed each other with distrust. These transformed assumptions, premises, and beliefs should assist in creating the environment needed to provide the catalyst for change. I recommend a philosophical change in praxis, whereby praxis means the organizational activities and actions that challenge dominance, critique the status quo, and have social justice as a central core value (see Lather, 1986).

Figure 7. Proposed Non-Linear Model of Heterosexism and Homophobia in a Fraternity Community
Recommendations

No one deserves to live denying who he or she really is. This is why there is urgency in solving the problem of homophobia and heterosexism on college campuses and in U.S. society. On college campuses, some of the most prominent and involved fraternity leaders continue to hide their gay sexual orientation and live in fear of beingouted. Even in the 21st century, many undergraduate gay fraternity members feel they need to conceal who they really are in order to be accepted by their fraternity brothers, friends, campus peers, family, and the rest of society. Consequently, some of our most capable students spend their time and energy hiding their true identities by doing whatever is required to pass as heterosexual. Theodore and Basow (2000) found that an important predictor of homophobia was the extent to which heterosexual males attributed how much they conformed to prevailing social norms of masculinity. Since they are often leaders on their campuses and within their respective fraternity chapters, many gay students are role models to other students, and even faculty and staff. When role models hide their gay sexual orientation, others learn the norm is to hide sexual orientation and this sends a negative message to all members of the campus community, whether gay, bisexual, transgender, or heterosexual. A primary role of an educator is to provide an environment that not only encourages each student’s curiosity to search, explore, define, and express, but also to challenge and confront intolerance to difference and diversity. To ignore the issues of heterosexism, homophobia, and heteronormality within the college fraternity subculture is unacceptable to the espoused mission and philosophy of postmodern higher education.

The contact hypothesis (Allport, 1979) has been used as a framework for reducing negative group attitudes and conflict. Allport proposed that regular contact with members from different groups is a necessary, albeit insufficient, means for reducing negative attitudes and challenging stereotypes of stigmatized groups. He suggested that in order for contact to be effective, (1) participants must be seen as equals, (2) there is a need for cooperation, and (3) it must be supported by an authority figure. Research by Pascarella et al., (1996) suggested that the positive main effect associated with participating in a cultural awareness workshop was particularly strong for White (versus nonwhite)
students. Similarly, the positive main effect of interactions with peers suggested that interventions involving peer-based or peer-led interactions could also serve to counter the negative effect of fraternity membership on White students’ openness to diversity and cultural differences.

Sexual orientation issues among students present many challenges that need to be addressed by college administrators, inter/national fraternity staff and volunteers, and campus fraternity community leaders. Often in this research, it appeared that intolerance – actual or mere perception – was influenced by a lack of understanding by heterosexual fraternity members about homosexuality, the contributions that gay brothers could make to a chapter, and the positive impact that many gay brothers had historically made. Campus administrators and fraternity staff and volunteers need to provide more education for fraternity alumni and undergraduates about heterosexism and homophobia. Those in leadership positions should challenge their own and others’ misconceptions about homosexuality. Such targeted education and awareness can contribute to a safe, equitable, and productive chapter environment and can influence the social culture of an entire campus. In a study with college students, Bowen and Bourgeois (2001) found that increased contact with GLB students in residence halls was associated with attitudes that were more positive toward homosexuality by majority-identity students. Thus, probably one of the most important ways to educate people would be for gay fraternity brothers to be visible. This would require some level of a safe environment so students could make that first step of revealing their gay sexual orientation.

Now we Know, What Next? Implications for Educators, Administrators, and Fraternity Staff

Fraternities constitute an influential student subculture, with powerful implications for their members’ learning (Whipple & Sullivan, 1998). If student development professionals understand these cultures then higher education institutions are more likely to help students make the peer culture possess values and behaviors that are consistent with the institution’s educational priorities (Dalton & Petrie, 1997). In other words, campus-based higher education professionals and fraternity staff and
volunteers can influence students to create communities of student development and learning within fraternity communities. Love and Love (1995) stated that if colleges and universities want learning to occur,

Institutions and individuals must put into place actions that correspond with the emerging assumptions regarding the interrelatedness of cognitive, emotional, and social elements of learning. Present cultural norms and practices must be examined and, where appropriate, discarded, while new ones must be nurtured (p. 43).

Thus, several practical implications for student development professionals and inter/national fraternity professional staff grounded in the proposed geometric model emerge from this research and are stated below. It would also be interesting, however, to revisit these data from theories such as leadership, psychosocial, and others to see if the same recommendations emerge.

First, fraternity governing bodies, headquarters’ staff members, and volunteers need to take steps to communicate institutional and organizational values clearly and routinely. Conveying messages of acceptance for diversity and respect of and support for gay and questioning brothers and potential members is a relatively simple, yet meaningful, action. Campus and fraternity leaders should actively promote and enforce non-discrimination statements that include sexual orientation and that are already in existence. When such statements are absent, they should be introduced. Ongoing membership education should focus especially on how such statements apply during the rush process and during the pledging time.

