A POSITIVE SPIN ON A NEGATIVE NARRATIVE: HOW THE MEDIA PORTRAYS FRATERNITIES AND WHAT FRATERNITIES CAN DO ABOUT IT

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As research on fraternity men largely focuses on misbehavior and criminal activity, no research examines the types of stories reported on by media outlets and whether these stories include fraternity voices or statements. Employing quantitative content analysis, this study examines 100 fraternity-related stories published by the ten newspaper websites most frequently visited by people in the United States. Findings suggest 12% of fraternity-related publications are positive in nature and tone, 36% of publications include official fraternity-issued statements, and 69% of all publications include official university-issued statements. Implications for practitioners and future research is addressed.

Extant research supports the notion that involvement in college and university fraternities has positive effects, including increasing men's self-awareness and leadership strengths (Isacco, Warnecke, Ampuero, Donofrio, & Davies, 2013); sharpening cultural competencies and diversity awareness (Johnson, Johnson, & Dugan, 2015; Reuter et al., 2012); building meaningful relationships with fraternity brothers (Long, 2012) and the university community (Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2009), improving cognitive abilities (Pike, 2000), and boosting graduation rates and degree persistence (Walker, Martin, & Hussey, 2015). As of 2017, fraternity membership on college campuses was at an all-time high, as over 375,000 undergraduate men were members of fraternities, with over 6,000 active fraternity chapters operating on nearly 800 college campuses (North-American Interfraternity Conference [NIC], 2017).

However, Harris and Harper (2014) argued that the predominant view of male undergraduates is that they "are drunken, promiscuous, academically disengaged lovers of pornography, sports, and video games who rape women, physically assault each other, vandalize buildings on campus, and dangerously risk their lives pledging sexist, racially exclusive, homophobic fraternities" (p. 10). Akin to Harper

and Harris' work is decades of overwhelmingly negative fraternity-related research and reporting in higher education, social science, and popular media, focusing on fraternity members' alcohol abuse (Caudill et al., 2006; Glindemann et al., 2007; Park, Sher, Wood, & Krull, 2009), burdensome financial obligations and socioeconomic stratification (Byer, 1997; Miller, 1973; Newsome, 2009), hazing and initiation practices (Boglioli & Taff, 1995; Cimino, 2016; Somers, 2007), homophobic attitudes (Hall & La France, 2007; Hesp, 2006; Worthen, 2014), and sexual misconduct (Boyle, 2015; Franklin, Bouffard, & Pratt, 2012; Kingree & Thompson, 2013). To be clear, popular media does report on factual, abhorrent, and negative behavior demonstrated by fraternity men. Yet, it is possible that the media often leans toward a negative portrayal of fraternities and does not convey a comprehensive image of fraternities and their missions, values, and service to their communities.

This aforementioned negative fraternity-related research — coupled with the proliferation of social media and ease of information in the Internet age — has catalyzed the action of fraternity chapters' communications and public relations units. These units have charged themselves with "sophisticated public relations

efforts" (Kingkade, 2015, para. 1) to counteract the "popularized social media platforms" and "constant media scrutiny" (Kingkade, 2015, para. 7) which damages the reputation of fraternities and drowns out fraternities' unified, powerful voice, according to the North-American Interfraternity Conference (Kingkade, 2015). Yet, after reviewing the literature, no study has examined this sense of "constant media scrutiny" (Kingkade, 2015, para. 7) as it relates to fraternity voices in media publications.

Research has suggested fraternities are portrayed in a negative, and often unfair, light (Harris & Harper, 2014), and a comprehensive synthesis of fraternity and sorority-related research determined "overwhelming body of research has explored detrimental behaviors and consequences associated with [fraternity and sorority] membership, while little attention has been paid to developmental aspects" (Biddix, Matney, Norman, & Martin, 2014, p. 101). However, the existing body of research has not addressed fraternity-focused media publications to articulate exactly how fraternities are portrayed in the media and what fraternities are doing to mitigate negative publicity and condemnation (Kingkade, 2015).

In short, this study seeks to answer two crucial questions related to the "constant media scrutiny" (Kingkade, 2015, para. 7) facing fraternities:

1. Which types of fraternity-focused stories are reported on by popular, widely-read media outlets?
2. Are fraternity voices included in fraternity-focused media publications, and if not, whose voices are included?

We hypothesize that fraternity-focused media publications are overwhelmingly negative in nature, possibly perpetuating the negative perception of fraternity membership touched upon by the research (Fouts, 2010; Sweeney, 2014; Wells & Corts, 2008). By exploring our two research questions, we hope to inform fraternities and their advisors regarding their work repairing fraternities' public images

and sharing the wealth of positive work that fraternities do on a regular basis. If fraternities do experience condemnation from the media (Kingkade, 2015), this study will explain to the extent this condemnation exists and whether fraternities work to combat negative narratives with positive, or at least, more comprehensive narratives.

