# SORORITY AND FRATERNITY ATTITUDES TOWARDS INITIATION AND HAZING

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*This study assessed students' attitudes towards fraternity and sorority intake processes at a regional Mid-Atlantic University (MU) to gain an understanding of overall attitudes and discern whether students distinguish differences between hazing and initiation procedures. Study results indicated that students understand the general purpose of initiation and the dangers of hazing; however, a general understanding may not translate to an understanding of the specifics activities involved in new member initiation processes. Study results specified differences in understanding initiation and hazing are greatest by gender and fraternity/sorority council. Implications for higher education research and student affairs practice are discussed.*

Taking on a mythical appeal in popular culture with films such as *Animal House* (1978), *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984), *School Daze* (1988), *Legally Blonde* (2001) and the more recent comedy-drama series *Greek* (2007-2011), fascination with fraternity and sorority initiation captures public imaginations. Mythology aside, there is ongoing concern regarding student safety in recruitment and intake processes (Bittner, 2016). In 2017, the alcohol fueled, hazing related death of a 19-year-old fraternity member at Pennsylvania State University made national headlines leading to criminal charges against 26 associate members of the fraternity (Deak, 2018; Flanagan, 2017). In a lawsuit filed against the fraternity members, the student's parents alleged that he was forced to drink large amounts of alcohol as part of a hazing ritual (Deak, 2018). Similarly, four students at Louisiana State University were indicted with criminal charges in the alleged hazing death of an 18-year-old student at fraternity house (Andone & Burnside, 2018). It is estimated that one fraternity associate member has died nationally every year since 1970 due to dangerous hazing rituals (Filip, 2012; Nuwer, 1990, 2017). Given the breadth of hazing and related deaths, *The Huffington Post* has dedicated an entire webpage to informing publics on and off campus about hazing and its hazards ("Fraternity and Sorority Hazing," 2017).

In this study we examine fraternity and sorority student members' attitudes towards initiation and hazing at Mid Atlantic University (MU), using the Survey of Attitudes About Fraternities and Sororities (SAAFS) instrument designed by Cokley et al. (2001). Our purpose was to determine whether students could distinguish differences between hazing and initiation so as to better effect educational programming for positive change.

## Review of the Literature

### Definitions

Definitions are useful in understanding the idiosyncrasies of initiation processes in fraternity and sorority communities. For the purposes of this study, hazing is defined as an illegal set of procedures which can inflict mental and physical harm (Nuwer, 1999). Binge drinking, deviant sexual behavior, and violence are often associated with hazing processes and draws negative media attention to the respective organizations and campuses (Foster, 2008; Gumprecht, 2006). Following this further, coerced destruction of personal property, tattooing, sleep deprivation, and performing acts of servitude are also forms of hazing which could cause physical or

psychological harm to those involved (Foster, 2008; Hansen, 2004).

Initiation is not necessarily a negative venture and is an important aspect of fraternity and sorority communities. Initiation processes typically involve social gatherings and the successful completion of activities for induction (Foster, 2008). Recruitment and intake are forms of initiation that do not inherently demean or dehumanize persons seeking membership. The use of the term "pledging" is diminishing overtime given traditional connections with hazing and the notion of "pledges," persons bullied as they seek fraternity or sorority membership (Kimbrough, 1997, 2003).

The process for joining a fraternity or sorority varies depending on the umbrella under which the organization exists. For fraternities that are members of the Interfraternity Council (IFC) and sororities under the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), new members go through a recruitment process. This process allows men and women to see all organizations through a mutual selection process, where the organizations are evaluating the potential new member (PNM) and the PNM is also evaluating each organization. Once accepted as a new member, members of IFC and NPC organizations go through a new member orientation period, traditionally this has been considered pledging. Although national organizations have moved away from this title because of its association with hazing. IFC organizations such as Lambda Chi Alpha, Sigma Phi Epsilon, and Beta Theta Pi among many others have worked to eliminate any form of a new member period. Other IFC organizations, most notably, Phi Kappa Psi and Sigma Alpha Epsilon have shortened their new member period that range from a few days to a few weeks. NPC new member periods vary but most are less than eight weeks.