Campus IFCs or similar governing councils should ensure rush and recruitment events occur in an atmosphere blind to the sexual orientation of potential members. Likewise, campus and inter/national fraternity staff must provide training for alumni, volunteers, and fraternity house staff to explain the standards and expectations in regard to sexual orientation. Publications and policies that refer to “couples” (e.g. social event policies) or demean based on sexual orientation should be articulated in nondiscriminatory terminology that is inclusive of same-gender couples and gay sexual orientation. In addition, policies must be established and enforced for inclusiveness as well as a zero-tolerance for dealing with homophobic violence and harassment. Adapting only a few policies to be inclusive may communicate only tolerance, whereas making
efforts to adapt a wide range of formal policies conveys acceptance (Malaney, Williams, & Geller, 1997).

Second, fraternity staff and volunteers and campus-based higher education professionals must train chapter officers and leaders (i.e. those not necessarily in elected or appointed positions) in diversity, acceptance, chapter self-esteem, confidence, and member identity development. Such training should promote open discussion of gay sexual orientation and fraternity membership so that gay and questioning fraternity members and their allies (and potential allies) can explore these aspects of personal development. Pascarella et al., (1996) found that undergraduate students who participated in educational activities and programs focusing on diversity displayed greater openness to diversity than their peers who did not.

To successfully modify fraternity socialization processes, a solid conceptual understanding is needed as to how and why these processes are so effective (Kuh & Arnold, 1993) and the subculture in which they exist. Helminiak (1996) pointed to the strong cultural norms that keep aspects of identity distinct in society. Consequently, discussions should specifically focus on the establishment of a true familial environment that is a safe, interpersonal space for gay and questioning members and guests. The following suggestions should assist in this process: (1) how brothers would respond to a blended prospective member; (2) how brothers should protect the confidentiality of a brother who chooses to reveal his questioning or gay sexual orientation to individual members over an extended period of time; (3) how to respond to a brother revealing his gay or questioning sexual identity; (4) situations such as a blended brother bringing a same-gender date to a chapter event both at the undergraduate and alumni levels; and (5) policies for brothers dating. Headquarters’ chapter consultants who visit local chapters and key local volunteers need to be trained and prepared to address questions and issues about sexual orientation. Regular and ongoing evaluation should assess the effectiveness of such training.

Third, both fraternity staff and campus higher education professionals should undertake campaigns to highlight positive examples of chapter diversity, especially to put a 'face' to gay fraternity members (while also recognizing the diversity within the GLB
community). Students who reported exposure to GLB people rated their own attitudes to sexual orientation and their perceptions of their friends’ attitudes as more positive.

Dynamic social impact theory predicts that strong attitudes towards prejudiced opinions are significantly affected positively through close contact (Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001). Cultivating the commitment of chapter members, particularly formal and informal leaders, to change their practices is the only intervention that promises to be effective to change fraternity chapter culture (Kuh & Arnold, 1993). Failure to understand the fraternity subculture or to know the students affected can impede any changes that require student support (Whipple & Sullivan, 1998). Indeed, “if the student cultures are not addressed, even the most ambitious elegantly designed institutional renewal strategy will fall short because students themselves determine the social context in which learning occurs” (Kuh, 1996, p. 141). Thus, these suggested actions should help break perceived stereotypes while also allowing blended men to act as role models to passing and covering brothers, and supporting individual passing or covering brothers who decide to reveal their gay sexual orientation to the chapter members. By encouraging chapter members to be honest with one another and creating an atmosphere of support for differences among brothers, a stronger sense of true brotherhood will result.

Fourth, campus-based higher education professionals should create and promote support groups that provide confidential assistance for gay and questioning brothers (see Hesp, 2005). Such programs can also be implemented via the Internet specifically for individual inter/national organizations. Such activities should replace the former emphasis on campus-wide speakers on sexual orientation issues. However inter/national organization-specific programs that focus on how authentic brotherhood accepts all types of diversity and that incorporate brothers discussing their personal experiences with matters of gay sexual orientation should be continued and expanded.

In addition, it is vital that programs and speakers that focus on safe sex practices regardless of gender and orientation should be expanded by both campus higher education professionals and inter/national fraternity staff. Both campus professionals and fraternity staff should also expand availability to resources on fraternities and sexual identity such as books, web sites, and articles, easily accessible to gay and questioning members and potential members. Higher education professionals should also establish
cross-campus partnerships with areas such as the Counseling Center, GLBT Center, and religious groups and ensure these groups are knowledgeable about gay sexual orientation issues within fraternities in order to provide a seamless support system.

Inter/national fraternity staff and campus-based higher education professionals should also collaborate with GLB entities at the local and national level to educate non-fraternity members who are gay on the positives that fraternity membership can give gay undergraduates. Although untested with attitudes about GLB people, interventions that provide corrective normative beliefs toward such behaviors as alcohol, drug, and tobacco use have sometimes been found to be useful (Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001). Developing interventions that focus on correcting misperceptions of community norms might also strengthen the effects of peer contact. Thus, such campaigns should help break any reverse stereotypes that may exist.

Lastly, since fraternities began as “outposts of rebellion, places apart from the institution where male students could do whatever they wished” (Kuh & Arnold, 1993, p. 333), it is not surprising that the practices of some of these groups continue to be antithetical to the educational purposes of their host institutions. When this view accurately describes the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the brothers of a particular fraternity chapter, implementing policies and practices is “an exercise in the illusion of control and authority” (Kuh & Arnold, p. 333). If homophobia and heterosexism are so deeply embedded in the collective psyche of a chapter’s membership, it likely will be that the only option will be to close the group.