The Positive Impact of Fraternities

While extant research focuses primarily on the negative impact of fraternities (Harris & Harper, 2014), several researchers have explored the benefits of fraternity membership (Long, 2012; Reuter et al., 2012; Walker, Martin, & Hussey, 2014), as well as how fraternity men have been able to demonstrate productive masculinities (Harris & Harper, 2014). Drawing from the work of Kimmel and Messner (2007), Harris and Harper (2014) defined a productive masculinity as behaviors of fraternity men that promote desirable psychosocial outcomes, such as leadership skills, improved health, and increased student engagement. During a two-day leadership retreat, Harris and Harper found fraternity men challenged negative stereotypes of fraternity membership by holding each other accountable to the values and principles of their organization. These men often practiced disrupting negative stereotypes by "calling brothers out" (Harris & Harper, 2014, p. 715) in order to challenge sexism, homophobia, and racism apparent in some fraternity men.

Anderson (2008) completed a two-year ethnographic study on fraternity men and found members he studied embraced a culture of inclusive masculinity, valuing vulnerability and rejecting hegemonic masculinity using positive peer pressure to curtail homophobia, racism, and misogyny. Referencing Anderson's work, Harris and Harper (2014) provided the most direct examination of men who contradicted stereotypes and engaged in productive masculinities. The men Harris and

Harper worked with "consciously acted in ways that sought to disrupt sexism, racism, and homophobia; confronted chapter brothers who behaved in ways that were inconsistent with their fraternity's espoused values; and cultivated substantive non-romantic friendships with women on campus" (p. 706).

Walker et al. (2014) argued opportunities for leadership development, networking, and community involvement were all potential benefits to fraternity membership. Results of their study, conducted at an elite, highly-selective institution, found that fraternity membership led to more involvement in and satisfaction with campus social life and predicted higher graduation rates. Long (2012) found the fraternity membership experience successfully created a sense of belonging and helped men develop a variety of academic and non-academic skills.

Here, fraternities have demonstrated their positive social value in ways that impact a fraternity member's academic and non-academic lives. However, this positive social value may struggle for its voice to be heard above the din of the negative fraternity-related research.

The Negative or Negligible Impact of Fraternity Membership

While some studies have demonstrated the positive impact of fraternity membership (Long, 2012; Reuter et al., 2012; Walker, Martin, & Hussey, 2014), other research has shown fraternity men do not experience many meaningful gains from the membership (Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2009; Hevel & Bureau, 2014). Hevel and Bureau (2014) and Asel, Seifert, and Pascarella (2009) found fraternity and sorority membership had a net neutral effect on academic success, interpersonal skill development, moral reasoning, and critical thinking, among other measures. While fraternity membership did not have a harmful effect, positive gains found in other studies (e.g.,

Long, 2012; Reuter et al., 2012; Walker, Martin, & Hussey, 2014) are not constant across the literature.

Illustrating this inconsistency, Biddix, Matney, Norman, and Martin (2014) synthesized nearly two decades of critical research focusing on the influence of fraternity and sorority involvement from 1996 to 2013. Ultimately, the researchers determined negative effects of fraternity and sorority membership are most apparent in the first year of college, and this membership's effect is largely context dependent (e.g., such as the size and culture of the organization and the campus on which the fraternity or sorority resides). Moreover, the researchers urged that adequate evaluation of fraternity and sorority membership is difficult due to the lack of accurate and comprehensive research, as most research has focused on White majority fraternity members and single-location case studies. Of this research, Biddix et al. (2014) suggested an "overwhelming body of research has explored detrimental behaviors and consequences associated with [fraternity and sorority] membership, while little attention has been paid to developmental aspects," (p. 101). This finding perhaps speaks to this study's hypothesis that both media outlets and research in the field has contributed to a negative narrative instead of balancing "detrimental behaviors and consequences" with "developmental aspects" (Biddix et al., 2014, p. 101) of fraternity membership.

Although research has explored negative effects and positive benefits of fraternity membership, perceptions of fraternities and sororities by other students are overwhelmingly negative. Wells and Corts (2008) found evidence of in-group bias in a study of affiliated and unaffiliated students: unaffiliated students showed a negative implicit attitude toward fraternities and sororities and positive attitudes toward other types of student organizations, while fraternity members showed positive implicit attitudes toward fraternities and sororities. Negative perceptions of fraternities play a powerful role in some students' choices

not to join organizations as well.

In a survey of unaffiliated students, Fouts (2010) found one reason students chose to not join fraternities and sororities was a perceived incongruence between personal and organizational values. Unaffiliated students, especially men, did not want to be associated with negative stereotypes of fraternity and sorority life. Similarly, Sweeney (2014) explained fraternity men's perceptions of the collegiate party and hook up culture highlighted socioeconomic disparities within members in the fraternity. Privileged men viewed this culture as essential to the college experience and a rite of passage of fraternity life, whereas fraternity men with less privilege viewed this culture as isolating, uncomfortable, and a deterrent of fraternity association. Here, Sweeney argued this culture not only divides fraternity men from one another, but this culture may discourage men from associating with fraternities or, if already a member, dissuading a fraternity man from voicing his displeasure with activity related to the collegiate party and hook up culture.

