

**You Forgot 'Gender' in the Roll Call:
Complexities of Gender and Culture in United Councils**
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Our recently elected Multicultural Greek Council (MGC) executive board has been working through some interesting challenges this semester. (But then, what council comprised of both fraternities and sororities isn't?) During one of their executive board meetings, one of the sorority women blamed gender for the way the fraternity men were showing up. I get a good laugh each time I think of this meeting because of the complexities this reflection brought. This newly elected board had not named gender and how its social constructions impact the way they conduct business until this point. This conversation is one I still struggle with as their advisor. How do I support culturally based fraternities and sororities as they navigate working together in a united council? Better yet, how do I address developing brotherhood and sisterhood as an alumnx that lives outside of the gender binary?

It is important to name my use of 'x' in 'alumnx' (al-um-nex) and why that matters. Higher education has used alumnus/alumni to name men and alumna/alumnae to name women who are former students of an institution. Fraternities and sororities have embraced these words as much, if not more, than the colleges they are part of. Variations of words without 'x' leave out non-binary identities (Logue, 2015). My use is both tangential and relevant. The use of words like brotherhood and sisterhood embrace the binary and leave out transgender individuals. So, how do I as an advisor be both authentic in my gender identity and also support experiences that reinforce gender binaries? This is a question that I have struggled to answer many times since my coming out.

Many times I find myself reflecting on my own years serving as an executive officer of the Multicultural Greek Council. It helps me put back into perspective the struggles that came with supporting mostly sororities while coming from a fraternity mindset. Over the past three MGC executive boards I've worked with at Colorado State University (CSU), there have not been more than two men on the executive board in any one year to represent four fraternities and six sororities. However, two of the past three presidents of the council have been fraternity men. What should this tell me, and what does this tell me? What if I went as far back as the first iteration of this council when it was first called the Latino Greek Council back in 2006? No matter how many books on fraternities and sororities I read, media references I review, and stories I get from MGC alumnx, there's no set of best practices for serving a united fraternity and sorority council.

There are lessons that can be taken from distinctions made by the way men and women are socialized to interact with one another. Marianismo and machismo (Jezzini, Guzman, and Grayshield, 2008) are two concepts that come to mind for Latinx communities, and I would venture similar constructs exist for other communities of color. I can envision the opportunities for discourse on what an ideal multicultural sisterhood looks like taking years to cultivate. How, then, does the identity of the chapter interact with that of its members? What can be expected when the members of a Latina-interest sorority engage with those in an Asian-interest sorority,

and is it the same when said sororities connect with a multicultural-interest sorority? The same questions can be asked of cultural fraternities, in addition to unpacking how culturally based fraternities and sororities face pressures to conform to historically white fraternities' and sororities' gender roles. This reflection brings forth some interesting research questions, not to mention challenge how my gender identity and affiliation to Lambda Theta Phi Fraternidad Latina, Inc. inform my actions in advising.

Reflecting on gender is an important aspect of advising fraternities and sororities. How that shows up for anyone, whether it be during a leadership experience hosted by an international headquarters or during transitions for a newly created officer position, will look different—even among advisor/advisee relationships with shared gender identity and gender expressions. I think there are three things to consider when advising a united council of fraternities and sororities:

1. Reflect on individual and organizational identities. These council chapters spend a significant amount of time asserting how they want to be honored among their peers and on campus, and it is reasonable to assume they anticipate having advisors who have done similar self-work.
2. Name when gender is a factor. Fraternities and sororities in a united council will face challenges where the social constructs of gender inform how they relate to each other. Reflecting with leadership on when and how behaviors are informed by gender expectations will bring some interesting conversations to the table.
3. Create spaces of dialogue for the community. All chapters will benefit from observations that the council advisor(s) has/have, and hopefully each chapter will take the time to ask their members how gender expectations inform connections with one another and others in the council.

While I take the experiences I have had and use them as input to developing best practices for MGC at CSU, I cannot say my presence and advising style have been the best for the needs of the community. When my students have asked questions about my experiences in MGC, I struggle with explaining what it meant to be who I was as an undergraduate member and who I am now. I spend a number of hours reflecting on how embracing my gender identity and gender expression affects how the community interacts with me. As my struggle continues, it is my hope others can be a part of this struggle with me and help develop better practices to support students as they work through the influences gender has on their lives, their trust in each other, and the future they create.

References

Logue, J. (2015). "Latina/o/x: Students adopt gender-nonspecific term 'Latinx' to be more inclusive." Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/12/08/students-adopt-gender-nonspecific-term-latinx-be-more-inclusive>

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