There is no easy solution to combating negative attitudes to GLB students. For the 18 years before traditional-age students arrived on campus, they had likely internalized at least some of the heterosexist and homophobic attitudes prevalent in American culture. The good news is that through a wide-ranging, community-based effort that brings together student development professionals, fraternity leaders, and inter/national fraternity staff and volunteers, change can occur. The publication of this research in scholarly journals, such as Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity Advisors as well as fraternity alumni magazines, and perhaps, gay publications such as The Advocate, coupled with the presentation of study findings and recommendations at
higher education conferences such as ACPA: College Student Educators International will begin the conversation needed to facilitate change.

Areas of Future Research

Higher education needs continued research into fraternity life and the other types of student organizations that play an educational role outside of the classroom on college campuses. This study was the first to examine the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of both gay and heterosexual fraternity brothers and their effects on the college fraternity subculture. I recommend that future researchers replicate this study with a variety of modifications, as suggested below.

1. It would be extremely beneficial to undertake a comparative case study of the experiences of a heterosexual student, a blended student, and a passing/covering student as they each go through the rush process to compare and contrast their interactions with particular fraternity chapters;

2. A qualitative case study of one chapter should be undertaken to assess in depth the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the chapter brothers;

3. Likewise, a qualitative case study of one individual should be undertaken;

4. Further studies should investigate the extent of prior exposure to GLB individuals by all participants to see if such exposure affects attitudes toward GLB individuals;

5. It would be interesting to include sorority women, alumni from the fraternity chapters under study, undergraduate fraternity men who are not members of the fraternity chapters under study, and non-fraternity affiliated men to compare and contrast their values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards the blended fraternity men and the chapters to which they belong;

6. This study focused on the experiences of participants in the male fraternity subculture. A future research topic should explore the effect of a lesbian sexual orientation within sororities;

7. The rich traditions of non-historically-White fraternity chapters such as the historically African American National Pan-Hellenic Council’s “Divine Nine”
and the increasing number of fraternities grounded in member cultures such as Latino and Asian American groups warrant exploration as to the experiences of gay fraternity men with double minority status;

8. Future studies should examine the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of fraternity members towards bisexual men and transgender students;

9. All the participants of this study attended a single institution in the Southeast. Future studies should include participants who attend higher education institutions in other geographical regions to determine if similar patterns exist across the U.S.;

10. Likewise, all participants were students at a large, national, research/doctoral granting institution. Future studies should include students at different types of higher education institutions (public versus private, different Carnegie classification, secular versus religious affiliation, etc.). My desire would be these different studies could be collected together to allow some level of cross comparison;

11. Similar studies should be conducted of gay males who are members of other all-male college subcultures (for example, athletic teams, musical organizations, and residence hall floors) to identify possible consistencies or disparities in the experiences of gay members within these groups; and

12. Finally, a cross generational qualitative study focusing specifically on gay fraternity men using Dilley’s (2002) methodology would help to understand both the changing atmosphere within the college fraternity in regard to homosexuality across time and the comfort of gay men to reveal their gay sexual orientation within the context of their fraternity chapter membership. Because prior levels of affective development affect later levels, it is not enough for student development professionals to assess only one point in a student’s life; thorough examination must occur as students progress through the college environment.

**Closing Thoughts**

The foundation of this qualitative study was based upon exploring the experiences of those individuals who had revealed a gay sexual orientation to their fraternity chapter
brothers while they were undergraduate members. It goes without question that a certain
degree of complexity is involved when investigating a highly controversial phenomenon
such as this one. In order for me to capture the nuances of the participants’ experiences, a
semi-structured, face-to-face, informal interview was employed. Moreover, it was
predetermined that the data from the interviews would be organized into categories
apropos to the initial research questions. As this was an early study in the experiences of
gay males in fraternities, a comparative analysis with the existing literature was in many
ways restricted because so little published, credible research in the area was available.
Albeit limited, the foregoing conclusions were made based upon this analysis.

It is likely that as this research was read and the analysis considered, readers did
not see everything that I did. My goal was not for all readers to agree automatically with
my conclusions rather that they understand my interpretations and, perhaps, be persuaded
by my argument. In her own research, Bordo (1999) articulated that

Different viewers may see different things. In pointing to certain [things] … I’m not
ignoring the differences in how people may see things, but deliberately try to direct your
attention to what I see as significant…. You might think – as my students sometimes do –
that I’m ‘making too much’ of certain elements. Or your own background, values, ‘ways
of seeing’ may enable you to discern things that I do not (p. 29).

My own interpretations are grounded in my experiences as a fraternity member who used
a passing strategy to cope with my own gay sexual orientation as an undergraduate, my
personal history of growing up White, male, and middle class in England, and my
enrollment in the U.S. higher education community as a non-traditional student in the
1990s. My experience in completing of this dissertation enriched me; my hope is that it
will enlighten readers in not only an academic sense, but will also serve as a call for
change.

There have been “Brokeback Brothers” in society and fraternities for many years;
perhaps the voices in this study signal that a time is approaching when gay fraternity
members need not be so circumspect in their public behavior (see Proulx, 1997). The
question remains: How can student development professionals and inter/national
fraternity staff and volunteers help fraternity members adopt to more inclusive attitudes
toward gay brothers, prospective members, and other GLB non-members? If fraternity
life mirrors society in its attitude to gay sexual orientation, student development
professionals and fraternity staff and volunteers cannot expect fraternity members or others on campus to become comfortable and accepting of gay sexual orientation overnight, nor can the homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormality of the larger society serve as an excuse for inaction.