Ultimately, extant research has composed a negative narrative of the fraternity, yet no study has critically analyzed how popular media outlets may be contributing to this negative narrative and how fraternities have addressed media scrutiny through these outlets (Kingkade, 2015).

Methodology

Riffe, Lacy, and Fico's (2014) quantitative content analysis (QCA) is an appropriate methodological tool to examine media coverage of college and university fraternities. Defined as a methodological tool for examining media messages and textual documents, QCA is the "systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods" (Riffe et al., 2014, p. 3). QCA has become an increasingly popular method for describing typical patterns or characteristics

or to identify important relationships within organizational communication. An examination of media outlets' communication of fraternity-related news may reveal these media outlets' communicative goals, beliefs, and biases, as well as how fraternities contribute to this communication (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). As a form of mass communication, an online news publication also lends itself to sender-to-recipient inferences. These inferences go well beyond the basic description of the message with the goal of identifying organizational or societal attitudes held toward fraternity-related news, including an audience beyond the postsecondary community. It is important to interrogate these news publications to learn how organizational and societal attitudes may be shaping the public perception of fraternities.

Finally, QCA of media publications is appropriate given QCA is not limited to the types of data captured or how the source presents the text or media. The websites analyzed in this study were published on official, organizational domains for each media corporation, implying organizational idiosyncrasies from company to company. Also, many online news publications — although including some organizationally-mandated information — are predominantly written by individuals or small group communications staffers and not the overarching institution itself. Employing QCA's variable dynamism is necessary to decode organizational attitudes related to communicating fraternity-focused stories with the greater population.

Within QCA, our research team employed a word frequency analyses of fraternity-focused media publications and their titles to add rigor and depth to the study. Term frequency was popularized by G. K. Zipf (1935), a quantitative linguist who articulated Zipf's Law: few words occur frequently (e.g., conjunctions and articles) and many others occur rarely (e.g., gerunds, participles, infinitives, and modifiers) given the context and purpose of a text. Since his landmark contribution, Zipf's Law — articulated as a

statistical power law when a change in quantity predicts a proportional growth in another, independent of initial size — has been widely used to study a range of societal issues such as income distribution of companies (Okuyama, Takayasu, & Takayasu, 1999), size distribution of cities (Gabaix, 1999), and gene expression (Furusawa & Kaneko, 2003). In this study's context, the more frequently a media outlet employs a specific word for a specific purpose (e.g., fraternity titles, university names), the more powerful that word is believed to be by its author, and the more powerful that word is to influence the syntax and semantics (meaning) of subsequent text. In short, word frequency analyses reveal patterns or characteristics in linguistic behavior, augmenting Riffe, Lacy, and Fico's (2014) QCA, which simultaneously established a project-specific word bank (lexicon) for this project, thus informing our coding strategies and emergent themes in the data.

Data Collection

To examine news outlets which reach the greatest number of people in the United States (U.S.), we needed to learn how U.S. people digest their news. A 2016 Pew Research Center report found most U.S. people (58%) get their news online, through either news websites (e.g., Yahoo News), newspaper websites (e.g., *Wall Street Journal* at www.wsj.com), or social media (e.g., Facebook News Feed, Twitter), instead of television or radio sources. The same Pew report found online news sources also produce more current, accessible content than television outlets, as most televised news stories are also published on a television company's website (e.g., news appearing on NBC Nightly News is also published on www.nbcnews.com; Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). Furthermore, ten of the twenty-five most frequently visited websites that U.S. people often explore for news are also major, in-print newspapers: *The New York Times* (www.nyt.com);

Washington Post (www.washingtonpost.com); *USA Today* (www.usatoday.com); *Wall Street Journal* (www.wsj.com); *Los Angeles Times* (www.latimes.com); *New York Daily News* (www.nydailynews.com); *New York Post* (www.nypost.com); *Boston Globe* (www.boston.com); *San Francisco Chronicle* (www.sfgate.com); and, *Chicago Tribune* (www.chicagotribune.com; Olmstead, Mitchell, & Rosenstiel, 2011).

These ten websites also republish select news stories on their social media accounts, and as a result, these newspapers reach a clear majority of U.S. people through three major channels: their website, related social media accounts, and in-print newspapers (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). Furthermore, these ten newspaper websites also represent great geographic diversity from New York to Los Angeles and throughout the Midwest. Thus, the research team agreed these ten websites represented the most accessible, most dynamic, most frequently-visited news sources and would serve as appropriate, high-quality sources for this study.

