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Latina Sorority Membership Impact on the Experience and Persistence of Latinas In Higher Education

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Latina Sorority Membership Impact on the Experience and Persistence of Latinas In Higher
Education

by
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I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook* of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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Luz D. Randolph
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First, to my God! I am a humble servant and I hope that through this field I can continue to serve you! To my husband you are an angel. Thank you for encouraging me to follow my dreams. To my children, you are too young now to understand what was going on; but know that the sacrifices made by mami were with you in mind. Your kisses and hugs fueled me when I had no more to give.

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Abstract

Latina Sorority Membership Impact on the Experience and Persistence of Latinas In Higher Education, Luz D. Randolph, 2018; Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education. Keywords: Latina-based sororities, membership, persistence.

Latinas face many challenges upon their matriculation to a university, including culture shock, acclimation and sense of belonging. Such challenges threaten their retention and success. Having support or a sense of belonging within higher education are notions that influence Latina students to continue or persist in school. An emphasized venue, which supports the educational journey of undergraduate Latinas, is involvement in organizations that reflect their culture. The problem addressed was the need to investigate how sorority involvement impacted their experience and persistence. Conducting research on Latina sorority membership and whether it has an impact on the experience and persistence of Latinas was important especially when focusing the discussion on predominantly White institutions (PWI) as research is scarce. Using a qualitative approach, the researcher set out to explore how membership in Latina-based sororities impacted the experience and persistence of Latinas in a predominantly White institution.

A total of nine women from four different sororities at a predominantly White institution in central Florida participated in this hermeneutic phenomenological approach study which provided an opportunity to highlight and understand the lived experiences of the participants. Data collection methods included a demographic form and one-on-one interviews. Data received through these methods were analyzed using narrative analysis.

Four themes emerged from the data analysis – sisterhood, identity and sense of belonging, values and beliefs, and academic support. It was evident through the reiteration of themes and experiences that all participants' membership had a profound impact on their collegiate experience. Participants reiterated that their respective organization provided a family/support system not expected, helped them with their cultural identity as well as secure a sense of belonging on a predominantly White campus. The nurturing of sisterhood and identity and sense of belonging are due to the shared experiences provided by their sorority membership. The pledging process appeared to provide experiences which helped the women become close-knit; experiences after their initiation further enhanced the sisterhood bond created. When discussing the academic support received, it was evident by participants' responses that their organization provided resources to help navigate the academic system. However, all participants, including undergraduates, shared that they did not feel their membership, or the resources provided specifically contributed to their current or past academic success.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Hispanic presence in college has increased in the U.S.; however, Hispanics' "enrollment in higher education has not kept pace relative to their population growth" (Turner & García, 2005, p. 178). Data from 2013 indicated women across all demographic classifications make up 56.51% of the overall enrollment in undergraduate programs with Hispanic women representing 57.73% of that set (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Per Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions Report by the U.S. Department of Education's (USDE) National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 37.5% of students attending two-year or four-year institutions are classified Hispanic (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Of the 37.5% enrolled, more than half are Latina women seeking a college degree. Exploring and understanding the experiences and challenges faced by Latinas while attempting to attain a college education are important to future scholars, university staff, and administrators to assist Latina women in their college campus. This research will address Latina student involvement outside of the classroom, specifically in Latina-based Greek letter organizations (LBGLO).

Recognizing the impact college experiences have on Latina/os, it is important to understand why Latina women chose to increase involvement. Alexander Astin's Theory of Involvement is the framework that guides the need to research if sorority membership impacts the experience and persistence of Latinas in higher education. Published in 1985, the core concept of the theory is based on three elements-inputs, environment, and outputs- along with five basic claims about involvement (Astin, 1999).

First, Astin defines "inputs" as the student's demographics, background, and any previous experiences which have shaped or provided a certain foundation to the student. Next, is the student's "environment" which, accounts for all the experiences they have in college. This

factor helps the student learn inside and outside the classroom. Lastly, the third element is "outcome" which encompasses the student's knowledge, characteristics and beliefs after they have graduated college (Astin, 1999).

Each of the elements feed into the five basic assumptions about involvement. Astin (1984b) argues that involvement requires an investment of psychosocial and physical energy. The student must be invested in their involvement. Secondly, he states involvement is continuous, and that the amount of energy invested varies from student to student. Next, aspects of involvement may be qualitative and quantitative. A student's development is directly related to the extent to which they were involved. Lastly, academic performance is correlated with the student involvement.

To fully understand the experience of Latinas one must look at the inputs (past experiences they bring in), the environment (surrounding where the inputs will be noticed), and the outputs (gains from the environment they are in). Other theories can be applied to this specific topic, however; the foundation must begin with the involvement and its primary focus of the experiences.

Statement of the Problem

Latinos accounted for almost 75% of the growth in college student enrollments between 2010-2011 (Fry & Lopez, 2012) in predominantly White institutions. Predominantly White institution (PWI) is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment. Enrollment for undergraduate women of color in colleges and universities has more than doubled over the last three decades, increasing from 16.9% to 40.3% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012a) however, degree conferrals for women of color is at 29.8% in comparison to their White counterpart which is at

67.5% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012b). Having support or a sense of belonging within higher education are notions that influence Latina students to continue or persist in school. An emphasized venue, which supports the educational journey of undergraduate Latinas, is involvement in organizations that reflect their culture. Latinos still face issues of separation, isolation, cultural stereotyping and language barriers that can impede their success as they enter college (Gilroy, 2008). Montelongo's 2003 study of Latina involvement with college student organizations and its effects on specific student outcomes indicated that 45% of students believed that cultural organizations enhance students' connections to the overall college community. Latino Based Greek Letter Organizations (LBGLOs) are part of that experience. A closer analysis of factors that support and encourage retention and academic achievement in higher education is pressing.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how Astin's Theory of Involvement relates to sorority membership and its impact on the experience and persistence on graduation of Latinas at a predominantly White institution. The problem being addressed is the need to investigate how sorority involvement assists Latinas in their experience and persistence. Other studies discuss enrollment, persistence, and retention but do not link academic retention to student organization involvement, specifically that of Latina-based organizations (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013). Conducting research on Latina sorority membership and whether it has an impact on the experience and persistence of Latinas is important especially when focusing the discussion on predominantly White institutions (PWI).

Institutions vary in their enrollment of Latina students as a function of geography, institutional context and setting (Burciaga & Zarate, 2010); therefore, not every institution,

including those in the same geographical area, is guaranteed to have the same Latina-based sorority, if any at all. Qualitative research in this area will offer detailed views of students' experiences while providing multiple perspectives. By examining this topic, in a qualitative manner that involves students there will be a better understanding of the Latina student experience. Furthermore, this research will provide information on what Latina women consider to be determining factors in attaining their degree.

Definition of Terms

The term Hispanic/Latino is often used to refer to people with cultural ties to Latin America and people of nationalities within the bounds of Latin America. Per Rodriguez (2008), "Latino is an actual Spanish word that refers to people with Latin American ancestry which includes the Spanish Caribbean, Central and South America as well as those from Spain" (p.16). For this study, these two terms are used interchangeably and to promote inclusivity. The term Latina is used when addressing members of the community who identify as women.

Sororities are social organizations located in colleges and/or universities. Membership is typically single-sexed, and the women can join during their undergraduate years at a participating college or university or as a professional. For this study, sororities are a membership-based group whose membership is composed of individuals who identify as women.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Latinos in Higher Education

Education is typically the foundation on which all other aspects of personal and economic well-being are built. However, that isn't always the case for the millions of Latinos in the United States. In the last decade reports have shared that by 2050 Latinos will no longer be considered a minority, but rather a majority. In 2012, 70 percent of Hispanic high school graduates enrolled in college (Fry & Taylor, 2013). Conversely, in that same year 63 percent of Latino children did not attend preschool (Gandara, 2015). Latino enrollment in higher education is contingent upon the accessibility, affordability and support system built into current college structure. Encouraging developments have occurred over the past 10 years regarding Latino college enrollment; however, they remain an underrepresented and underserved population across virtually all post-secondary education sectors (Santiago, Calderon Galdeano, & Taylor, 2015). There is relatively little extant literature that examines the experiences of Hispanic first-generation college students. The literature that does exist shows, that a disproportionate number of first-generation Hispanic college students come from lower socio-economic classes, are foreign-born and come from households where English is not the primary language. Additional barriers that impede Latinos to be successful in college include media's representation of the culture, legal status, cost and lack of faculty representation.