Hurtado (1999) challenged higher education professionals by asking, “what kind of society do we aspire to become?” If the role of higher education is to create the most educationally powerful learning environments for all students, it is necessary to address sexual identity differences. By examining the positive educational and societal outcomes of acceptance of all types of identity, we can learn more about how effectively to serve all our students.

Geertz (1973) argued, “Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete” (p. 58). There is the need for more research into the fraternity subculture and larger higher education community to demonstrate the need for greater introspection and change. In a similar vein as Geertz, Bordo (1999) posited that “cultural interpretation is an ongoing … process, and no one gets the final word” (p. 29). Through this process, we must all recognize that social change is ongoing and one to which we must all remain vigilant and open-minded.
APPENDIX A
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Gay Fraternity Member Questions

Go over Informed Consent Form and ask participant if he has questions. If yes, answer them, if no, ask him to sign form.

TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF
- Year in school
- Part-time or full-time
- Age
- Major
- Do you have any employment?
- Hometown
- Why this university?

WHO ARE YOU AS A CHAPTER MEMBER?
- Why did you decide to join an all-male organization?
- Why did you initially decide to join a fraternity
  - Friendship, camaraderie
  - Social life, parties, having fun
  - Support group, a sense of belonging
  - Status, acceptance
  - Leadership opportunities
  - Career contacts, networking opportunities
- Why your fraternity?
- Were you influenced in your decision to become a chapter member? What experiences?
- Do chapter membership responsibilities coincide with your personal beliefs? How?
- What image comes to your mind when you think of your role as a chapter member?
- Do you consider yourself a leader? Explain.
- What office or leadership positions have you held in your chapter?
- What campus-wide leadership positions have you held, both fraternity and non-fraternity related?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses as a chapter member?
- What are you learning or what have you learned from your time in the chapter?
- Overall, how satisfied have you been with your fraternity experience?
- Have you ever lived in the chapter house?
  - If yes, How was that experience? Would you repeat it?
WHAT ARE YOUR BELIEFS ABOUT FRATERNITY MEMBERSHIP? WHAT CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR BELIEFS?
- What are the core values of your fraternity?
- What does it mean to be a member of your chapter?
- What would constitute a poor bid decision, one that could result in a pledging member being blackballed before initiation?

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A MEMBER OF YOUR CHAPTER?
- What does it take to join your chapter?
- What does it require to be a really good member of your chapter?
- Describe the last time you saw a really good display of your chapter’s core values in action.
- Of the chapter members currently in the chapter, are there any you consider outstanding brothers? Describe them.
- Describe the chapter culture.
- What is expected from potential members?
- Whom do you trust in the chapter? Why?
- When chapter members get together, what do they talk about?
- Do you ever talk about chapter brothers with others outside the chapter? How is it discussed? What is the usual context?
- How would you chapter handle a revelation by a chapter member to something like a gambling or drug addiction?
  - What if the chapter members found out from a source outside the chapter? Would they react differently?
  - What if the revelation was about the sexual orientation of a brother? A pledging member? A prospective member?

TELL ME ABOUT THE MEMBERS WHO RUSH YOUR CHAPTER
- If someone wanted to join your chapter, what would you tell him?
- If your chapter were to offer a bid to a person, what would he be like?
- How much input do you have on who gets a bid to join your chapter?
- What is the relationship between rush and the chapter’s core values?
- Who establishes the criteria for membership in your chapter?
- What might prevent a transfer student who is already initiated in your national fraternity from being allowed to affiliate with your local chapter?
- Tell me about a time when an African American rushed the chapter. Did he get a bid? If not, why not? Did he accept? If not, why not?
- Without mentioning any names, do you know any openly gay members of any of the fraternities on campus? Would your chapter offer a bid to an openly gay rushee? Under what conditions?

GAY IDENTITY
- Would you say there is any rejection by gay fraternity members of the gay community counterculture i.e. a focus/concentration on the fraternity (heterosexual) lifestyle?
- Is there a difference between gay and heterosexual fraternity members in:
  - Substance – interaction differences; conversations
Politics
Race relations
Visibility – style (camp); clothing; mannerisms
Education/knowledge – self; others (chapter undergrads/alumni; friends; family)

What should/can be done to help gay/questioning fraternity members by . . .

national organizations?
local chapter members?
host institutions (counseling, safe zones, gay fraternities, recognition of gay-friendly chapters)?

Would you say there is a connection between gay fraternity members on campus?

Sense of solidarity?
Is there any social interaction, especially for closeted members?
How might closeted gay fraternity members learn about other gay fraternity members on campus?
Has electronic communication (bulletin boards, chat rooms, other web sites) affected the communication between gay fraternity members? Has it affected the coming out process for gay fraternity members?
  - Has it resulted in “outing” closeted fraternity members?
  - Do closeted gay fraternity members act/behave differently online than in person?
Are their spaces (locations) where gay fraternity members feel more comfortable? Uncomfortable?