All data used in this study were extracted directly from the aforementioned ten newspaper websites in March 2017 using computer-aided text analysis (CATA) software (i.e., Readability Studio, a quantitative linguistic software program). Using the CATA helped eliminate human error during the extraction, cleaning, automatic tabulation of variables, and content organization processes. The research team located each fraternity-focused media publication by employing the website search engine on each newspaper's website and searching for the term "fraternity." Every newspaper website returned at least fifty results, ranging in publication from 2011 to 2017. The research team cleaned the results and included only results focused on college and university fraternities instead of unrelated fraternities such as Elks Lodges. This cleaning procedure resulted in every major news outlet publishing at least ten college and university fraternity-related stories

since 2011. After these stories were identified, the research team employed a random sampling technique to identify ten stories from each news outlet to reduce sampling and researcher bias. For instance, if a news outlet published 33 fraternity-related stories, the team used a random number generator with the parameters 1 through 33 to assign one randomly-selected story to the sample. As a result, this study will focus on ten fraternity-related publications from each news outlet's website, resulting in a corpus of 100 fraternity-focused media publications.

Data Analysis

Once the data were extracted, cleaned, and organized, all text were inputted into a database including the following metadata: newspaper name, URL of the publication, title of the news article, and publication date (day, month, and year). Across 100 publications, there was one publication from 2012, one from 2013, five from 2014, 12 from 2015, 46 from 2016, and 35 from 2017.

First, the research team performed a preliminary review of the metadata and 100-article corpus to become familiar with the content. Next, the research team's coding procedure involved two steps and two coding strategies: holistic coding and attribute coding. First, holistic coding of the data was appropriate, as holistic coding "applies a single code to a large unit of data, rather than line-by-line coding to capture a sense of the overall contents and the possible categories that may develop" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 77). After each research team member read each story, the reader assigned a simple, holistic code to the text: positive, negative, or neutral. Per modified binary coding (1 = positive, 0 = negative, * = neutral), positive articles were ones focused on fraternity fundraisers, community service events, and human-interest stories, whereas negative stories were ones focused on fraternity member misbehavior or criminal activity, university censuring of fraternity chapters,

and stories highlighting stereotypical behavior of fraternities, including hazing rituals, excess drinking, objectification of women, and homophobic behavior. Each research team member coded stories individually, with the entire team collaborating to compare results. Without deliberation, the research team unanimously agreed upon the positive, negative, or neutral coding of each story. Only one story was neutral, and the research team reached this decision unanimously.

Next, the team performed attribute coding to "notate basic descriptive information of text" and provide context for analysis and interpretation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 79). Each team member performed the first round of attribute coding separately and then the team collaborated to develop attribute code categories. After collaboration, five textual elements relevant to the analysis of fraternity-focused media publications emerged from the descriptive coding procedure: inclusion of fraternity name, inclusion of university name, inclusion of an official fraternity statement, inclusion of an official university statement, and type of story (e.g., investigative report, news, opinion, or critical review).

Across 100 publications, 31 different fraternities and 62 different universities were specifically mentioned. Regarding fraternities, Sigma Alpha Epsilon (9 occurrences) and Tau Kappa Epsilon (5 occurrences) were the most frequently mentioned. Regarding colleges and universities, Penn State University (5 occurrences) and the University of California-Berkeley and University of Connecticut (4 occurrences) were the most frequently mentioned. In all, news outlets reported seven duplicated stories, six of them negative and one positive. The six negative stories involved a hazing incident at Central Michigan University (Alpha Chi Rho); the death of a fraternity member at the University of Connecticut (Kappa Sigma); a hazing-related death at Baruch College (Pi Delta Psi); a former fraternity president pleading guilty

in a sexual abuse case at Cornell University (Psi Epsilon); racist chanting by fraternity members at the University of Oklahoma (Sigma Alpha Epsilon); and a burglary attempt at the New Jersey Institute of Technology (Tau Kappa Epsilon). The positive story involved a 70-year-old member of Kappa Sigma at Arkansas Tech University. These duplicitous stories represented 19 of the 100 publications in this study: 17 negative and two positive. As a result, publications in this study reported on 81 unique fraternity-related incidents.

Limitations

Three primary limitations of this study were issues of generalizability given sample size, media duplicity, and the medium of publications examined.

First, issues of generalizability arise when a sample size is not large enough. In addition, this study did not examine sorority-related news stories, as Kingkade's (2015) reporting on the NIC was the catalyst for the study. As an exploratory study, the research team decided an examination of 100 fraternity-related news publications was a robust sample, considering multiple news outlets only published ten fraternity-related stories since 2011. Given the size and scope of modern news media outlets and the sheer volume of digital news produced daily across a variety of multimedia platforms, focusing on the ten most recent fraternity-related news publications on each newspaper's website allowed the team to conduct an appropriately tailored, narrowly-focused and manageable study from which to adequately inform fraternity advisors and university representatives as to how fraternities are portrayed in widely-read newspapers. Furthermore, this study rigorously examined each of the 100 fraternity-focused media publications featured herein, as this study produced a 58,767-word corpus, providing an ample semantic space for the first quantitative content analysis of fraternity-focused media publications, resulting in salient, current, and well-informed implications for a variety of educational stakeholders including fraternity advisors and fraternity spokespeople and communication professionals.

