

## **Vivir mi Vida: The Experience of Latino Gay Men as Fraternity/Sorority Professionals**

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Police brutality, same sex marriage, the confederate flag, and tragic shootings are just a few examples of the identity rooted events that have occurred within the U.S. just over the past few months alone. These happenings have sparked national discourse surrounding identity that fraternity/sorority professionals across the country are taking part in. While our involvement in these social identities based conversations is a great thing, we all too often leave out how these identities (i.e. race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, gender, religion, etc.) interact with one another within ourselves as individuals. This is a concept that Jones and McEwen (2000) identified as intersectionality; one is comprised of multiple identities that interact in different ways and have varying levels of saliency depending on contextual influences.

Intersecting identities often times lend themselves to unique issues, conversations, and even privileges that should be acknowledged. We, the authors of this article, share some unique intersecting identities that we spoke about together at the Association's 2014 Annual Meeting. Being gay Latino men who are in Latino based fraternities and are or have been campus-based professionals has created some commonalities among our experiences that may be unique to the intersectionality of those identities. Among them are a consciousness of language and its use, equitable service of students, and the importance of spaces that are both safe and welcoming.

The importance of language in the work we do cannot be understated. How we utilize language and what informs our approach to its use can be linked to our lived experiences. As young gay men, hearing the word faggot elicited a strong emotional response. Knowing that words can evoke such intense feelings and the consistent prescriptions of different labels to our targeted identities has developed a consciousness of how we engage colleagues and students with our words. With this consciousness comes a sense of responsibility to help develop the capacity of others to use language in ways that is often challenging. Engaging dialogues about homophobic language in heteronormative spaces proves challenging when coupled with the necessity to also challenge racist structures and speech. Even affinity spaces can be toxic if their understanding of our identities are compartmentalized and fail to provide room for intersections. We are not only gay men; we are gay Latino men.

This can manifest itself in our professional work in the field in ways that many might deem trivial if it were not for the implications on students. An example might be the desire to have organizations on our campuses move away from the use of "house" to refer to themselves instead of "chapter." One might assume the implications of such usage are minimal but they are not. Many groups often utilize campus and community facilities that are not houses for their operations. When students and staff are using language that excludes members of the fraternity/sorority community on their campus they are affecting the experiences of students who are already feeling alienated. Similarly, when describing various activities and practices on campus are we really saying what we mean to say? Is this really "Sorority Recruitment" when we mean "Panhellenic Recruitment?" Another trap is describing students' engagement from the

dominant lens. Why do we often refer to the practices of Latino/a fraternal groups as “alternatives” to the IFC/Panhellenic practices? We must develop the vocabulary necessary to help our students feel welcome in our spaces and communities. They may not remember much but they will remember how we have made them feel.

Another area where the intersection of our minoritized identities (ethnicity, sexual orientation, and affiliation) has created a specific consciousness is with regards to the service of our students. The Latino Greek movement is relatively new in relation to our interfraternal peers, and thus has left our undergraduate membership without much of an established inter/national structure with which to support themselves. The three of us are all too familiar with the frustration of knowing the additional support needed for our Latino based and Multicultural Greek organizations from campus-based professionals, and yet not being able to provide that support due to the resources that are often seized by catering to the needs of dominant groups. These appropriated resources can be anything from budget allocations, access to senior-level administrators, or even our available time. When dominant chapters require a majority of our resources to function properly and safely, inequitable distribution of those resources to our Latino and Multicultural organizations becomes inevitable. Time and time again we have had to apologize to groups (some with which we still have membership) for not being able to provide for them because the other groups have required so much of us, thus perpetuating a system where our own groups remain oppressed. The “othering” that can occur when we, as administrators, fail to service students equitably can continue to compound students’ feelings of exclusion.

As Latino fraternal men, we have experienced being the “other” in spaces that were not welcoming to aspects crucial to our identities: ethnicity, sexual orientation, and affiliation. Specifically, we have felt minoritized by our fraternal partners with regard to our affiliations; those “multicultural and Latino fraternities.” In other instances, it has been regarding our sexual orientation; we have been emasculated because we identify as gay men. Fortunately, our respective fraternities have provided us the safe space in which to be our true selves, but this was not always the case. Although each of the safe spaces were originally created by gay identifying brothers (some who were open with their sexual orientation, others in the midst of the coming out process), these spaces were initially secret, serving as a support system for those brothers only. In time, these spaces have allowed us to be empowered in our identities as gay fraternal men, garnering the respect of our fraternity brothers all the while advocating for us, regardless of our sexual orientation. Of importance to note: each of our fraternities views us first and foremost as fraternity men, most importantly as their brothers. In essence, we are equal to all members.

The theme of this issue of *Essentials* is “How **IT** Shapes Our Work.” For us, the “it” is intersectionality. Our intersected salient identities revolve around four facets: Latino ethnicity, fraternity man, Gay, and student affairs professional. These identities and the way they intersect continue to shape our work on a daily basis. Our hope is to take the ever present one dimensional conversation of identity within the fraternal movement, and graduate to conversation that accounts for the multiple dimensions of identity we all possess.

## References

Jones, S.R., & McEwen, M.K. (2000). A conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41, 405-413