Member organizations of the National Pan-Hellenic Conference (NPHC) go through an intake process. This process consists of interest meetings, an application, and educational sessions before one is initiated as a full member. Multicultural fraternities and sororities often use a process similar to intake, but some do have a recruitment process similar to IFC organizations. NPHC and MGC organizations often coordinate intake in clusters. The purpose of the clusters is to group a few chapters from the same region to have the same intake experience. This is a way to try to take the intake experience from being run on the local level to be more consistent with the national organization and eliminate any chance of hazing.

Negative initiation processes may be the largest cost to individuals associated with fraternity and sorority membership (Biddix, Matney, Norman, & Martin, 2014; Kase, Rivera, & Hunt, 2016; Simmons, Bauman, & Ives, 2015). In fact, for students, the line between hazing and positive team building may be blurred, which points to a need for additional research in this area (Campos, Poulous, & Sipple, 2005; Cimino, 2011). While some college student affairs personnel advocate to rid college campuses of sororities and fraternities due to perpetual fatal incidents of hazing, overall the costs and benefits of membership to individuals and institutions is mixed (Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2009; Biddix, Singer, & Aslinger, 2016; Martin, Parker, Pascarella, & Blechschmidt, 2015; McGinley, Rosependa, Liu, & Richman, 2016; Morgan, Zimmerman, Terrell, & Marcotte, 2015; Walker, Martin, & Hussey, 2015). Much research attests to the positive benefits of fraternity and sorority membership, ranging from higher graduation rates, partaking in prominent campus leadership positions, greater civic engagement, and greater alumni involvement (Ahren, Bureau, Ryan, & Torres, 2014; DeSantis, 2007; Gumprecht, 2006; Hevel, Martin & Pascarella, 2014). In addition, given social connections, fraternities and sororities produce prominent and generous alumni (Lara & Johnson, 2014). As such, the institutional relationship with these organizations can be considered symbiotic, with fraternity and sorority offices providing a bridge, mediating

relations (Gumprecht, 2006). Unfortunately, the positive aspects of fraternity or sorority membership are often overshadowed by negative facets, the foremost of which is hazing.

### Scope of the Problem

Hazing is an issue globally, non-unique to the United States (Guerrero, Johnson, & Holman, 2016; Silva, Caldeira, Mendes, Botelho, & Martins, 2016) or to fraternities or sororities (Bourke, 2016; Silveira & Hudson, 2015), or even to modern generations (Butt-Thompson, 1908; McCarl Jr., 1976; Schlegel & Barry, 1979). Hazing is thought to engender solidarity, solicit individual commitment to an organization, and exert dominance over those seeking to become members (Cimino, 2011). However, the result of hazing activities can result in psychological and physical damage to an individual, even death. In addition, known hazing activities are risky for higher educational institutions as well as sororities and fraternities as they can result in lawsuits generating millions of US dollars in compensatory and punitive damages (Alvarez, 2015; Merriweather, 2016; Parks, Jones, Ray, & Hughey, 2015).

In 2009 Allan and Madden published an extensive mixed methods study on student hazing: 1,482 college students at 53 U.S. institutions, along with 300 staff and student interviews at 18 of the institutions. They found that students perceived hazing prevention messaging by campus actors limited to "hazing is not tolerated" overtures. However, not all students agreed that hazing is a problem and it was found that there is tacit acceptance of hazing practices on campuses beyond fraternities and sororities. In fact, Allan and Madden found that there were more students who recognized hazing as a positive rather than a negative consequence which is corroborated by other literature casting hazing as a "rite of passage" to adulthood ritual (Hansen, 2004). As phrased by one fraternity member in Govan (2001), "…No devotion or loyalty for our organization can be learned through a no-pledge intake process" (pp. 708-709).