Second, when a news story breaks, multiple news outlets cover the story and deliver their own version to their own idiosyncratic audience through their own unique multimedia channels. Subsequently, several newspaper websites covered the same story in this study (e.g., Cornell University's Psi Upsilon President pleading guilty to sexual abuse), and these duplicitous stories are included in our text corpus and this study. However, it should be noted that these duplicitous stories are far from identical in text and serve to augment this study's scope, focus, and purpose rather than detract from it. Analyzing several newspapers and media outlets covering the same story is a novel approach to dissecting and explicating how fraternities are portrayed in the news, especially given the geographic and structural diversity of the newspapers and the stories themselves. As a result, the research team simultaneously acknowledges the media duplicity included in this study and encourages future research to expand the size and scope of this study to continue to define how fraternities are portrayed in the media and if their voices are made apparent in all forms of media.

Lastly, we understand that people in the United States receive news from a variety of courses, meaning that the fraternity-focused stories analyzed in this study were not and will not be read by every person in the United States. However, as this study is the first of its kind, we decided to focus on the media outlets most likely to reach the greatest numbers of U.S. people. Future research related to fraternity portrayals in the news could and should focus on other forms of media, such as television, radio, social media, podcasts, blogs, and emerging media sources which could change the way the public views fraternities and their purposes and functions on college campuses and beyond.

In short, this study's size and scope, as well as the ingenuity and inventiveness of the study itself, mitigates its limitations and provides ample room for future examination.

Findings

Results of a quantitative content analysis of 100 fraternity-focused media publications can be found in Table 1.

The types of articles included in this study were largely news-intensive, representing 81% of all publications, whereas opinions (11%), investigative reports (7%), and critical reviews (1%) were much less common. In fraternity-focused media publications, mentioning of a specific university was more common than mentioning of a specific fraternity, as 94% of all publications explicitly referenced a specific university or universities, whereas 77% of all

Table 1

Quantitative Content Analysis of Fraternity-focused Media Publications on Newspaper Websites (n = 100)

Publication type	
News	81%
Opinion	11%
Investigative report	7%
Critical review	1%
Publication content	
Mention of specific fraternity	77%
Mention of specific university	94%
Official fraternity-issued statement	36%
Official university-issued statement	69%
Nature of publication	
Positive	12%
and includes official fraternity-issued statement	9%
and includes official university-issued statement	3%
Negative	87%
and includes official fraternity-issued statement	27%
and includes official university-issued statement	66%
Neutral/indiscernible	1%

publications explicitly referenced a specific fraternity or fraternities. Official university-issued statements were also more prominently featured in publications of fraternity-focused news: sixty-nine percent (69%) of all publications featured an official university-issued statement—many from deans of students, presidents of university-sponsored hellenistic societies, or executive leaders—whereas 36%

of all publications featured an official fraternity-issued statement from either the university chapter's leadership or a leader from the larger, international fraternity organization such as NIC.

The researchers also found that the nature of fraternity-focused media publications was overwhelmingly negative, as only 12% of all publications could be considered positive in nature. Only one publication (1%) was

neither positive or negative (i.e., a review of the movie *Burning Sands*). Of the 12 positive publications, nine featured an official fraternity-issued statement, representing 75% of positive publications. Inversely, three positive publications featured an official university-issued statement, representing 25% of positive publications. Of the 87 negative publications, 27 featured an official fraternity-issued statement, representing 31% of negative publications. Again, inversely, 66 negative publications featured an official university-issued statement, representing 76% of negative publications.

Results of a word frequency analysis of 100 fraternity-focused media publications and their titles can be found in Table 2.

Across 100 fraternity-focused media publication titles and text, the words "fraternity" and "university" were most popular. Frequent words in titles were demonstrably more negative than frequent words in the full-text of the publication, as the title words "hazing," "suspended," "death," and "rape" were not used as frequently in the full-text. Although publications were more likely to mention a specific university and include an official university-issued statement (see Table 1), the full-text of the publication mentioned "fraternity" (518 occurrences) and "fraternities" (143 occurrences) much more frequently than "university" (386 occurrences) or "college" (165 occurrences).