Poverty and parental education attainment. Research indicates that socioeconomic status and parental education attainment play a key role in education outcomes and in the decision whether to pursue higher education (Dubow, Boxer, & Huesmann, 2009). These two barriers are important to highlight as they correlate and have a large impact on student success in higher education.

Poverty is defined by a set of measurements composed by the U.S. Census Bureau (the Bureau) which uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty (Bureau, 2017). According to the Bureau, in 2015 more than 43 million people lived below the poverty line. One fourth or 10.7 million of those people were Latinas. Latinos seem to be at the forefront of this epidemic. According to Krogstad and Flores (2016) Latinos experience a poverty rate above 20 percent. Furthermore, nine percent of Latinos live in deep poverty, which is defined as an income below 50 percent of the federal poverty measure, compared with six percent of the total population (Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, & Singh, 2014). It can be assumed Latinos experience poverty due to their rapid growth in population and very little resources that can accommodate for such. A report done by the U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that the rates for food insecurity for Hispanics were higher than the nation's average - 22.4 percent versus 14 percent (USDA, 2016). Additional factors such as "pride" prohibit this population from inquiring for assistance. Even with government programs like food stamps, Hispanic households have a high rate of food insecurity, unlike their White counterparts.

Next, poverty has been linked to a delay in the cognitive development of children. A new study found that low socioeconomic status could inhibit brain growth due to family stress, greater exposure to environmental toxins or insufficient nutrition (Hackman & Farrah, 2009). Money stressors prevent families from having the resources to provide the necessary nutrition for their children. Additionally, money stressors hinder the parents' decision to enroll their children in preschool. In 2012, 63 percent of Latino children did not attend preschool (Gandara, 2015); parents indicated cost as a major factor for their decision. Programs offered to parents that provide reduced day care exist, but not all states have the same guidelines. Often Latino parents

resolve in leaving their child at home in the care of relative than to spend money in the education needed.

Research demonstrates that Hispanics under the poverty threshold have a high school diploma serving as a major driving force in the persistence of poverty among Latinos. While Latinas have made progress in attaining a college degree, earning that four-year college degree comes with a multitude of challenges, making it excessively difficult to achieve upward economic mobility and, thus, break the cycle of poverty. Four-year colleges are an effective mechanism in avoiding individual and intergenerational poverty however the impact poverty has on the development of a child could pose an obstacle for admission, retention and completion.

Because of poverty, Latinas are more likely to be in high poverty and segregated elementary and secondary schools. "Thirty-eight percent of Latinas were attending high-poverty schools in 2011 compared to just six percent of white females" (Gandara, 2015, pg. 10). High-poverty schools have more challenges and far fewer resources to meet the demands required for the students they serve. A report compiled by the ACT showed that 83 percent of Hispanic students reported planning to enroll in college. However, nearly half of these ACT-tested 2014 high school graduates – 47 percent – met none of the four ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. In comparison, about one-third – 31 percent – of all ACT-tested 2014 high school graduates met none of the four ACT College Readiness benchmarks (ACT, 2015). Access to prep courses is vital to assist students to attain a college education. However, courses that would assist any student, particularly those in the Latino community are limited due to budget cuts within high school programs. As Latino students matriculate in colleges across the nation, many receive offers to attend college from programs that assist in the access to higher education. Federal programs like TRIO and GEAR UP, designed to identify and provide services for individuals

from disadvantaged backgrounds, not only facilitate the access but help provide specialized resources for this population. However, in the last few years such programs have been in turmoil. Budget cuts have threatened the existence in colleges across the nation. If programs like TRIO or GEAR up exist, they tend to receive budget cuts that hinder the assistance they aimed to provide.

Increasing Latino educational attainment in the United States would improve the quality of individual lives by increasing human capital. Therefore, focused investment of time, energy, and monetary resources in Latino education is practical for a variety of reasons. Parental educational attainment is significantly linked to children's educational outcomes. Well-educated parents have a stronger understanding than their peers of the skills needed to achieve academic success, allowing them to better support their children in school. Additionally, parents with higher levels of education tend to have higher expectations for their children's educational attainment, which makes them more likely to engage in behaviors with their children – such as reading, playing, and exhibiting warmth – that promote social and intellectual growth (Davis-Kean, 2005).

Language barriers. About half of all Latinas will also enter school speaking Spanish as their first language. Instead of the school systems recognizing their native language as an asset, often these students are placed in remedial programs that track them into lower level curricula and slow their academic progress (Gandara, 2017)**.** Language barriers severely limit many Latino students' ability to succeed academically in the United States. With 58 percent living with one or more immigrant parent (Foxen, 2010); many Latino children receive little or no English exposure outside of school settings. A 2007 Pew Research Institute report by Hakimzadeh and Cohn (2009) indicated that less than one fourth of adult first-generation Latino immigrants are fluent in

English, and although fluency increases dramatically across generations, second - and third - generation immigrants do not unanimously achieve fluency, speaking English at rates of 88 and 94 percent, respectively. Although the majority of second and third generation Latinos speaks English fluently, there remain many Latinos in the United States who have not achieved fluency. Many young Latinas who are still learning English must simultaneously overcome the initial disadvantages of poverty, lack of decent academic resources, and the challenge of learning a new language and culture, while simultaneously trying to catch up with their native English-speaking peers. Many Latino students rely on their schools to provide them with the ability to read, write, and speak English at a level comparable with their peers. If their schools fail to provide adequate English instruction, students will inevitably suffer academically. Limited English proficiency creates excessive difficulties in educational success. Students who lack a mastery of English quickly lag their classmates due to difficulty understanding the material being discussed. Many schools not only lack the resources to provide appropriate curriculum that can prepare Latinos for college, but they also do not, at the present, provide sufficient language support to Latinos. In 2004, less than three percent of the nation's teachers of English language learners had completed formal certification to work with this population, and only 27 percent believed that they were sufficiently prepared to teach them (American Federation of Teachers, 2004). Eight years later, Samson & Collins (2012), highlight the inconsistencies still plaguing the field. Per their study, "there is insufficient information on what teachers should know about teaching English Language Learners (ELLs)" (pg. 8). Additionally, it remains that there are inconsistencies across states in the required skills necessary to teach ELLs. States such as Arizona, California, Pennsylvania and New York, require specific course work for their teacher candidates in relation to ELLs; others make references to the special needs. However, 15 states have no requirements

(Samson & Collins, 2012). Introducing bilingual education in public schools and increasing the support provided to Latino parents would have a significant positive impact on Latino education outcomes.

Media's representation of the culture. Historically Latinos have not only been portrayed negatively through stereotypes, but they have also been largely ignored and excluded from most American media. From 2012-2013, 17 percent of Latino movie characters and 24.2 percent of TV characters were linked to a crime, a large increase from 1996 where only six percent of TV characters were somehow involved in a crime (Muntaner, 2016). Media research demonstrates how viewers and readers obtain a sense of reality from news programming that is both vested in and supported by a hegemonic mainstream white-American culture (Means-Coleman, 2000). The portrayal of Latinos as criminals or maids has a negative impact on their self-esteem. Research indicates that exposure to these stereotypes of Latinos demonstrate that media images can influence audience members in terms of numerous cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Sink & Mastro, 2017). Scholars have argued that Latinos who frequently consume media content are more likely to downplay the importance of their ethnic group in society because of their absence on screen and may internalize negative stereotypes about themselves. While more research is needed to correlate whether such images have a negative impact on college-bound Latinos, it can be concluded that continuous stereotypical portrayal can cause for Latinos aspiring to go to college to believe they aren't meant to be successful in the "White collar" world.