In terms of the prevalence of hazing, Allan and Madden found 47% of students had experienced hazing. They also found that 9 out of 10 students who experienced hazing acts did not consider the experience as hazing (Allan & Madden, 2009). Moreover, 95% of students who acknowledged they had been hazed did not report the actions to campus authorities. Students acknowledged hazing as part of campus culture, with almost 70% of students reporting they knew hazing existed in other organizations in addition to their own organization. These results were replicated in Allan and Madden (2012) and are corroborated by Gose (1997) who found that some students who expressed that hazing was mild and worthwhile for the bonding it engendered (Campos, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005; Gose, 1997) and membership benefits accrued (Cimino, 2011).

### Hazing Consequences

Regardless of form, hazing is illegal in most states (44 out of 50), can be prosecuted as assault, battery, or other criminal statutes in the remainder states, is banned on campuses and expressly forbidden by national fraternity and sorority councils through documented policies (Alvarez, 2015; Parks, Jones, & Hughey, 2015). For example, the NPHC banned hazing in 1990 and reaffirmed this ban in 2003 (Foster, 2008). As part of this ban on hazing, NPHC has abolished new member pledging and now conducts intake programs; however, it is unclear to what extent this policy change has impacted the frequency and nature of hazing. Underground hazing continues to exist and poses a significant challenge for administrators (Nuwer, 1999; Salinas & Boettcher, 2018).

Under the Cleary Act, many campus professionals are bound to disclose criminal incidents on campus annually, including hazing incidents of a criminal nature. With increasing liability for unchecked hazing practices, most

colleges and universities are compelled to address hazing allegations. Some institutions have created hotlines for potential hazing cases to be reported. Many institutions regularly impose restrictions on new member intake processes, student organization status and other privileges in response to hazing and other campus violations. Colleges and universities also have the option of closing chapters permanently, especially in the face of severe, repeated hazing incidents including but not limited to those resulting in fatalities. In the absence of closure, organizations can acquire a bad reputation that may be difficult to change. For example, due to negative publicity surrounding a hazing incident at the University of Texas, Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity membership declined from 80 to 12 members (Gose, 1997).

Nevertheless, in spite of decades of negative publicity including research, trade, and news articles on hazing, binge drinking, drugs, smoking, and rape, since the early 2000s, fraternities and sororities have increased in popularity among first-year college students (Ingraham, 2015). Moreover, researchers have difficulty estimating the exact number of hazing related fatalities because, in an effort to manage institutional risks and publicity, college fraternities and sororities rarely acknowledge the truth associated with hazing related deaths (Allan & Madden, 2009; Alvarez, 2015).

## Theoretical Framework: Belonging

According to Strayhorn (2012), belonging in a campus environment regards a student's perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group [e.g., campus community] or others on campus [e.g., faculty, peers].

For many students, the college experience is the first opportunity away from parental oversight but is also a point of distancing from the life students traditionally knew, cultures and environments in which minimally there is the safety in the routine ordinary. Joining a fraternity or sorority broadens a student's sense of community and gives emotional safety as well as a sense of belonging as one traverses college experiences (Giacolone, 2018; Soria, Troisi, & Stebleton, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012). In addition, joining fraternity and sorority communities further encourages that independence through the decision to join a social organization of highly influential peers (Keating et al., 2005). The contention is that campus social dynamics, along with student desires for acceptance, render many new members, especially first year students, vulnerable to hazing by associate members in fraternity and sorority communities (Keating et al., 2005; Pershing, 2006). In fact, many students may be unable to discern the difference between initiation processes and hazing (Cimino, 2011) as they seek a space on campus to belong.

## Research Method

Given ongoing hazing concerns, and particularly the educational need of students to be able to discern the difference between acceptable initiation processes and hazing, the present study assessed students' attitudes towards hazing and initiation at a large, research extensive, multiculturally diverse institution in the Mid-Atlantic region of the US (MU). The purpose of the present study was to create a baseline assessment of student attitudes towards hazing prior to the conduct of a university level inquiry into fraternity and sorority life more broadly, and implementation of educational programming to address campus hazing. As such, we examined whether students can distinguish differences between hazing and initiation processes to inform on campus processes.