Table 2
Word Frequency Analysis of Fraternity-focused Media Publications and Titles on Popular Newspaper Websites (n = 100)

Ten most frequently used words in	# of occurrences
fraternity-focused media publication titles:	fraternity (43 occurrences)
	university (17)
	hazing (13)
	student (12)
	state (11)
	college (11)
	suspended (11)
	death (11)
	fraternities (8)
	rape (7)
fraternity-focused media publication text:	fraternity (518 occurrences)
	university (386)
	students (274)
	campus (227)
	student (216)
	members (199)
	sexual (184)
	college (165)
	fraternities (143)
	chapter (140)

Discussion

The researchers found fraternity-focused media publications were largely news, followed by opinions, investigative reports, and critical reviews. Media outlets tended to report on fraternity incidents, rather than publishing opinions, reports, and reviews about fraternities. As a result, these media outlets likely contribute to the public's negative perception of college and university fraternities, often focusing on widely-researched problems facing fraternities such as alcohol abuse, hazing, homophobia and sexual assault (Harris & Harper, 2014). However, limited research has found negativity in news and media outlets may be common, as a recent study found negative superlatives in headlines — such as "worst" and "bad" — were 30% more likely to attract a user to an online story than positive ones (Wood, 2014). Financial market reporting research also found journalists tended to report more frequently on negative news during times of positive market gains than report on positive news during times of market losses (Garcia, 2014). Although there is limited research to compare the negativity of fraternity news to other types of news, it is notable that 87% of media publications in this study's sample were unequivocally negative. As this research illustrates, if 81% of fraternity-focused media publications were composed to inform the general public of a fraternity-focused news story, fraternity advisors must understand that these news stories, often negative narratives, could be counterbalanced by positive news to inform the public of the good-natured, community-centered work that fraternities do across the United States on a daily basis.

For instance, the *Chicago Tribune* ran a story on November 30th, 2015 which featured an Alpha Sigma Phi chapter launching a food drive in River Grove, Illinois and collecting over 300 bags of food, just in time for the Thanksgiving holiday weekend (Pisano, 2015). The most encouraging aspect of this publication is the fact that River Grove, Illinois is not a large metropolitan area by any means — its population is barely over 10,000 — and the Alpha Sigma Phi initiative was, according to all evidence included in the publication, a one-time initiative. This positive publication reached the *Chicago Tribune's* nearly 500,000 daily readers and helped share the many positive effects and outcomes of fraternity involvement, including leadership development (Isacco et al., 2013) and sharpening cultural competencies and diversity awareness (Johnson, Johnson, & Dugan, 2015; Reuter et al., 2012).

Possibly contributing to the public's negative perception of fraternities is the reporting on fraternity news without including the voice of the fraternity itself. For instance, 77% of publications mentioned a specific fraternity, yet less than half of these publications included an official, fraternity-issued statement. In this study's sample, fraternities often did not contribute to and augment their own stories, both positive and negative. Here, if fraternities are experiencing criticism from the media (Kingkade, 2015), these fraternities did not offer a condemnation of unacceptable behavior or any form of clarifying statement. Without a fraternity voice in a negative news story, members of the public may consider fraternity leadership ambivalent to the negative news.

Inversely, the research team's coding of media publications found colleges and universities were more likely to contribute to fraternity-focused media publications — 94% of publications mentioned a specific university and 69% included an official, university-issued statement — than fraternities. Here, media outlets may be intentionally associating the university with the fraternity to provide its readership with some geographic context, yet it is troublesome that universities were twice as likely to speak to a negative fraternity-related story than the fraternity itself. For Kingkade (2015), this study finds that fraternities may not be doing enough to address media scrutiny by often failing to address the media scrutiny in the first place.

Unfortunately, our study supports related research (e.g., Harris & Harper, 2014) and found only 12% of all fraternity-focused media publications were positive. Diction of a negative connotation was apparent throughout our word frequency analysis of fraternity-related publication titles. The terms "hazing," "suspended," "death," and "rape" comprised four of the ten most frequently used terms in publication titles and eerily echoes what research has demonstrated are the largest problems facing fraternities (Boglioli & Taff, 1995; Boyle, 2015; Cimino, 2016; Franklin, Bouffard, & Pratt, 2012; Kingree & Thompson, 2013; Somers, 2007).

Of the 12 positive publications, two stories partially addressed the lack of evidence of rape during the University of Virginia scandal of 2014: one *Wall Street Journal* publication entitled, "Should Colleges Get Rid of Fraternities?" (Robbins, 2015), and one Washington Post investigative report entitled, "Fraternity Brother: Bad Headlines about Greek Life are Good for Us" (Svrluga, 2015). Considering these two publications and how they could be easily perceived as negative by a casual, inattentive reader, only 10% of all fraternity-focused media publications were unequivocally positive without a negative precursor or potentially misleading title. This is extremely problematic for fraternities and their advisors: This negative narrative must shift, beginning with a movement away from problematic behaviors which lead to negative media coverage and justified criticism.

However, this criticism could also be directed toward news outlets as well. For instance, a July 8, 2016 publication in *USA Today* highlighted a Chi Phi chapter's decision to allow transgender pledges (Osler, 2016). Included in our study, this story was coded as positive in nature and tone and demonstrates multiple positive effects and outcomes of fraternity involvement: developing men's self-awareness and leadership strengths (Isacco et al., 2013), sharpening cultural competencies and diversity awareness (Johnson, Johnson, & Dugan, 2015; Reuter et al., 2012), and building meaningful relationships with the university community (Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2009). However, this story was only reported by one news outlet. Inversely, the *New York Daily News* and *New York Post* both reported on a 70-year-old Kappa Sigma pledge at Arkansas Tech University (Burke, 2017; Eustachewich, 2017). Granted, a 70-year-old pledge is a fun and newsworthy narrative. Yet, given the political climate in our country and the challenges facing the transgender community during their fight for equitable civil rights in the United States (Thoreson, 2017), it is notable that news outlets publicized the Arkansas Tech story more frequently than the Chi Phi story.