Legal status. Latinos constitute a significant portion of the United States' immigrant population, with 46 percent of the nation's immigrants reported to be of Hispanic origin (Zong & Batalova, 2015). Being first-generation with barriers such as poverty, parental education and

language barriers has an impact on Latinos in higher education however, being undocumented poses the biggest challenge. The U.S. unauthorized immigrant population – 11.1 million in 2014 – has stabilized since the end of the Great Recession, as the number from Mexico declined but the total from other regions of the world increased, according to new Pew Research Center estimates based on government data (Passell & Cohn, 2016). Little information can be gathered about the number of students attending the over 4,000 colleges and universities across the country. And while the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and state legislation have increased the access to four-year colleges for this population, undocumented students enroll at low rates due to the uncertainty of their status, the lack of finances available, and other restrictions that could be posed by the individual college or state.

Cost. Pursuing a college degree after high school is of utmost importance to Latinos in the United States. Roughly eight-in-ten Hispanics cited education as very important to their vote in the 2016 election (Krogstad, 2016, a.). Higher education however, comes at a higher cost to Latinas/os. Chacon (2012) analyzed the experiences and perceptions of low-income Latina/o students enrolled in community colleges. While budget cuts played a role in the factors prohibiting the completion of Latinas/os' education, it was the cost of financing their education that worsened their chances. Students from low income families must pay a larger percentage of their income for tuition which makes their families more dependent on financial aid. "Across the nation, Latinas/os rely on need-based assistance programs such as Pell Grants" (p. 210). For many Hispanics, economic factors remain an obstacle to college enrollment thus some choosing to work as to not impose the tuition bill on their already stressed household (Krogstad, 2016, b). In a 2014 National Journal poll, 66 percent of Hispanics who went into the work force or enlisted in the armed forces after high school did so because they needed to help their families. Despite

the growing college enrollment, young Latinos and Latinas are choosing to bypass college so that they could go into the workforce or enroll at a community college. This decision results in lower tuition however may be associated with a higher attrition rate.

       Lack of representation in faculty and administration. Another important factor affecting Latinos in higher education is the lack of representation amongst faculty and administration. Between 2003 and 2014, the percentage of Latinos among all faculty members grew from 2 to 4 percent, moving the ratio of Latino students to Latino faculty from 80:1 to 90:1 over the same period, according to the Excelencia report, published at the organization's annual Accelerating Latino Student Success (ALASS) workshop in Washington, D.C. (Morris, 2016). While faculty numbers rose minimally, the same cannot be said for Latinos in positions of leadership such as presidencies. According to the American Council on Education's (ACE) 2012 survey, "The American College President 2012", assessed college presidencies in 2011. The survey highlighted that Hispanic presidents, who represented 3.8 percent of all presidents in the survey (ACE, 2012a), saw the largest decline among minority presidents since 2006 (Stripling, 2012). The same survey was administered in 2017 assessing presidencies in 2016. The results showed a .01 percent growth for Hispanic presidencies (ACE, 2017b). More alarming is estimates on women holding leadership positions. Leon (2008) showed that Hispanic women occupy .7 percent of all presidencies; an incredible statistic when women are the majority of undergraduates in the United States (Stripling, 2012). Moreover, much of Hispanic presidencies are held at two-year colleges. In the rise from community college to research institutions many find far fewer Latino administrators. Leon et. al. found that 3.7 percent of administrators at four-year public institutions were Latinos. Why are Latinos so scarce? Is the route to leadership and professorship challenging? Is it attainable for this population? The route to professorship or

leadership for any group comes with its obstacles but for Latinos is much slower and brings different challenges. First, a graduate degree is virtually essential; which poses a challenge since Latino students struggle from preschool through college. Additionally, obstacles such as acclimation and lack of resources Latino students face during their undergraduate years to attain a degree may also deter them from continuing their education. Although limited research of exploring personal and academic development of Latina/os exists it has highlighted the challenges and unique needs of this population (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Garcia, 2005) More is needed to gain an understanding of the unique transition, adjustment, and persistence that contribute to the success of Latinos in higher education.

Student Development/Student Engagement and Impact on Retention

  Astin's Student Development Theory. Several theories have emerged over the last few decades explaining the relationship between student retention and involvement. Much research by Astin revolves around the impact of student involvement and student outcomes in college. His essential assertion is that students must be actively engaged in their surroundings to learn and grow in college (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). As such, Astin (1984b) defines involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297). The theory of student involvement has its roots in a longitudinal study of college dropouts (Astin, 1975a) that strived to identify the factors in the college environment that significantly affect students' persistence. Through his research, Astin concluded that every significant effect could be rationalized in terms of the involvement concept which he defined in his 1984 work in five basic postulates: "involvement is a physical and psychological investment; occurs along a continuum; has both quantitative and qualitative features; the amount of student learning and personal development is directly proportional to the

quality and quantity of student involvement; and lastly its effectiveness on any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement" (Astin, 1984, p. 519) Through his findings, Astin could determine that the most significant environmental factors that impacted student retention were the student's residence, holding a part-time job on campus, and those who participated in social fraternities and sororities (Astin, 1984b, p. 523).

Astin conducted additional research working with Sax (1997; 1998) and Vogelgesang (1999c) that further addressed the multiple benefits undergraduates obtain by being involved in service and experiential learning activities. These benefits include the reinforcement of concepts and theories learned in the classroom and activities that prepare them for different careers. Further research confirms the positive impact student involvement has on the personal growth and development of the student and how it encourages persistence and facilitates academic achievement (Garcia, 2005; Torbenson, 2009). Involvement in social fraternities has proven to empower students to become leaders inside and outside their college campuses (Guardia & Evans, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nuñez, 2004; Sanchez, 2011). Additionally, student involvement in fraternities and sororities provides a community of support (Bureau, Ahren, Shoup, & Torres, 2011). This support can translate into opportunities for peer interaction, academic support, campus involvement, community service, and leadership development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Schlossberg's theory on marginality and mattering. Schlossberg's theory on marginality and mattering is also an important concept recognized in college student success (Evans et al., 1998). According to Schlossberg, students feel marginalized when they sense they do not fit it in, which leads to negative outcomes such as "self-consciousness, irritability, and

depression" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 27). Schlossberg emphasizes the role that post-secondary

institutions have on making students feel significant since that feeling precedes student

involvement in college activities and programs. The feeling of significance is heightened when

discussing minority students especially Latinas. Latinas enroll in college as first generation with

little to no knowledge of what to expect and no guidance offered from their parents, who often,

did not attend college. The first step to becoming engaged and involved on college campuses is

for students to interact with their peers. For Latinas, these "interactions" often revolve around a

cultural similarity. These interactions are imperative for all students but especially for Latinas as

it will reinforce academic learning and permeate into other areas of college life such "as

discussing policies and issues related to campus activities; having serious discussions about

religious, philosophical, or political beliefs; discussing personal problems; discussing the arts,

science, technology, or international relations; and talking about an idea brought up in class"

(Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 121). While it is true that students must experience academic

success to remain in college, it is also vital that they become involved and engaged in other areas

of college life. Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) state that "personal adjustment and integration

into the social fabric of campus life plays a role at least as important as academic factors in

student retention" (p. 286).

Hurtado and Carter's (1997) analysis of data from the National Survey of Hispanic

Students (NSHS) provided insight into the level of "students' sense of belonging" via a research

sample of 272 students attending 127 colleges. The researchers investigated whether membership

in various student organizations or class year significantly impacted students' sense of belonging

or whether there was a link between a range of academic activities and students' sense of

belonging. The data demonstrated that Hispanic students who frequently interacted with

professors outside of the classroom and tutored others felt a higher sense of belonging than those who were less engaged with faculty or in academic discussions with other students.