How does sexual orientation fit within your fraternity’s values?
Do you feel a disconnect between the religious foundation of your fraternity and your gay orientation?
Without mentioning names, do you know any current openly gay members of any of the chapters on campus? Would your chapter offer a bid to an openly gay rushee?
How would your chapter handle an initiated alumnus brother coming out?
How would your chapter handle an initiated undergraduate brother coming out?
How would your chapter handle a pledging member coming out?
Is sexual orientation of either brothers or prospective members an issue for you? Why or why not? Is there a difference between the two?
What would happen if two chapter brothers started dating?
  - What about if they wanted to room together in the chapter house?
How would your chapter handle some form of ‘hate crime’ against a gay fraternity member based on sexual orientation by members of the fraternity community? Against a non-fraternity student?

YOUR EXPERIENCES

During your time as a undergraduate member of your fraternity, how would you rate the climate for your chapter in terms of:

Sexism
Racism
Attitude to gay sexual orientation

How would you classify your sexual orientation?
o In the closet to everyone
o Gay and everyone knows
o Out to a few people
o Out to all my chapter brothers
o Out to most people, but not my family

o How comfortable are you in disclosing your gay identity?
  o Are there people to whom or situations where you would likely not disclose your identity?
  o Are there people to whom or situations where you would want your gay identity known?

o What was your sexual orientation when you started here on campus?

o Why did you initially decide to join a fraternity?
  o To meet members of the opposite gender and pursue sexual relations
  o To meet members of the same gender and pursue sexual relations
  o To help pass as heterosexual

o If participant has come out to the chapter:
  o When did you first come out to a chapter brother
    ■ During rush?
    ■ During the new member period?
    ■ After initiation? When?
  o Did you have any contingency plans in case the reaction was bad?
  o What was the reaction of the chapter brothers?
    ■ What type of experience would you say this was for you?
    ■ Did anything change for you in the chapter after coming out?
    ■ If you could go back in time, would you still come out or not?
  o Have you come out to the chapter, or just selective brothers? Why?
  o Do you think all the brothers know about your sexual orientation?
    ■ What do you believe to be their collective reaction?
  o Has your chapter implicitly or explicitly placed any expectations or limitations on you regarding your gay identity?
    ■ Could you bring a same-gender date to formal?
    ■ Can you talk about your gay identity to potential members if the topic came up?
    ■ Has there been any sexual tension with brothers at any time?
  o Is your gay identity common knowledge to other members of the campus fraternity/sorority community?
    ■ Has this information affected your chapter? How?
    ■ Did/do you have a fear of stereotyping your chapter as the “gay” fraternity on campus?
    ■ Did/do your chapter brothers share this fear?
  o Did coming out make a difference in your chapter?
    ■ How?
    ■ Where any explicit policy changes made?
  o What were the reactions of your chapter alumni?
  o Do you feel any responsibility to educate your brothers on matters surrounding gay identity and gay culture?
- How? What have you done?
- Have you ever felt as if you were placed in the situation to speak for “all gay men?”

○ If participant has NOT come out to anyone in the chapter:
  ○ Why have you not come out to any chapter brother?
  ○ What do you think might happen if you told one brother?
  ○ Do you foresee a time when you can/will come out to the entire chapter? How would you make the announcement?
  ○ What do you believe would be the collective reaction of the chapter?
  ○ Do you feel it has been difficult to get close to other members of your chapter because of not being out to them?

○ Would you classify your fraternity as a ‘safe space’ for you as a gay male? Why/why not?

○ Do you hear homophobic nomenclature with the chapter? The larger fraternity community?
  ○ How does that make you feel?
  ○ Do you confront it? What happens when you do?

○ Without mentioning any names, do you know of gay alumni members from your chapter? Are they out to the undergraduate chapter brothers? How did you find out about gay alumni?

○ How open do you believe your chapter is to gay diversity programming?
  ○ What programs do you believe would be most effective in developing a chapter discussion on sexual orientation?
  ○ Is the fraternity community open to such programming?
  ○ Would you be prepared to be part of such programming?

○ During your time on campus as either a fraternity member or just as a student:
  ○ Have you ever feared for your physical safety because of your sexual orientation?
    ▪ In what form(s) was this harassment? Where did it occur? Who was the source? How did this make you feel?
  ○ Concealed your sexual orientation to avoid intimidation? Where? What situation(s)?
  ○ Avoided disclosing your gay identity due to a fear of negative consequences, harassment, or discrimination?

○ Since joining your chapter, how likely are you to
  ○ Go to a local gay bar/club?
  ○ Go to a gay bar/club away from here?
  ○ Access an online gay chat room?
  ○ What would you do if you encountered another fraternity member in a bar/club/online chat room whom you knew to be closeted?
  ○ Seek out other gay fraternity members on campus?
  ○ Seek out other gay members of your fraternity at regional/national events?

○ Have you ever been intimidated by homophobic attitudes and remarks
  ○ Within the chapter?
  ○ While at regional/national events?
  ○ On campus by other fraternity chapter members?
• On campus by non-fraternity members?
  • How did you react?
• What policies does your national fraternity have regarding gay identity?
  • What experiences have you had with the national fraternity as a gay chapter member?

WRAP UP
• I would hope my chapter would change in the following three ways over the next two years…
• What do you think the next 10 years hold for gay males in the fraternity world?
• Looking back 10 years and forward 10 years, what would say has happened and will happen with the number of gay fraternity members?
  • Is the percentage changing?
  • What about those closeted versus those out?
• Do you have anything like photographs, journals, pledge books, or letters that might give further insight into your fraternity experience, and would you be willing to let me look at them?
• Other comments you feel are pertinent . . .