Data in this study suggest fraternities were less likely to issue official statements than universities were, yet the type of media publication including official statements requires additional attention from fraternity advisors. In positive publications, our study found official, fraternity-related statements (9%) were three times as apparent than official, university-issued statements were (3%). However, the inverse was true in negative publications: official, university-issued statements (66%) were more than twice as likely to appear than official, fraternity-issued statements in negative publications (27%). Therefore, fraternity advisors must ask two questions: why are fraternity-related stories so overwhelmingly negative, and, why are fraternity voices more apparent in positive publications than negative ones? A hallmark of quality journalism is paying credence to both sides of a story, positive or negative, and fraternity advisors must ensure that fraternity voices are being acknowledged and heard by the United States' most widely-circulated newspapers. A troubling finding of this study, only 36% of all fraternity-related publications included an official, fraternity-issued statement.

Universities and the media outlets themselves will continue to report — and justifiably so — on negative fraternity news and offer a one-sided version of this news until fraternities insert

themselves into the national conversation and make their voices heard, whether the fraternity statement condemns negative activity or praises positive activity. To begin a national conversation about fraternities, fraternity stakeholders must begin to share responsibility for providing more positive and comprehensive narratives about fraternities and combating overwhelming negative narratives.

Implications: Shared Responsibility in Starting a Conversation

The findings of this study imply all fraternity stakeholders must share responsibility to start a conversation with the media and with the public, beginning with inter/national chapter leaders. Whether they are marketing and communications officers, executives, or the chapter president, inter/national leaders should be active when addressing negative and promoting positive stories involving their chapter.

First, inter/national leaders must address media coverage of a negative fraternity-related incident through an issuance of a formal statement. Although members of the U.S. media are guaranteed freedom of the press, inter/national leaders must work to ensure members of the U.S. public are aware that the highest level of fraternity leadership has the highest level of condemnation for the unacceptable behavior of their members. Even if the media outlet refuses to publish a fraternity's formal statement, the inter/national leadership can publish the statement on their official website, disseminate the statement through digital channels including social media, and link any negative media publications to the formal statement on the website. Even though a small number of publications in this study were opinions (11%), inter/national leadership could respond to opinions, too. A fraternity voice responding to an outside opinion begins a dialogue — a conversation — that can help maintain and repair the good reputation of thousands of fraternity men across the country.

This responsibility to communicate with the public should be shared with inter/national leadership and the chapter leadership of the fraternity. This responsibility implies inter/national leaders and chapter leaders maintain open lines of communication and provide unified formal statements to any and all media outlets reporting on fraternities. In addition, this shared responsibility requires inter/national leadership and chapter leadership to foster positive relationships with media outlets at the local and national level to ensure fraternity voices can be heard in popular news publications read by millions of people in the United States every day. Here, both inter/national leaders and chapter leaders must communicate and collaborate on how to efficiently and effectively connect with media outlets and respond to negative media coverage.

Although inter/national leadership may be better suited to establish relationships with large media outlets, chapter leaders need to prepare fraternity members to not only respond to negative coverage but promote positive happenings. In this study, a sense of conversation was sorely lacking in the media's portrayal of fraternities and fraternity life: No media publications in this study included interviews with fraternity men. Here, chapter leaders and advisors need to not only prepare fraternity men to respond to negative media coverage, they also need to prepare these men to share their stories, become advocates for their chapter, and insert their voices into the national conversation. The public should be provided the opportunity to understand one or two bad apples cannot and will not spoil the bunch, and yet, this notion seems to hold as public perception (Harris & Harper, 2014). Without inserting fraternity voices into negative media publications, the overwhelmingly negative narrative surrounding fraternities will continue to be one-sided and misrepresentative of fraternities and the incredible amount of positive work they do on college campuses and in their communities.

At the campus level, it is possible that universities have the ability to get in front of a negative fraternity-related news story because they may possess prior knowledge that chapter leadership may lack. Given this study's findings that universities were identified and quoted more frequently in fraternity-focused media publications, fraternities must work to collaborate with their universities to address negative media coverage and promote positive coverage. This assertion does not presuppose that fraternities and universities do not collaborate: surely, they do. This collaboration was simply not apparent in the findings of this study. Again, speaking to a lack of conversation, no publication in this study included a joint statement from a fraternity and its university to address a negative incident or promote a positive one. Because chapter leaders are more closely connected to their university than inter/national leadership likely are, chapter leaders must share the responsibility of collaborating with their university and fostering an open, communicative relationship. Without this relationship, the public may read about fraternities in the news and deduce that universities and fraternities do not communicate, resulting in both the university and the fraternity appearing unprofessional, uncollaborative, and uncommunicative.