Hurtado et.al. found that student organizations did, generally, positively affect Latino student social integration by providing the student with a greater sense of connection and identification with the campus. Additionally, both the type of student organization and the class year the student participated in affected the level of social integration. The merging of the academic and social interactions seemed to prompt a greater sense of belonging for Latina/o students, which supported Tinto's theory of academic and social integration. The results, however, revealed no definitive sense of whether Latino students' belonging to culturally-specific organizations created significantly different levels of social integration than non-culturally-specific groups. The authors concluded that additional research was needed to better understand the impact of participation in cultural organizations on Latino students' social integration.

Tinto's model of student retention. According to the research it is evident that students must become engaged in experiences which promote both academic and social reinforcement. However, Tinto (1993) affirms that "…it is entirely possible for individuals to achieve integration in the academic system of college without doing so in the social domain" (p. 120). Furthermore, Tinto found that students who do not become socially integrated may or may not suffer from persistence issues, depending on the individual. Therefore, it can be assumed based on his research that students who become involved in campus activities, organizations, and extracurricular activities, which promote involvement and integration of college life, have higher chances of attrition. One of the most widely known types of college organizations are Greek organizations. Some higher education professionals are somewhat doubtful regarding the impact

of these organizations on academics. Pascarella, Flowers and Whitt (2001) discovered, however, that the negative effects of Greek affiliation decreased after the first year, and for sororities yielded increases in writing skills and scientific reasoning. Although the findings regarding the impact on academics are somewhat ambivalent, Pike and Askew (1990) clearly conclude that belonging to these Greek organizations contributes psychologically to a student's sense of community and increase levels of involvement on college campuses. When students feel like they are a part of the campus community, they are more likely to feel loyal towards their institution and persist (Bean, 2005). While research does not specify Latinas as part of their sample, understanding that involvement in groups such as sororities can have a positive impact on cognitive reasoning is important and impressive, especially since research indicates Latinas are at a disadvantage.

Tinto (1975, 1993) takes the approach to understanding college attrition, in which personal attributes and experiences prior to entering college lead to students' goals and intention about pursuing a college degree. Knowing that Latina/o students are most likely the first in their families to attend college, it is understood that once in the post-secondary educational institutions, these students are confronted with a set of new experiences which may not be aligned with their expectations or abilities to navigate (Sweat, Jones, Han, & Wolfgram, 2013). Thus, in the absence of family, some research indicates that students join social groups to develop second families. Garcia et.al (2005) notes "friend support" was related to school engagement. Latino youth who reported greater trust and closeness with their peers "were more likely to be more positively engaged in school" than those who do not (p. 267). It is important for students, particularly students in this population, to feel connected and supported. The connection and supports assist in their continued efforts to remain enrolled and graduate.

According to Tinto (1993), social integration can be disrupted by two sources: incongruence and isolation. Incongruence refers to the institutional fit and can be based on student perceptions of the campus climate and whether the student feels welcomed or not. A student's judgment of whether they "fit" at an institution of higher education is based on their perception of shared values and support within their collegiate environment. Integration with academic and social communities supports positive institutional fit and full integration of the student into the collegiate life. Isolation refers to limitations on students' ability to interact with others and engage in day-to-day life on campus. The notion of isolation has been linked to the concept of subcultures and the importance, particularly for Students of Color, of finding a group with which to connect and form community. This identification with the institution based on the connections made by students is defined as a "sense of belonging" (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002, p. 228). Tinto (1993) suggests that to avoid incongruence and isolation, students need a place where they feel a sense of belonging and are integrated within the campus. The higher the sense of belonging, the more likely the student will persist (Hoffman et al., 2002). Considering how sense of belonging is manifested in the experiences of Latino students may assist us in addressing their feelings of marginality. Tinto's theory has helped explain feelings of marginalization and cultural incongruence that Latinas may feel at a predominantly White institution (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000).

As a sub-set of his social integration theory, Tinto (1993) described the diversity of student communities on campus as sub-cultures. He asserted that persistence of Students of Color is predicated on the ability of students to form a viable community of like students. According to Tinto (1993), a student's ethnicity is one of many criteria for defining a sub-culture or community. Therefore, involvement in ethnically-defined organizations or subcultures has

been shown to prompt persistence for Students of Color by providing a vehicle for the experience of social integration and belonging. Tinto's theory indicates that cultural student organizations could be particularly effective in providing both a connection to a culture and the ability to gain important information from upper-class students. Culturally-defined sororities are a particularly clear example of organizations that support belonging, integration and involvement as conceptualized in Tinto's (1993) and Astin's (1984) theories.

Phinney's model of ethnic identity development. Jean S. Phinney studied the importance of ethnicity for minority group members to understand their specific identity development. Her model has three stages- (a) unexamined ethnic identity, (b) ethnic identity search/moratorium and (c) ethnic identity achievement (Phinney, 1993, a). Unexamined ethnic identity refers to individuals who fall into two categories based on the influence or knowledge of existing identity- diffusion where an individual has not encountered ethnicity as an issue or topic and foreclosure where an individual has collected information about ethnicity from family and peers and succumbs to the information without interacting with said group. Ethnic identity search/moratorium focuses on the individual searching for more information about their identity. Lastly, when an individual achieves ethnic identity, they recognize and are informed about their own ethnic identity and are also aware and appreciative of others (Phinney, 2007b). It must first be understood that ethnic identity is the way in which individuals come to understand the implications of their ethnicity and make decisions about its role in their lives (Phinney, 1989). In the first stage individuals have not explored their own ethnicity and may be disinterested. Through her research, Phinney encountered that, for several individuals in her study, ethnicity was a nonissue which could lead to diffusion or foreclosure. However, this is important to understand when considering Latinas and their own understanding of their culture. College will

most likely be the first time they are away from home and their family. Thus, they have not had the chance to explore their ethnicity through the lens of a community they are not familiar with. In stage 2 individuals talk with friends and family, read literature, take courses, learn cultural customs as they research more about who they are and where they come from. This stage is especially important when analyzing Latinas who identify as such but are second, even third generation, and far removed from the culture their mothers know. Lastly, stage 3 is where the individual resolves their identity conflicts and accepts membership in their culture. This stage is particularly important as it may provide an understanding why Latinas engage with specific groups on campus, specifically Latina sororities.

Model of Hispanic identity development. Racial identity emphasizes questions of what drives individuals to adopt group identities. Helms' 1993 theory defines racial identity as a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a group (Chaze & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). In 2003, Vasti Torres developed the Model of Hispanic Identity Development from her 1999 research and initial theory Bicultural Orientation Model (BOM). BOM, Torres' 1999 theory, shows the relationship between acculturation and ethnic identity among Hispanic college students. Introduced in a pilot study (Torres & Phelps, 1997) the model is composed of four quadrants, created by intersecting acculturation and ethnic identity. Acculturation is defined as the process of adapting oneself to the broader social surroundings (Knight, Bernal, Garza, & Cota, 1993, p. 222). An individual's understanding of his or her culture constitutes the construct of ethnic identity and is based on the information from family and community. Through a questionnaire, Torres could identify students' level of acculturation or ethnicity, by three orientations- bicultural orientation, Hispanic orientation and marginal orientation. Bicultural orientation is a preference where the student can

function within most of their White peers without forgetting who they are. Hispanic orientation is a preference to function within a Hispanic culture whereas students in the marginal orientation are unable to function in either. What is important to recognize from Torres' theory is that Latinas may fluctuate among all three of the orientations presented. For example, a first-generation Latina may operate within the first year in the Hispanic orientation or marginalization. It is plausible based on the theory and understanding of Latinas in higher education that she may not move to a bicultural orientation until later in her academic journey pending her involvement within the institution.