### Instrumentation

The primary research question in this study

was what are the attitudes of MU fraternity and sorority members towards initiation and hazing? The authors used Cokley et al. (2001) Survey of Attitudes About Fraternities and Sororities (SAAFS) to assess the attitudes of fraternity and sorority members at this institution. Cokley et al. (2001) conducted a study at a Midwestern University and gained 258 respondents. Note that given the timeframe, positive initiation in the survey is measured by the term pledging and while the survey was distributed unaltered, our interpretations are with the more contemporary term, initiation.

Forty-seven items were included on the survey, which can be digested down to six factors: purpose of pledging (initiation), impact of pledging (initiation), conformity to pledging (initiation) rules, perceptions of fraternities and sororities, moral concerns about pledging (initiation), and beliefs about pledging (initiation) difficulty. Scores ranged from 1 to 5 with higher scores on the purpose and impact of pledging (initiation) items indicate a positive disposition towards initiation for the individual and the group. Higher scores on the conformity to pledging (initiation) rules factor indicate the degree to which students believe in rigid conformity, which for some represents mild hazing to the extent activities are internalized as demeaning. Higher scores on the beliefs and perceptions factor indicate student positive esteem of fraternities and sororities. Higher scores on the morality factor indicate student willingness to report discomforting or illegal activities. Finally, higher scores on the difficulty factor indicate student beliefs that initiation should be hard. The latter two factors appear to reflect student tolerance for hazing.

Utilizing a principal axis factor extraction and direct oblimin rotation, Cokley et al. (2001) found that the SAAFS scale with an additional scale regarding student beliefs about alcohol use (2.8%) accounted for 52% of the variance in student attitudes about initiation: 24.7% purpose of pledging (initiation), 11.4% impact

of pledging (initiation), 3.6% conformity to pledging (initiation) rules, 3.5% perception of fraternities and sororities, 3.0% moral concerns about pledging (initiation) and 2.5% difficulty of pledging (initiation). In terms of reliability, the factor regarding beliefs about alcohol was dropped as the coefficient was determined to be uninterpretable due to the extremity of its negative skew. Alpha coefficients for the remainder ranged from $\alpha = 0.527$ (moral concerns) to $\alpha = 0.867$ (purpose of pledging(initiation]), with all but one of the remainder, conformity ($\alpha = 0.639$), registering an alpha greater than $\alpha = 0.70$. As such, the reliability of the purpose of pledging (initiation) factor was good with the conformity and moral concerns factors registering a questionable reliability. All other factors registered at an acceptable level (see Kline, 2000).

A secondary research question was whether there were differences in student attitudes towards initiation and hazing by race or gender? Like Cokley et al. (2001), we collected data on student race and gender. We also added an indicator for fraternity/ sorority council. While we considered an indicator of the exact fraternity/ sorority, we considered that specific identification of participants by chapter would increase the risk of individual identifiability, especially in smaller chapters. In addition, we did not want to discourage candor from participants out of the fear of identification.

Cokley et al. (2001) found that race and gender was a factor in the way initiation processes were perceived by students in fraternities and sororities. In particular, Cokley et al. found that African American students had more positive attitudes toward the purpose and impact of initiation and that Latino/a Americans thought that initiation should be easier, as compared to their European and African American counterparts. They also found that women had more positive attitudes towards initiation than men. Owen, Burke, and Vichesky (2008) found fraternity members more likely to be hazing

victims than sorority members, which may contribute to the more favorable disposition of sorority members towards initiation.

A significant limitation of this tool is its age and lack of update over a decade in which there were many developments in fraternity and sorority initiation processes, updates and consistency in terminology, as well as heightened attention nationally on campuses and beyond. This tool is used contemporarily (e.g., Hamilton, Scott, LaChapelle, & O'Sullivan, 2016; Ladd, 2016) and according to Google Scholar the work was cited 38, including in important volumes such as *The Influence of Fraternity and Sorority Involvement: A Critical Analysis of Research (1996-2013)* (2014), *Black Greek-Letter Organizations 2.0: New Directions in the Study of African American Fraternities and Sororities* (2011), and *Critical Perspectives on Hazing in Colleges and Universities: A Guide to Disrupting Hazing Culture* (2018). As such there is an underlying value the needs for updating notwithstanding. As a baseline assessment, we found the tool to be valuable and execution of the tool to be helpful towards the development of a new instrument befitting of fraternity and sorority life contemporarily.