Both positive and negative news can reach a national audience more quickly than ever before, given the proliferation of social media and Internet technologies (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). As a result, a unified effort among inter/national leaders, chapter leaders, fraternity men, and universities should work to promote positive fraternity happenings as frequently as possible across numerous channels (e.g., print media, digital media, and word of mouth). The aforementioned 2015 *Chicago Tribune* story is evidence that a small but positive fraternity event can reach a large audience. Similar to how chapter leaders should prepare fraternity men to respond to negative coverage, these leaders must work to put

fraternity men in positions to not only *do good work* but *share good work.* This preparation could involve chapter leaders teaching fraternity men how to document and publicize community service events or other positive contributions to society.

All fraternity stakeholders must share responsibility to promote positive news, as inter/national leaders, chapter leaders, and fraternity men themselves cannot assume their good deeds will be recognized by media outlets. Princeton University's Chi Phi chapter decided to admit transgender men as new members in 2016. For one of the nation's oldest fraternities to fundamentally change membership policies to become more inclusive is an incredibly noteworthy act of social justice and equity. However, more news outlets decided to publicize a 70-year-old Kappa Sigma member at Arkansas Tech University. Given this discrepancy, chapter leaders must communicate and promote positive, social justice work performed by fraternities to slowly change the media's overwhelmingly negative narrative of fraternities, again repeating the call to action by the NIC (Kingkade, 2015).

Regarding sororities and their leadership, many of the implications for fraternities are applicable to sororities. Given the negative media coverage of fraternities found in this study, sororities and their leadership should be proactive to address negative publicity and promote positive happenings. Although sororities may not face the same level of public scrutiny that fraternities do — and rightfully so, given the number of unique negative fraternity incidents analyzed in this study alone — sororities and fraternities can be mutually supportive and collaborative. If fraternity and sorority leadership and their members communicate and collaborate at chapter and national levels, perhaps fraternities can mirror best practices exhibited by sororities regarding public relations and media communication. Understanding fraternities and sororities often engage at a social level, leaders of these organizations should

explore ways for both groups to collectively make positive contributions to their community and greater society, and then publicize these contributions at the local and national level.

Finally, future research should investigate how inter/national leadership, chapter leadership, and fraternity men publicize fraternity-related news. Researchers could explore who is formally responsible for responding to both negative and positive media coverage, including how these fraternity leaders or fraternity men are trained to address such coverage. Beyond the fraternity, researchers should also investigate how universities communicate fraternity news — positive and negative — and whether universities actively solicit official fraternity statements regarding any type of news. The same call to research applies to how media outlets actively solicit fraternity feedback on a future or current publication and whether fraternities seek positive relationships with the media. To better inform how fraternities can share communicative responsibility and start a conversation with the public, researchers must interrogate all stakeholders with the power to shape the public's opinion of fraternities. Only then will fraternity men and their leaders begin to combat fraternities' negative narrative in the media.

Conclusion

Although this study found fraternities are portrayed in a negative light by the United States' most widely-read newspapers, stories such as the Alpha Sigma Phi food drive and the Chi Phi inclusion of transgender pledges must motivate fraternity advisors and leadership to ensure that fraternity voices are heard, whether newspapers publish positive or negative fraternity-focused stories. Surely, when a tragedy befalls a college or university fraternity, popular media outlets are likely to report on the story and continue to compose a negative narrative. However, such salient, culturally transcendent work performed by fraternities across the country must find its place in modern media. Granted, each inter/national fraternity has an official website on which organizational leadership publishes positive stories of fraternity involvement in their campuses and communities, yet these websites are not likely visited by the overwhelming majority of news-seeking people in the United States. These positive stories must be supplied to major media outlets by fraternity advisors to provide a more comprehensive picture of fraternities and combat, what is currently, a largely negative narrative.

Perhaps Harris and Harper (2014) best articulated the desire of fraternity men to change the negative stereotypes associated with their fraternity membership. One of their participants remarked, "It's typical frat boys. Sometimes we bring it upon ourselves. There's a lot of fraternities out there who don't stand for good causes, so that's why we have that image, but our fraternity really aims to counter those ideas" (as quoted in Harper & Harris, 2014, p. 713). In an effort to "counter those ideas," fraternity leaders must address a real or perceived "constant media scrutiny" (Kingkade, 2015, para. 7) by condemning negative behavior and promoting positive behavior in widely-read media publications that may work to further perpetuate negative stereotypes or establish positive ones.

For decades, many fraternity men have reaped the positive benefits of fraternity membership and positively contributed to countless fraternities' legacies of service, leadership, and social justice. Now, it is time for the leaders of these men — chapter leaders and inter/national organizations — to ensure the incredibly positive work performed by fraternities is acknowledged, recognized, and praised.

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