Student Involvement in Cultural Organizations

Much research exists about the benefits of student involvement during college. The work of Alexander Astin is foundational to scholarship regarding student involvement. His 1984 and 1993 research outline and confirms the positive impacts of involvement on the personal and academic development of college students. Literature confirming student engagement in culturally based clubs and organizations results in a new-found sense of empowerment (Delgado-Guerrero & Garcia, 2013; Garcia-McMillian, 2009; & Montelongo, 2003).

Montelongo's 2003 study examined the college extracurricular experiences of Latina/o undergraduates and provided a foundation to understanding the relation among student, institution, and involvement and how those factors have an impact on two specific educational outcomes: satisfaction with college and academic achievement. The findings indicated that cultural organizations enhance students' connections to the overall college community; student organizations provided a "home away from home"; and proved that satisfaction with college is influenced by college environments and experiences. Latina/o students agree minority and Latina/o organizations enhance campus and community connections. The more connections

students have the more likely they are to have higher levels of satisfaction with their college experience. As for academic achievement, when Latina/o students participate in community-based organizations or minority student organizations, their level of academic achievement (i.e., grade point average) will likely increase. They feel a sense of support and responsibility to the individuals they are being socially supported by and provide a sense of adjustment.

While Montelongo's research concentrated on non-Greek letter organizations, Garcia-McMillian's 2009 study analyzed the effect Greek membership has on students' social and academic lives. Her research determined that membership in a sorority created "an agential space that allowed them to embrace their culture, while providing service to their communities, yet being supported in their education quest" (Garcia-McMillian, 2009, p. 76). Further research from Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria (2013) using a psychosociocultural (PSC) approach on 115 undergraduate women and indicated the variance of academic persistence and social support was correlational; in other words, women who felt supported by their peers were successful academically.

Pertaining to the impact on students and membership in ethnic and cultural Greek letter organizations, members of LGLOs have the potential to facilitate ethnic/racial identity development and enhance a sense of belonging for students of color (Atkinson, Dean, and Espino, 2010). Baker (2008) and Negy and Lunt (2008) highlight that culturally based student organizations influence academic success through social support, access to faculty of color, and an increased level of self-efficacy. This can lead to a stronger academic identity, enhanced satisfaction with the university, and improved overall persistence.

Literature on Fraternities' and Sororities' Beginnings

Greek life began as a form of extracurricular academic debate and inquiry at the College of William & Mary. It was there where the first secret society, Flat Hat Club (F.H.C.), was established in 1750 (Bonzo, 2014). F.H.C led the way to the founding of Phi Beta Kappa (PBK) (Whipple, Crichlow, & Click, 2008) in 1776 (Johnson, 1972). The establishment of Phi Beta Kappa, and its precedence for secrecy, set in motion the establishment of over 70 Greek letter organizations across college campuses, all of which were composed of "white, male, Christian students of proper breeding" (Bonzo, 2014). It was not until 1825, with the establishment of Kappa Alpha, that a resurgence of fraternities began to take place. Sigma Phi and Delta Phi followed KA's establishment and are still in existence today. Boasting memberships between 30-100 members per semester; predominantly white fraternities are some of the largest groups on college campuses across the nation.

The founding of the Adelphian Society, later named Alpha Delta Pi (ADPi) in 1851 was the establishment of the first "women's fraternity"(Alpha Delta Pi, 2017). Sixteen years after ADPi's founding, Pi Beta Phi became the first organization of college women as a "national college fraternity". Three years later Kappa Alpha Theta was organized as the first Greek letter society for women. By 1888, twenty-three women's Greek letter organizations were established. The development of "fraternities for women" during this time was a major accomplishment in the way of women's rights and equality.

Both the fraternities and sororities founded in the 1800s were a way of seeking independence from college administrators however; it also provided a sense of status. Members of these traditional, White fraternities and sororities were afforded the opportunity to attend a

college and university because they typically came from well-off families who were educated. The same cannot be said for the historically black fraternities and sororities and the Latino/multicultural fraternities and sororities.

African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Divine Nine

At the start of the 20th century Black students were excluded in all areas of higher education including fraternal organizations. The creation of Black fraternal organizations acted as cultural and social maps for the Black community (Malarney, 2014). The Black fraternal movement for collegians was first attempted in Bloomington, Indiana with the establishment of Alpha Kappa Nu in 1902 (Kimbrough, 2003) Alpha Kappa Nu was established by Black students to "foster a better life on the Indiana campus" (Kimbrough, 2003. Pg. 23). Alpha Kappa Nu was a short-lived venture. However, a more substantive effort began in Philadelphia where an African American doctor joined forces with five others to establish Sigma Pi Phi or Boulé. From the onset, Sigma Pi Phi was to be an organization composed of an elite class of Black citizens with membership offered to college graduates. "Another Black fraternal organization prior to 1906 was Gamma Phi Fraternity, founded on March 1, 1905" (Kimbrough, 2003, pg. 29).   Unlike Sigma Pi Phi, Gamma Phi was established by undergraduate students at Wilberforce University. Unlike Alpha Kappa Nu, it boasted a large following noting in a 1924 yearbook photo a 35-member roster. Gamma Phi had a 30-year span at Wilberforce before ceasing to exist in 1947.

The founding of the major Black Greek letter organizations took place in 1905 through 1930 and it wasn't without contention or barriers put in place. It began with the fist continuous intercollegiate Black Greek letter fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha (A Phi A or Alphas). A Phi A, for short, was established on the campus of Cornell University. Much like

the F.H.C, a group of Black students formed a social studies club or literary society as they would be called then. After much discussion, and the resignation of a graduate student, Alpha Phi Alpha was founded on December 4th, 1906. The establishment of Alpha Phi Alpha at Cornell with their official expansion to Howard University in 1907 is what led to the establishment of five new Greek letter organizations, including two sororities which have a deeply rooted and intertwined history. Following the lead of the Alphas, a group of women became interested in establishing a sorority of their own. At that time, there were only about 10 women on the college campus. Thus in 1908, 16 women established Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKAs), the first African American intercollegiate sorority (Alpha Kappa Alpha History, 2017). Three years later, in 1911, three undergraduate men and a faculty member established the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity (Omega Psi Phi, 2017; Kimbrough, 2003).

The following academic year proved to be a point of contention inside Alpha Kappa Alpha. Members were discontented with some of the group's practices and ideologies (Kimbrough, 2003). They believed that their name, for starters was a derivation of Alpha Phi Alpha. Their 22-member chapter voted to transform the original Alpha Kappa Alpha organization into Delta Sigma Theta. Delta Sigma Theta was established in January 1913. By 1914 a new fraternity joined Howard, Phi Beta Sigma. Their establishment posed has additional significance as it worked with a group of women to form a sorority. After receiving approval from the institution and creating a constitution based on Phi Beta Sigma's Zeta Phi Beta Sorority was established in 1920 and the two became the first official brother and sister organizations. It is important to recognize that while the Greek letter movement seemed to flourish, it flourished with provisions from the institution. Kimbrough (2003) states "the five new groups established on the Howard campus could colonize at the

campus, but only if they remained local" (pg. 34). The groups agreed to those terms, but eventually maneuvered around that provision. In 1922, the last group of the first nationally recognized historically Black fraternities and sororities, was established in a state with a stronghold for the Ku Klux Klan; Sigma Gamma Rho sorority (Sigma Gamma Rho, 2017).

The Elite Eight as they were known then were established as a product of social and cultural necessity that faced its founding members. In the early 1900s, survival was necessary for African Americans across the country, especially those who dared to attend a university not designed to help them. These eight groups were at the forefront of the civil rights movement. Leaders such as Jessie Jackson (Omega), Chelsea Chisolm (Delta), and Huey p. Newton (Sigma) led the way to some of the rights that African Americans have today. Another fraternity flourished in the 1960s at Morgan State University. Iota Phi Theta (Iotas) was founded in 1963 by 12 men who differed from founders of the as they were nontraditional students (generally older, married, veterans). The founding of this organization became a symbol of the 1960s- a new approach to address the concerns of Black American. (Kimbrough, 2003).