### Site Selection and Participants

To assess contemporary student attitudes towards initiation and hazing, the authors distributed an online survey to all undergraduate fraternity and sorority members enrolled at Mid-Atlantic University (MU), a large, public, doctoral extensive institution, in Spring 2012 (N=1,589). The time selected was just past the initiation period to optimize participation rates, tapping into the enthusiasm of new members. In addition to reasons of convenience, the campus selected has attributes of multiculturalism, including equitable graduation rates by race/ethnicity, a large commuter population in addition to on campus residents, as well as a significant number of lower socioeconomic status and first-generation college students.

IRB approval for distribution at MU was obtained (UMCIRB 11-001062). The survey was available for four weeks with three prompts urging student completion and the Office of Greek Life offered a $50 Best Buy gift card to encourage participation. The total number of students participating was 197, yielding a response rate of 8.07%. Generally, response rates to paper surveys have been on the decline, at a high of 60% in the 1960s to about 21% in the 1990s (Dey, 1997). Response rates for online surveys are notoriously low, with some estimates as low as 10%; nevertheless, there is little research confirming response bias due to low online survey participation rates (Nair & Adams, 2009).

The sample garnered was reasonably reflective of fraternity and sorority demographics at MU. At MU, the NPC has 822 members, the IFC 602, the NPHC 90, and the MGC 29. In the current sample, NPC members constitute 48.7%, IFC 39.5%, NPHC 9.2%, and MGC 1%. Racial/ethnic minorities make up 13.8% of the sample. By gender, women make up nearly 59% of the sample. See Table 1.

### Data Analysis

Qualtrics software was used to issue the survey. Survey results were imported into IBM PASW (SPSS) for analysis. A missing values analysis was calculated, revealing that there were no more than 2.5% skips per survey item. By individual, there were four respondents omitted for skips greater than 4%, including one test entry by one of the researchers. The remainder of skips on the SAAFS was imputed to the mode. No demographic skips were imputed. There were three skips by council and one by gender which coincided with a council skip. There were no skips by race. The effective sample size was $n = 195$. In addition to descriptive statistics, a Student's *t*-test was calculated to discern gender differences. A one-way ANOVA was used to identify differences by race/ethnicity and council. Tukey post-hoc tests were used to further probe differences by race/ethnicity

**Table 1**

*Sample Demographic Characteristics*

| | Total (N= 195) | By Gender (N=192) | | By Council (N=192) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Men | Women | IFC | MGC | NPHC | NPC |
| **Race/ Ethnicity** | | | | | | | |
| Asian/ Pacific Islander | 3 (1.5%) | 2 (1%) | 1 (0.5%) | 1 (0.5%) | 0 | 2 (1%) | 0 |
| Black/ African | 10 (5.1%) | 4 (2.1%) | 6 (3.1%) | 4 (2.1%) | 0 | 6 (3.1%) | 0 |
| Caucasian/ European | 168 (86.2%) | 67 (34.9%) | 100 (52.1%) | 65 (33.9%) | 1 (0.5%) | 8 (4.2%) | 91 |
| Latino/ Hispanic | 7 (3.6%) | 3 (3.1%) | 4 (2.1%) | 3 (3.1%) | 1 (0.5%) | 0 | 3 (3.1%) |
| Multicultural/ Multiethnic | 7 (3.6%) | 4 (2.1%) | 3 (3.1%) | 4 (2.1%) | 0 | 2 (1%) | 1 (0.5%) |
| Total | 195 | 80 (41%) | 115 (58.5%) | 77 (39.5%) | 2 (1%) | 18 (9.2%) | 95 (48.7%) |
| **Missing** | | | | | | | |
| Gender | 1 (0.5%) | | | | | | |
| Council | 3 (1.5%) | | | | | | |

and council. Cohen's ds were calculated to determine effect sizes. Using a Cohen's d, effect sizes can be interpreted as follows: 0.2 = small, 0.5 = medium, and 0.8 = large (Cohen, 1988).