Heterosexual Fraternity Member Questions

Go over Informed Consent Form and ask participant if he has questions. If yes, answer them, if no, ask him to sign form.

TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF
• Year in school
• Part-time or full-time
• Age
• Major
• Do you have any employment?
• Hometown
• Why this university?

WHO ARE YOU AS A CHAPTER MEMBER?
• Why did you decide to join an all-male organization?
• Why did you initially decide to join a fraternity
  • Friendship, camaraderie
  • Social life, parties, having fun
  • Support group, a sense of belonging
  • Status, acceptance
  • Leadership opportunities
  • Career contacts, networking opportunities
• Why your fraternity?
• Were you influenced in your decision to become a chapter member? What experiences?
Do chapter membership responsibilities coincide with your personal beliefs? How?
What image comes to your mind when you think of your role as a chapter member?
Do you consider yourself a leader? Explain.
What office or leadership positions have you held in your chapter?
What campus-wide leadership positions have you held, both fraternity and non-fraternity related?
What are your strengths and weaknesses as a chapter member?
What are you learning or what have you learned from your time in the chapter?
Overall, how satisfied have you been with your fraternity experience?
Have you ever lived in the chapter house?
If yes, How was that experience? Would you repeat it?

WHAT ARE YOUR BELIEFS ABOUT FRATERNITY MEMBERSHIP? WHAT CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR BELIEFS?
What are the core values of your fraternity?
What does it mean to be a member of your chapter?
What would constitute a poor bid decision, one that could result in a pledging member being blackballed before initiation?

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A MEMBER OF YOUR CHAPTER?
What does it take to join your chapter?
What does it require to be a really good member of your chapter?
Describe the last time you saw a really good display of your chapter’s core values in action.
Of the chapter members currently in the chapter, are there any you consider outstanding brothers? Describe them.
Describe the chapter culture.
What is expected from potential members?
Whom do you trust in the chapter? Why?
When chapter members get together, what do they talk about?
Do you ever talk about chapter brothers with others outside the chapter? How is it discussed? What is the usual context?
How would you chapter handle a revelation by a chapter member to something like a gambling or drug addiction?
What if the chapter members found out from a source outside the chapter? Would they react differently?
What if the revelation was about the sexual orientation of a brother? A pledging member? A prospective member?

TELL ME ABOUT THE MEMBERS WHO RUSH YOUR CHAPTER
If someone wanted to join your chapter, what would you tell him?
If your chapter were to offer a bid to a person, what would he be like?
How much input do you have on who gets a bid to join your chapter?
What is the relationship between rush and the chapter’s core values?
Who establishes the criteria for membership in your chapter?
What might prevent a transfer student who is already initiated in your national fraternity from being allowed to affiliate with your local chapter?

Tell me about a time when an African American rushed the chapter. Did he get a bid? If not, why not? Did he accept? If not, why not?

Without mentioning any names, do you know any openly gay members of any of the fraternities on campus? Would your chapter offer a bid to an openly gay rushee? Under what conditions?

**GAY IDENTITY**

Without mentioning names, do you know any current gay members of any of the chapters on campus?

- Open or closeted?
- How do you “know” if they are closeted?

Would your chapter offer a bid to an openly gay rushee?

Do you see a difference between gay and heterosexual fraternity members in:

- Substance – interaction differences; conversations
- Politics
- Race relations
- Visibility – style (camp); clothing; mannerisms
- Education/knowledge – self; others (chapter undergrads/alumni; friends; family)

What should/can be done to help gay/questioning fraternity members by . . .

- national organizations?
- local chapter members?
- host institutions (counseling, safe zones, gay fraternities, recognition of gay-friendly chapters)?

Do you see a connection between gay fraternity members on campus?

- Sense of solidarity?
- Do you know of any social interaction, especially for closeted members?
- How do you think closeted gay fraternity members learn about other gay fraternity members on campus?
- Do you know if electronic communication (bulletin boards, chat rooms, other web sites) affected the communication between gay fraternity members? Has it affected the coming out process for gay fraternity members?
  - Has it resulted in “outing” closeted fraternity members?
- Are their spaces (locations) where gay fraternity members feel more comfortable? Uncomfortable?

How does sexual orientation fit within your fraternity’s values?

Would you feel a disconnect between the religious foundation of your fraternity and a gay member?

How would your chapter handle an initiated alumnus brother coming out?

How would your chapter handle an initiated undergraduate brother coming out?

How would your chapter handle a pledging member coming out?

Is sexual orientation of either brothers or prospective members an issue for you? Why or why not? Is there a difference between the two?

What would happen if two chapter brothers started dating?
- What about if they wanted to room together in the chapter house?
- How would your chapter handle some form of ‘hate crime’ against a gay fraternity member based on sexual orientation by members of the fraternity community? Against a non-fraternity student?