Latina/o Fraternities and Sororities

To better understand the purpose of Latina/o sororities, Munoz and Guardia (2009) provide a brief history of cultural organization and the evolution to selective membership groups. Cultural organizations have been in existence on college campuses since the 1800s. "The first fraternal organization linked to Latino roots is Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity" (Baily, 1949, pg.315). This organization can trace its roots back to a group of men who organized to conceptualize the values of a fraternal organization in 1898 at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York named Union Hispano Americana (UHA) (Kimbrough, 2003). UHA provided a cultural

and intellectual haven for its members. Munoz et.al follows the trajectory of UHA and their operation as a "secret society". Through the years, they merged with other existing organizations with similar purposes and in 1936; Phi Iota Alpha the first Latino fraternity was established (Phi Iota Alpha, 2017). Their beginnings gave a push to the many Latino Greek-lettered organizations that are now part of the predominantly White tradition of fraternity life and are being offered to the large influx of Latina/o arriving at college campuses.

It would not be until the 1970s that the Latino Greek movement wouldn't explode. It began at Kean College (now University), students founded both Lambda Theta Phi and Lambda Theta Alpha. Since then, over 50 Latina/o fraternal organizations have flourished on college campuses across the nation. While an impressive number to boast, it cannot be affirmed as many local Latin fraternal organizations are suspected to exist but have not been recognized by any national body.

Like the reasons for the establishment of Black fraternal groups, Latinos have sought to be involved in significant extra-curricular activities that would offer a sense of community and belonging. Furthermore, being first-generation students, college is unfamiliar. Thus, a greater level of support is warranted from individuals who have similar experiences and/or backgrounds. Fraternity and sorority life offers that and much more for Latinos in these groups.

Significance of the Study

Research on the experiences of Latina students in the college sorority system is scarce. Essential to the conversation of personal, academic and professional development for Latina students is the realization of their position as minorities within the institution of higher education. The Hispanic student population within the United States is growing at an overwhelming rate. While studies demonstrate that Latinas are choosing to enroll in college, they

highlight that issues such as financial instability and/or familial support challenge their ability to adjust to the campus environment and persist until graduation (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996). Student organization involvement, specifically sorority membership, has the potential to significantly impact the success of Latina students (Bovell, 2009; Garcia, 2005; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Nuñez, 2004). Sororities can influence the development of students by encouraging and affirming multiple social identities (Guardia, 2007; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Handler, 1995). Latinas face many challenges adjusting to and completing college (Garcia, 2005); exploring how sororities can help address those challenges can produce critical information.

Research Question

This study will explore how membership in a Latina-based sorority impacts the college experience of Latina undergraduate students. The research question guiding this study is: How does membership in Latina-based Greek letter sororities influence the academic experience and persistence of Latinas? Additional sub-questions that will aid the central question are as follows:

1: How has sorority membership impacted their overall collegiate experience?

2: What is the reason behind their membership in a Latina-based sorority?

3: How do previous experience(s) determine their membership in a Latina-based sorority?

4: What type of academic support has their sorority membership provided?

5: How has that resource assisted in their persistence to graduation?

Chapter 3: Method

Aim of Study

The researcher explored how membership in a Latina-based Greek-letter sorority impacts the academic experience and persistence of Latinas. Using a qualitative approach utilizing both a demographic questionnaire and interviews allowed the researcher to understand and document the participants' unique experiences. Watson (2002) describes qualitative research as assigning value to the "voice" of the participant. Qualitative research models seek to uncover patterns of relationships among the voices of participants within the community. Furthermore, they assist the researcher in seeking "a holistic understanding of how participants within the phenomenon construct meaning and use this newly created framework in a practical manner" (p. 26).

Qualitative Research Approach

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach where in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews were used as the main source of data collection. A qualitative research approach such as phenomenology was deemed most appropriate given the research questions and the focus on highlighting the meaning the women made from their experiences within their respective sororities and the impact it had on their academic success. Because this approach was based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity it also emphasized the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. In utilizing this approach, it was the researcher's intended outcome to provide an understanding on the effects membership in a Latina sorority has on Latinas and how it ultimately impacts the institution.

Participants

The research site for this study was a four-year university in central Florida; referred to as "Central East Florida University" (CEFU), for anonymity purposes. Central East Florida University (CEFU) was a public, American metropolitan research university located in central Florida. CEFU is also a member and a top-ranking institution of the State University System of Florida (CEFU, 2017). In the fall of 2016, CEFU reported 36,463 undergraduate students were enrolled. Approximately 20,000 or 55% were recorded as female students. Of those 20,000 students, approximately 5,000 or 25% identify as Hispanic (CEFU Factbook, 2017). There are more than 600 registered student organizations at CEFU, including academic, professional, special interest, Greek, and multicultural groups. There are more than 40 fraternities and sororities recognized by the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life on the CEFU campus. Four councils govern these chapters: Interfraternity Council (IFC), the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), the National Panhellenic Association (NPC), and the Multicultural Greek Council (MGC). Greek Village, a residential area on the CEFU campus, offers housing for members of 13 IFC fraternities and NPC sororities. Two local chapters of two different Latina-based sororities located in central Florida have been identified for this study. To maintain anonymity of the participants' sororities, the entities are referred to Alpha and Beta Sorority respectively.

Alpha Epsilon Sorority was established in the late 1980s at a predominantly White institution in the Northeast. This group was founded by 17 women who envisioned an organization that would unify women of color who were dedicated to correcting the injustices that have and continue to affect their surrounding communities (Alpha Epsilon Sorority, 2017). The sisterhood strives to continue their mission through their five pillars of: Sisterhood, Diversity, Leadership, Service and Academic Excellence. Since its founding, Alpha Sorority has

established over 40 chapters and 9 Professional Chapters across the United States (Alpha Sorority, 2017). Alpha sorority while a social organization, its founding, mission and purpose were focused on political and social justice.

Beta Gamma Sorority was established first, as an academic sorority in the mid-1970s at a predominantly White four-year institution in the Northeast. The organization was founded by a group of women who recognized the need to "actively integrate itself into social, political, and community service arena" (Beta Gamma Sorority, 2017). The purpose of the organization is reflected in their sorority goals of scholarly excellence, empowerment of the universal woman, political and cultural awareness and community activism. The organization has over 160 established undergraduate and alumnae chapters across the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Beta sorority's founding, mission and purpose are more academically driven than politically based.

Gamma Mu Sorority was established as a social sorority in 1990 at a predominantly White institution in the mid-west. The organization was commenced by five collegiate women who recognized the need to form an organization that provided empowerment to women of all cultural backgrounds (Gamma Sorority, 2018). Gamma Sorority is the largest, historically Latina-based national sorority with a multicultural membership in chapters and alumnae associations throughout the United States. Gamma sorority's founding, mission and purpose are more academically and socially driven that politically based.

Chi Alpha Sorority was established in 1980 as a demand to make changes for Latinos in higher education. Chi Alpha was established at a predominantly White institution in the northeast. The organization was founded by seven Latina women with the mission to create an organization to promote leadership amongst the Latino community (Chi Alpha, 2018). The organization has over 70 chapters across the nation.

A total of 30 women from the four sororities received the demographic form. Interviews were dependent on participants demographic form results. The sampling strategy used was homogenous sampling**.** This method samples individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics (Creswell, p. 207, 2014). In other words, for this sampling the researcher had to identify the characteristics needed for the study. The sample needed for this study to be effective was Latina women enrolled at a predominantly White institution who are members of a social Latina-based Greek letter organization.   Participants included undergraduates with a minimum of one year of active status in their entity in good standing and alumnae five years removed. Undergraduate participants were recruited through CEFU's Office of Greek Life; alumnae were recruited via the local alumni chapters. Alumni chapters are required to be involved in their respective undergraduate entities thus making it easy to obtain demographic information for the alumnae. For participants to be considered the following criteria needed to be met: (1) must be an active undergraduate member for at least one full academic year or alumni member of either sororities; (2) Self-identify as Hispanic/Latina and as a woman; (3) at least18 years old or older. For undergraduate participants, "active" status was determined by using each respective organization's definition.