## Results

Overall, students reported strong, positive attitudes towards the purpose of pledging [initiation] ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.43$) and impact of pledging [initiation] ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.48$), with mean scores above 4 on a 5-point scale. Students were least likely to report strong attitudes towards conformity to pledging (initiation) rules ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.87$) and beliefs about pledging (initiation) difficulty ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.82$), both being indicators of student tolerance for hazing. That said, for both items are above the half-way mark on the 2.5 scale. In addition, student variation in reporting on these measures

is more widely distributed than the former two. The most variation occurred within the measure of student moral concerns about pledging ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.99$), one of the two factors found not reliable but retained in Cokley et al. (2001), the other being conformity to pledging rules. Overall student beliefs and perceptions about fraternities and sororities were positive ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.56$).

Gender differences were found for four of the six factors. Women felt slightly stronger about of the impact of pledging (initiation) than men ($M_{women} = 4.48$, $SD_{women} = 0.45$; $M_{men} = 4.28$, $SD_{men} = 0.52$; $d=0.411$). Men felt stronger about conforming to the rules of pledging (initiation) than women ($M_{men} = 2.95$, $SD_{men} = 0.88$; $M_{women} = 2.4$, $SD_{women} = 0.79$; $d=0.658$). Men agreed more strongly about the beliefs and perception of fraternities and sororities than women ($M_{men} = 3.98$, $SD_{men} = 0.58$; $M_{women} = 3.73$, $SD_{women} =$

0.53; d=0.45). Men showed a slightly higher moral concern about the pledging (initiation) process than women ($M_{men}$ = 3.62, $SD_{men}$ = 1.08; $M_{women}$ = 3.4, $SD_{women}$ = 0.9; d=0.221). Men agreed much more strongly about the difficulty of the pledging (initiation) process than women ($M_{men}$ = 3.25, $SD_{men}$ = 0.82; $M_{women}$ = 2.69, $SD_{women}$ = 0.76; d=0.708). Regarding gender differences, the effect size for moral concern was small, but for pledging (initiation) difficulty, the effect size was large. All other effect sizes were moderate.

ANOVA results indicate significant differences in pledging/ hazing attitudes race/ ethnicity and council ($F(4,187)$ = 5.39, $p\le.05$). Racial/ ethnic differences in attitudes towards the purpose of pledging were found using at Tukey. There were significant differences between African American and European American/ Caucasian students as well as African American and Latinx/ Hispanic students. African American students felt less strongly about the purpose of pledging (initiation) than their European American/ Caucasian and Latinx/ Hispanic peers ($M_{African American}$ = 3.86, d=0.76; $M_{European American/ Caucasian}$ = 4.44 (reference group); $M_{Latino/ Hispanic}$ = 4.6l, d=0.90 ; $p\le.05$). These effect sizes are large. No other racial differences were found.

The ANOVA also indicated significant differences by council (F(3,188) = 2.70, $p\le.05$). On the purpose of pledging indicator, results of the Tukey's test mirror results on race. IFC members felt more strongly about the purpose of pledging than NPHC members ($M_{IFC}$ = 4.45 (reference group); $M_{NPHC}$ = 4.15, d=0.538; $p\le.05$). This effect is moderate. Significant differences by council were also found in perceptions of the importance of conformity to pledging (initiation) rules, beliefs in the importance of pledging (initiation), and how difficult the pledging(initiation) process should be ($F_{conformity}$(3,188) = 6.46, $p\le.05$; $F_{beliefs}$(3,188) = 3.67, $p\le.05$; $F_{difficulty}$(3,188) = 7.29, $p\le.05$). However, these differences arose between the IFC and NPC. IFC members felt more strongly about conforming to pledging (initiation) rules than NPC members ($M_{IFC}$ =2.93; $M_{NPC}$=2.37; d=0.392, $p\le.05$). IFC members felt slightly stronger in their beliefs and perceptions of fraternities and sororities than NPC members ($M_{IFC}$ =3.99; $M_{NNPC}$ =3.72; d=0.295, $p\le.05$). There were also differences in beliefs regarding the difficulty of pledging (initiation) with IFC registering stronger attitudes ($M_{IFC}$ =3.23; $M_{NPC}$ =2.67; d=0.416 $p\le.05$). Each of these effect sizes is small, with the effect size regarding difficulty approaching moderate. See Table 2.