YOUR EXPERIENCES
- During your time as an undergraduate member of your fraternity, how would you rate the climate for your chapter in terms of:
  - Sexism
  - Racism
- What would change for a gay brother in the chapter after coming out?
- Would your chapter implicitly or explicitly placed any expectations or limitations on a gay brother?
  - Could he bring a same-gender date to formal?
  - Can he talk about his gay identity to potential members if the topic came up?
  - Did/do you have a fear of stereotyping of your chapter as the “gay” fraternity on campus?
  - What would be the reactions of your chapter alumni?
  - Has there been any education of brothers on matters surrounding gay identity and gay culture?
    - How? What has been done?
- Would you classify your fraternity as a ‘safe space’ for a gay male?
- Do you hear homophobic nomenclature with the chapter? The larger fraternity community?
  - How does that make you feel?
  - Do you confront it? What happens when you do?
- Without mentioning any names, do you know of gay alumni members from your chapter? Are they out to the undergraduate chapter brothers? How did you find out about gay alumni?
- How open do you believe your chapter is to gay diversity programming?
  - What programs do you believe would be most effective in developing a chapter discussion on sexual orientation?
  - Is the fraternity community open to such programming?
  - Would you be prepared to be part of such programming?
- What policies does your national fraternity have regarding gay identity?

WRAP UP
- I would hope my chapter would change in the following three ways over the next two years…
- What do you think the next 10 years hold for gay males in the fraternity world?
- Looking back 10 years and forward 10 years, what would say has happened and will happen with the number of gay fraternity members?
  - Is the percentage changing?
  - What about those closeted versus those out?
Do you have anything like photographs, journals, pledge books, or letters that might give further insight into your fraternity experience, and would you be willing to let me look at them?

Other comments you feel are pertinent . . .
APPENDIX B
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2763
(850) 644-8633 · FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 1/10/2006

To: Grahaeme Hesp
2039 North Meridian Road # 256
Tallahassee, FL 32303

Dept.: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
   Out of the closet and onto fraternity row: An ethnographic study of heterosexism and homophobia in a college fraternity community

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Human Subjects Committee at its meeting on 12/14/2005. Your project was approved by the Committee.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals which may be required.

If the project has not been completed by 12/13/2006 you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. The principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to assure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

cc: Jon Dalton
HSC No. 2005.990
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Professor Jon C. Dalton in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Florida State University. I am conducting a research study entitled Out of the closet and onto fraternity row: An ethnographic study of heterosexism and homophobia in a college fraternity community to identify the values and behaviors of members of selected chapters of a historically White fraternity community related to sexual orientation. If you decide to participate in the project, you will be asked questions about your feelings about fraternity recruitment and membership selection as well as information about sexual orientation issues within historically White fraternities.

Your participation will involve participating in several interviews of about 60 minutes each. If you participate in the interview, you will receive lunch/dinner as compensation for your time. Any questions you may have at any time during this process will be answered by me or I will refer you to a source knowledgeable about your concern. In addition, there is the possibility that I will ask to observe your interactions with your chapter brothers at various fraternity functions.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. Your interview will be tape recorded by the researcher, the researcher will keep these tapes in a locked filing cabinet in his home office, only he will have access to these tapes, and they will be destroyed by September 1, 2011. The information you provide may be used for additional research at a future time. All your answers to the questions will be kept confidential and identified only by a participant code name; your true name will not appear on any of the results. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used and information obtained during the course of the study will remain confidential, to the extent allowed by law.

There is a possibility of a minimal level of risk involved if you agree to participate in this study. You might experience anxiety when thinking about fraternity membership, diversity within the fraternity community, or your own opinions on diversity. I will be available to talk with you about any emotional discomfort you may experience while participating or I can refer you to a professional on campus.

There are benefits for participating in this research project. First, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences with the fraternity community. In addition, fraternity diversity may be increased and you will be providing student development professionals with valuable insight into fraternity members’ beliefs and behaviors regarding recruitment, diversity, and general student practices. This knowledge can assist them in providing student support services that may help fraternity men in the future. Group results will be sent to you upon completion of the study if you request.

If you have any questions concerning this research study, please call me at 850/443-2561 or via email at ghesp@admin.fsu.edu or Dr. Dalton at 850/644-6446 or via email at jdalton@admin.fsu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at 850/644-8633.

Sincerely,
Grahaene A. Hesp

* * * * * *

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion give my consent to participate in the above study. I understand that this consent may be withdrawn at any time without prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I have been given the right to ask and have answered any inquiry concerning the study, any, have been answered to my satisfaction.

______________________________   _______________________
(signature)                          (date)
APPENDIX D
STEPS IN NUD*IST ANALYSIS

- Before importing a document into NUD*IST, save it as a plain text file

- Ensure each document includes a Header since these will show from where text fragments come
  - Headers are not searched by NUD*IST during any text searches
  - Start Headers with an asterisk. The Header ends at the first text unit that does not start with an asterisk

- A Sub header is in the body of the text and begins with an asterisk and ends with a hard return
  - Sub headers divide the text into sections and aid retrieval and analysis. (Useful for highlighting text based on comments from a respondent to a particular question)

- Do NOT double return at the end of a paragraph as this will result in many blank units of analysis

- A document (such as a Memo) may be attached as an appendage to an existing project document, rather than importing it as a new document. Its text unit numbers will continue from the last text unit number in the original document

- External documents (which are unable to be recreated as text files) are divided into units (a unit may be a photograph, page, etc.)