Data Collection Tools

This qualitative study set to explore how membership in Latina-based Greek letter organizations impacts the women's collegiate experience and persistence; therefore, two different ways to collect the data were identified: interviews and a demographic form. Interviews are a type of data collection that occurs when researchers ask one or more participants general, open-ended questions that does not constrain the individual and records the answers (Creswell, 2015, p. 216). The participant demographic form allowed for the researcher to receive

biographical information prior to the face-to-face interview. The interview protocol was designed to understand the impact of the sorority experience and drafted based on the researcher's questions. The participants were asked open-ended questions about their general undergraduate experience and their experience as a member of a Latina-based sorority. Interview questions are detailed in Appendix C.

Procedures

To disseminate information about the study, the researcher provided CEFU's Office of Greek Life a recruitment letter (Appendix A) to share with the chapters of the four sororities. Similarly, the recruitment letter was shared with local alumnae chapters to gather interest from alumna. The researcher attended a general body meeting to encourage participation and answer any inquiries. For those who choose to voluntarily participate in the study a Participant Demographic Form (see Appendix B) was provided. Additionally, before interviews were conducted, the researcher collected verbal (recorded) and written consent from participants. All interviews took place on-campus to provide accessibility and comfortability to the participants. For confidentiality purposes, rooms were reserved on campus for one-on-one interviews. Furthermore, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant.

To insure saturation was reached, the researcher chose individual interviews for participants (Appendix C). Interview questions were structured to facilitate asking multiple participants the same questions, otherwise one would not be able to achieve data saturation as it would be a constantly moving target (Guest, Bruce, & Johnson, 2006). Interviewing participants allowed for the researcher to maintain consistency and help reach no new "data", "theme", or "coding".

Recording the data was done in several ways. Interview questions were provided to each participant during one-on-one interviews. All interviews were voice recorded so that review of each participant's responses was available to the researcher.

Data Analysis

The study's data was analyzed in two ways: participants' responses about membership and its impact on their academic experience, as well as the researcher's interpretation of the narratives shared. Because the data collection was done via face-to-face interviews the researcher chose narrative analysis to analyze participants' responses. Riessman (1994) explained that the source of the research is the story. The open-ended interview questions allowed for the researcher to weave together the participants' stories to gain a greater understanding about the impact membership had on their academic experience. The nature of this study was qualitative as such the analysis required the identification, examination, and interpretation of patterns and themes in the text. Through the information gathered, via interviews and demographical questionnaire, the researcher needed to determine how patterns and themes helped answer the central question.

The demographic questionnaire assisted the researcher in the creation of open coding for the interviewees. Based on the coding viewed on the text, this was helpful during the interview process which led to identifying patterns and themes among participants. The researcher used qualitative software Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Miner Lite to assist in the organization of the data collected.

This study explored the narratives from both alumnae and undergraduates detailing their experiences as part of a Latina sorority. The researcher hoped that through Astin's Theory of

Involvement the study explored whether being part of a Latina sorority has helped or deterred members persisting in their pursuit to graduation.

Ethical Considerations

As with any research there are ethical issues that must be considered. Because this is a qualitative study and it explored the experiences of the participants, private details of their lives or experience may be exposed. During interviews the researcher did not receive information that violated ethics for this study.

Institutional Review Board, CEFU

Research took place at CEFU, the researcher contacted CEFU's Research & Innovation Research Integrity and Compliance Office to receive permission for the study. Once contact was made, the researcher submitted CITI course completion certification to be able to begin investigating. Once clearance was received for the CITI courses, the researcher was expected to submit through CEFU's Applications for Research Compliance portal an application for the CEFU IRB committee. The application required for the researcher to share the purpose of the study, what type of study and information about the human subjects the researcher would like to interview.

Institutional Review Board, Nova Southeastern University

Similarly, the research registered with her current institution to receive approval for her study. Every new research protocol begins with completing an IRB Manager *New Protocol Submission Form,* which was forwarded to the principal investigator, or researchers, respective College Representative. The College Representative, not the principal investigator, was charged with reviewing the submission to determine the appropriate level of review for the study as well as assuring that all necessary documents are included. After review was completed and assigned

a level of review, the college representative worked with the researcher to prepare the required IRB documents. Since the study did not require Expedited or Full Review, the researcher received confirmation from the college representative of status and the researcher began the investigation.

Trustworthiness

Trust is an important aspect of qualitative research. To establish trust, the researcher compiled a list of research questions that were asked to all participants. In doing so, the researcher achieved triangulation to achieve credibility. Additionally, because the participants were interviewed, the researcher provided them with a review of the data collected and the researcher's interpretation of that data. In providing an opportunity for members to check the data, the researcher created an opportunity for additional credibility.

Potential Research Bias

Research comes with its own sets of challenges and biases. For researchers one of the longest-recognized forms of bias in research is confirmation bias. This occurs when a researcher forms a hypothesis or belief and uses respondents' information to confirm that belief. Such bias then extends into analysis, with researchers tending to remember points that support their hypothesis and points that disprove other hypotheses. As humans, this is a natural tendency people use to understand and filter information, which often lead to focusing on one hypothesis at a time. For example, as a member of the Greek life system, the researcher believed in the power that Greek life can have in the lives of its members this can lead to confirmation bias. To minimize confirmation bias, researchers must continually reevaluate impressions of respondents and challenge preexisting assumptions and hypotheses.

Chapter 4: Results

In this study, the guiding research question was designed to explore how membership in a Latina sorority impacted Latinas' experience and persistence in college. In this chapter, the researcher describes the themes that emerged. This was accomplished by drawing from the interviews that were conducted with nine members of four different Latina sororities who attended a predominantly White institution. The characteristics of the study group are provided as well as the type of phenomenological approach used to frame the study, followed by the findings from the participants' interviews.

Participants

To obtain basic background information, a demographic questionnaire was provided to the participants. Undergraduate and alumnae received the same questionnaire (see Appendix B). Because there were a limited number of undergraduates in comparison to alumnae, personal characteristics for undergraduates and alumnae are presented separately. Findings obtained through interviews that highlight the emerging themes are presented jointly. Table 2 provides basic information about all participants.

Table 2

Participants and Identification

Ethnicity	Class standing	First-generation
Puerto Rican	Alumna	Yes
Mixed	Alumna	Yes
Mexican and Puerto Rican	Alumna	Yes
Puerto Rican	Undergraduate	No
Puerto Rican	Alumna	Yes
Puerto Rican	Alumna	Yes
Colombian	Alumna	Yes
Puerto Rican	Undergraduate	Yes
Colombian/Jewish	Alumna	Yes

Note. Information in this table was self-reported by participants.

Undergraduates

Personal characteristics. Of the nine women in the sample, two were undergraduates. These women were enrolled full-time at Central Florida University (CEFU); served in leadership positions for their respective organizations as well as non-Greek letter student groups. These two women came from low-to middle class families and lived in a diverse city in central Florida. One undergraduate reported she was first-generation thus being the first in her family to be exposed to Greek life. The second participant had a different experience; she was not first-generation and was aware of the Greek life system since her mother was a founding mother to the sorority she chose to affiliate with. Both participants shared that their entity make-up (meaning active undergraduate members in their college campus) is a diverse composition of races and ethnicities. In fact, the women shared they are currently the only Latinas in their chapter.

Sorority involvement. In terms of membership, both women were new to their group. One participant has been a member of her organization for three semesters; the other four. Their respective organizations have four executive board leadership positions required to be filled by their national organization - president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. Additional positions, such as committee chairs are also available, but are at the discretion of their respective entity to appoint. Both women reported being in a position of leadership since their initiation.