## Discussion

We found that students understand the general purpose of initiation as well as the individual and collective positive impacts of joining a fraternity or sorority. In addition, beliefs about fraternities and sororities were overall positive. However, a general understanding may not translate to the specifics of initiation processes, especially when they bleed into hazing. The results indicate that students have a tolerance for hazing as shown by their responses to conformity to pledging (initiation) rules and difficulty in pledging (initiation) scales. That said, there are wider variations in student responses to the scales with white men and IFC members more likely to strongly agree to rule conformity and initiation difficulty. In this vein, our results are similar to Cokley et al. (2001). Additionally, both studies found that women felt that pledging should be a more positive experience than men.

It is clear from both studies that there is a gender effect in pledging/ hazing perceptions. IFC members in particular were more likely to believe in strong conformity to pledging rules, which may indicate greater complicity with mild forms of hazing. They also are more fervent in their beliefs that pledging processes should be difficult, although it should be noted that the effect sizes are small, approaching moderate. While a broader, cross-institutional study could produce more widely applicable results, these results important, especially given that the

**Table 2**

*Results*

| | Overall Mean (N=195) | By Race (N=192) | | | By Gender (N=192) | | | By Council (N=192) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *MSB* | *MSW* | *F* | Men | Women | *T* | *MSB* | *MSW* | *F* |
| Purpose of Pledging | 4.41 (0.43) | 0.93 | 0.17 | 5.39* | 4.46 (0.45) | 4.37 (0.42) | 1.44 | 0.5 | 0.18 | 2.7* |
| Impact of Pledging | 4.4 (0.48) | 0.27 | 0.24 | 1.14 | 4.28 (0.52) | 4.48 (0.45) | -2.78* | 0.54 | 0.23 | 2.32 |
| Conformity to Pledging Rules | 2.63 (0.87) | 0.53 | 0.77 | 0.69 | 2.95 (0.88) | 2.4 (0.79) | 4.55* | 4.53 | 0.7 | 6.46* |
| Beliefs & Perceptions of Greek Organizations | 3.83 (0.56) | 0.18 | 0.32 | 0.55 | 3.98 (0.58) | 3.73 (0.53) | 3.2* | 1.12 | 0.31 | 3.67* |
| Moral Concerns about Pledging | 3.82 (0.99) | 0.71 | 0.99 | 0.72 | 3.62 (1.08) | 3.4 (0.9) | -2.62* | 1.78 | 0.97 | 1.83 |
| Beliefs about Pledging Difficulty | 2.92 (0.82) | 0.37 | 0.69 | 0.53 | 3.25 (0.82) | 2.69 (0.76) | 4.85* | 4.55 | 0.63 | 7.29* |

more publicized hazing accounts are typically more violent and involve men. Nevertheless, men were slightly more likely than women to raise moral concern, indicating a willingness to report illegal activity or question activities with which they are uncomfortable. This latter finding may be attributable to differences in how men and women perceive their own abilities to voice concerns in life, fraternity/ sorority life notwithstanding (Gilligan, 1993). By contrast, women more likely to approach initiation processes more positively overall and may have fewer moral concerns.

Results in this study and in Cokley et al. (2001) varied in both magnitude and direction with respect to race/ ethnicity. Cokley et al. found that African American members had more positive beliefs about the purpose of pledging than Caucasian/European American and Latinx/ Hispanic members. In this research, we found the opposite: African American members had

fewer positive beliefs about the purpose of pledging than Caucasian/European American and Latinx/Hispanic members. It is unclear whether these differences may be real, reflecting differences evolving over time and space, or the result of sampling error, and/ or attributable to differences in survey administration (online as compared to face to face). Survey terminology itself may be part of this possible time conundrum. NPHC organizations banned pledging in favor of intake processes before Cokley et al.'s (2001) survey administration; however, it takes a longer time to change culture than policy. As such, the results we see may be reflective of a culture shift emanating from that ban.