- Add Header information detailing unit measurement

- Annotations provide one method of inserting into imported documents commentary surrounding the text (extensive commentary is best in a memo)

- Use Autocoding to assist in the clerical job of descriptive and broad-brush coding

- Browse Autocoded nodes to review and create new dimensions or finer subcategories as nuances of meaning develop

- Use Document Annotation to insert observations, ideas, commentary, etc., where they apply in the texts. (This will also allow indexing searching)

- Memos will allow date-stamped records of growing notes or reflections about
data or ideas
  o To code a Memo, copy and past it into a file, import it as a document, or append it to another document

- When appropriate, bring together ideas via the Index System and a tree node. Nodes are most useful with regular monitoring and pruning of unused or duplicate categories, clarifying of vaguely defined ones, and shifting and reorganizing of trees as understanding grows. Node titles can be up to 20 characters in length

- Begin analysis using Overlaps that show where topics occur together; Intersections allow searches that compare one node and another

- Hypotheses and theoretical frameworks can be tested also using Intersections (especially for null hypotheses; Just-One; and Matrix)


*Louisiana Debating and Literary Association et al., v. City of New Orleans*, 42 F.3d 1483 (5th Cir. 1995).


Reisberg, L. (1998, October 2). Seeking acceptance on fraternity row: Despite tensions, more gay students are coming out within the Greek system. The Chronicle of Higher Education, A45.


D’Augelli & C. J. Patterson (Eds.), *Lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities over the lifespan: Psychological perspectives* (pp. 165-189). New York: Oxford University Press.


Grahaeme A. Hesp was born in Wallsend-on-Tyne, Northeast England, and completed his K12 education in the United Kingdom. After graduating high school, he joined National Westminster Bank’s Management Development Program and worked in several branches in the Newcastle upon Tyne metropolitan area. By the time he left the bank, Grahaeme was a loan, mortgage, and insurance officer.

In the summer of 1993, Grahaeme toured the Eastern seaboard and Midwest of the U.S. During a stop in the St. Louis Metropolitan area, he was a summer camp director for the Okaw Valley Council of the Boy Scouts of America.

Upon his return to England, Grahaeme matriculated Sheffield Hallam University’s Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration program. After one year, he returned to the U.S. for a one-year student exchange program at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE), once again in the Metropolitan St. Louis area. Prior to starting at SIUE, he again volunteered at the Boy Scouts’ summer camp and committed to volunteering on a regular basis with the Council during his stay in the area.

During his initial semester at SIUE, Grahaeme joined the Illinois Eta chapter of Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity and served as Beta Xi pledge class president. The chapter meeting after his initiation in January 1995, the chapter brothers elected Grahaeme chapter vice-president of finance, a position he held for two terms. As a direct result of connections made through the fraternity, Grahaeme was able to obtain a full-time 12-month internship and extend his exchange program an additional academic year. At this end of this time, Grahaeme formally transferred to SIUE, and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and Human Resources in August 1997. During his undergraduate years with the fraternity, Grahaeme also served in the roles of vice-president of recruitment, vice-president of development, and Balanced Man Scholarship chairman. As an alumnus of the fraternity, Grahaeme has served as a chapter advisor, alumni board member, alumni board president, Balanced Man Program steward, regional
recruitment trainer, regional leadership program faculty, and lieutenant district governor for both North Carolina and Florida.

Upon completion of his undergraduate degree, staff from SIUE’s Kimmel Leadership Center approached Grahaeme and asked him to consider a graduate assistantship working with student organization training and development. Since business remained the only experience he had, Grahaeme enrolled in SIUE’s MBA program and he began working with the campus student organizations and student government association. After 12 months, the campus fraternity/sorority advisor resigned, leaving Grahaeme as the only person in the office with fraternity and sorority advising experience. Consequently, Grahaeme became the interim fraternity/sorority advisor and realized a calling.

At the same time, Grahaeme joined the Association of Fraternity Advisors, an affiliation he continues to maintain. Over the years, Grahaeme has served as member and chair of the student development committee, twice as North Carolina area coordinator, Order of Omega masters’ student case study judge, presenter at regional and national conferences, and inaugural editor of the peer reviewed *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity Advisors*.

After graduating from SIUE and realizing his calling to work with college students, Grahaeme was successful in joining Elon College in North Carolina as their second director of Greek Life. Determined to obtain as much experience as possible, he moved on after two years to lead the fraternity housing refurbishment at nearby Davidson College. After facilitating the $3m campaign, Grahaeme enrolled at The Florida State University (FSU) in the doctor of higher education administration program. At both Elon and Davidson, Grahaeme formed support groups for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning fraternity/sorority members.

Grahaeme spent his first year at FSU combining his MBA credentials and higher education practical experience by working at MGT of America, a higher education consulting firm, but his desire to work with students brought him back on campus for the last two years of his studies. During this time, he worked in the Hardee Center for Leadership and Ethics in Higher Education, helping students in graduate assistantships with their professional development, fundraising from program alumni and friends, and
working with Jon Dalton’s *Journal of College and Character* and Institute on College Student Values. During his time at FSU, Grahaeme was involved as a researcher in three published studies investigating various aspects of sexual orientation within fraternities and sororities.

Grahaeme has been recognized by the Association of Fraternity Advisors as Outstanding Volunteer in 2005, the National Order of Omega as a Doctoral Fellow, and ACPA’s Outstanding Graduate Student for 2006.

Grahaeme is the second son of Ron Hesp and Audrey Roberts, both of whom still live in England. Grahaeme lives in San Francisco, California with the love of his life, his Pug dog Frankie, and works at the University of California, Berkeley.