**Study Limitations**

Limitations of this study as indicated above include the limited response rates of online surveys, verbiage within the instrument, as well as the questionable construction of at least two of

the survey scales. However, the wide variations found in those scale may be the distinction between students who are hazing tolerant and those who are not. In addition, this study is limited to a single large, doctoral, research extensive institution. Yet, results are consistent with the Cokley et.al study almost two decades ago. For our purposes, this indicates that there is work to be done on our campus and our hope in light of these findings is that other campuses are prompted to reflect on the attitudes of students towards initiation and hazing, tailoring campus programming to meet students where they are developmentally.

### Conclusion

This study assessed students' attitudes towards fraternity and sorority intake processes at a regional Mid-Atlantic University (MU) to gain an understanding of overall attitudes and discern whether students distinguish differences between hazing and initiation. Our research questions were what are the attitudes of MU fraternity and sorority members towards initiation and hazing and whether there were differences in student attitudes by gender, race/ethnicity, or council? Results indicate that students understand the general purpose of initiation and the positive impacts of fraternities and sororities; however, this general understanding does not translate to an understanding of the specifics activities involved in new member induction processes. In addition, we found that specified differences in understanding the hazing and pledging processes are greatest by gender and fraternity/sorority council.

### Implications for Future Practice and Research

Regarding the survey itself, we have several suggestions towards its reconstruction. First, terminology in Cokley et al. (2001) is problematic. We recommend a revision of the survey questions as the terminology in fraternities and sororities communities is constantly changing, so the survey questions should change as well, using procedures mapping across survey iterations that will allow researchers to compare results over time. Second, the questionnaire uses the terms "pledging" and "hazing" almost interchangeably. As discussed previously, these are defined and recognized as separate processes, and questions should reflect this clear delineation. Moreover, as the term "pledging" has negative connotations as well, it too should be replaced with a term such as "initiation" (Biddix et al., 2014). Third, this survey is long and several items are not relevant to hazing. These should be revised or deleted and replaced with relevant questions that will be easier for students to interpret. We suggest utilizing a focus group consisting of faculty members, fraternities and sororities professionals, students, and researchers to design a questionnaire that is more indicative of the current language used by students in fraternities and sororities.

With respect to practice, hazing continues to be a major problem in fraternities and sororities. The first priority of campus administrators must be the safety of students, including those who choose to join a fraternity or sorority. Ongoing education should be a major priority that begins before the members even join and should be a major part of the intake process. However, these messages seem to be delivered as blanket, no-tolerance policies having little effect on students' choices and behavior. In particular, women need to feel empowered enough to question practices that give them discomfort. More importantly, they need to feel that not only *should* they report illegal activity to appropriate campus personnel, but that it is the right thing to do ethically. For men, education may need to be more extensive. Males can learn that while participation in a fraternity yields significant benefits, that one cannot recoup those benefits if one is dead. Men at this age may also need education along the lines of understanding one's personal physical limits.

Colleges and universities can help sororities

and fraternities devise creative means to curb hazing. A long-standing program with a track record of positive results is Oregon State's Sigma Phi Epsilon chapter's Balanced Man Program (BMP) (Moody, 2006). In the BMP process, recruits become members immediately who work collaboratively across organization classes to enact membership development opportunities such as workshops on proper etiquette, yoga, and cooking skills. Moody (2006) reported the advantages for the students as well as the university that have come since the implementation of the BMP, including an 11% increase in recruits since 1990, a 50% reduction in alcohol related incidents over a five-year period, and an average grade point average of 3.0, the highest among fraternities on campus (Moody, 2006). The key is that as new classes of students enter campus and join organizations, educational initiatives must be ongoing given the cyclical ebb and flow of the hazing phenomenon. Beyond educating students, campus administrators as well as other faculty and staff involved in fraternity/ sorority life must not only talk zero hazing tolerance, but enforce it. Ongoing educational initiatives and accountability are essential elements to help eliminate hazing in fraternities and sororities.

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