Alumnae

Personal Characteristics. The ethnic identification of the alumnae women was as follows: three identified as Puerto Rican, one identified as half Puerto Rican half Mexican, one as mixed, one identified as Colombian, and the other identified as Jewish and Colombian. These women came from a variety of places in the state of Florida and had a wide array of experiences. Six of the seven women are first-generation and most identified as middle class, living in a diverse

community. Two out of the seven women spoke only English but can understand Spanish. All

the women in the alumnae sample graduated from CEFU. Interestingly, during each of the

participants' interviews, they all shared that during their undergraduate years their respective

organizations were composed of mostly Latinas.

   Career Background. An interesting factor from the alumnae participants is that most were

not in the fields to which they have a degree in. Currently, many are working in fields to which a

sorority sister recommended. Table 3 chart the career path of the alumnae participants. Included

is their year of graduation, degree, and current employment field.

Table 3

Majors and Careers

Graduation Year	Degree	Current Field of Employment	Future Career Plans
2006	Interdisciplinary Natural Sciences	Administrator	Education
2006	Interpersonal & Organizational Communication	Learning Measurement Specialist	Education
2007	Mass Communication	Online Adjunct	Education
2004	Criminology	Insurance Agent	Corporate Administration
2004	Criminology	Law School Student	Lawyer
2004	Psychology	Human Resource Manager	Human Resource
2005	Mass Communication	Real Estate Agent	Real Estate

   Note. Information on this table was self-reported by participants.

   Sorority Involvement. In terms of sorority involvement, the alumnae membership ranged

between 13 and 19 years. During their undergraduate years the alumnae reported they served

their respective organization in one or more of the following positions - president, vice president,

secretary, and treasurer. Committee positions were also held by the alumnae during their time as

an undergraduate. As alumnae, two of the women volunteered as chapter advisors and new

member educator. Table 4 chart the participants' class standing, sorority and number of years as

a member.

Table 4

Alumnae Participants

Class Standing	Sorority	# of Years as a member
Alumna	Beta Gamma	15
Alumna	Beta Gamma	15
Alumna	Beta Gamma	13
Alumna	Gamma Mu	18
Alumna	Gamma Mu	19
Alumna	Gamma Mu	19
Alumna	Gamma Mu	16

Note. Information on this table was self-reported by participants.

For the remainder of this chapter, the themes that emerged from participants'

interviews (see Appendix C) are highlighted by utilizing participants' quotes. Each participant

and their respective organization were given a pseudonym; these are provided in Table 5.

Table 5

Participants' Pseudonyms

Pseudonym	Organization	Classification
Nona	Chi Alpha	Undergraduate
Jacinta	Alpha Epsilon	Undergraduate
Natalia	Gamma Mu	Alumna
Joy	Gamma Mu	Alumna
Martina	Gamma Mu	Alumna
Odette	Gamma Mu	Alumna
Lauren	Beta Gamma	Alumna
Yolanda	Beta Gamma	Alumna
Nereyda	Beta Gamma	Alumna

Note. Information on this table was self-reported by participants.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

This study focused on the experiences lived by Latinas in a Latina-based sorority. Because the study focused on experiences it lends to a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that arose out of and remains closely tied to phenomenological philosophy (Gobble & Yin 2014). The purpose of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to bring to light and reflect upon the lived meaning of the experiences of the participants. Hermeneutic phenomenological research poses many challenges. First, the object of interest is experience before it is put into language and yet that experience cannot be accessed other than through descriptive account of participants. To understand the lived experiences of the participants in this study, the researcher gathered biographical information via a demographic questionnaire followed by interviews. The findings of such interviews provided four major themes which relate to the research questions posed.

Emerging Themes

Sisterhood

A consistent, repeated theme that emerged from the participants was the incredible bond of sisterhood gained through their respective affiliation. Defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary sisterhood is the state of being a sister; a community or society of sisters; or the solidarity of women based on shared conditions (9th ed., pg. 681). For example, when Nereida, an alumna member of Beta Gamma Sorority was asked to define sisterhood, she began by stating "[it] exceeded my expectations". She continued "I don't have sisters, so it showed me that people aside from your family will be there for you. Even if you need them at 4am". Natalia, an alumna member of Gamma Mu Sorority states "it is a bond and a relationship amongst women somewhat understood without explanation. It is built through situations and experiences. The bond of sisterhood, created through shared experiences, provided the women a support system to

which they were not privy to prior to their membership. The sisterhood gained provided a home away from home, a familial comfort, a sense of belonging and a network. When participants were asked to share what sisterhood meant to them two consistent subthemes emerged: the family/support system gained, and the impact sisterhood had in their life.

   Family/Support system. Participants shared how their sisters became a family; a support system that they didn't know was needed. Seven of the nine participants were first generation; thus, having little to no knowledge on college life and expectations. Having a group of women who shared similar experiences but have navigated the system before them was imperative for their individual success. Both Lauren and Yolanda, alumnae members from Beta Gamma sorority defined sisterhood as "truly a family". Yolanda continued "these are women I have done life with; shared life experiences with". Lauren declared that "sisterhood was a different type of bond than that of a regular friend". For the participants, their respective organizations allowed for the women with similar backgrounds yet different life journeys, to experience developing a relationship, bond with others under the same "space". It allowed for the women to experience family under the conditions and experiences provided by their sorority but also connect the dots between their family at home and the one in their college campus. Nona affirmed when describing the bond "I have two older sisters but my relationship with them is completely different than that of my sorority sisters. I can't always go to my sisters on certain things; because they have such strong opinions of my life since I am the baby. I feel like in my sisterhood they are all equal. I can go to them about anything and they won't be like 'you're my baby sister; you can't do that' they will be able to relate to me. Family experience and a way to learn more and to use the experiences that they have had to further educate me". For all participants the only difference between their sorority sisters and their own family members was

whether they could "wear letters". For these women, the sorority provided a support system away from home. For the alumnae, that support system transcended their time in college. All participants alluded to sisters being family; to capture such statement Martina shared "calling a sister is as easy as calling my mom or dad to talk something through. There are no boundaries".

For the undergraduate members, the support system has appeared; even in the short time they have been affiliated. Having someone to be of guidance and support was one reason why some participants wanted to be part of the sorority. Such guidance and support came during personal trials and tribulations. While for others, the support solicited and provided came during the time when there was a need to understand the next steps in their collegiate or professional career. It was evident based on the participants' responses that the sisterhood gained by the members emerged as a life-changing experience.

Impact of Sisterhood. Each participant shared that sisterhood was a "group of women with similar values and that will be there for you". But it was also understood that it is "something that cannot be described". The manner to which the participants described the bond between each other was deeper than just a college friendship. The bond of sisterhood gained for many of the women is one that is stronger today than it was 10 years ago. It began during their pledging process; a process which initiates new members into the organization. Such process facilitated and reinforced the sisterhood bond through experiences and activities. Undergraduate participants shared that "sisterhood activities like retreats and such" help keep the sisterhood alive and help the bond become stronger. Alumnae participants shared that programs such as retreats, and sisterhood socials were developed and executed to maintain and nurture the close-knit bond. Evidently, such experiences led for this bond to surpass their time as an undergraduate and continue as alumnae. Some participants shared that since graduation they have "done life

together". These women have become "intricately involved" in each other's' lives; forging a relationship that has led them to experience marriage, becoming mommies and celebrating each other's miles stones.

Next, having a sisterhood made the women feel that they had unconditional support. Their membership provided an "open door" to women with similar cultural backgrounds and circumstances. The sorority provided a space where a diverse group of women came together and supported one another. Participants, undergraduate and alumnae, shared lived experiences that profoundly impacted their life. For example, Jacinta explained, in trying to define sisterhood through a lived experience: "I witnessed the sisterhood before I was a sister in the way they demonstrated sisterhood to my mother during her divorce and the way they took care of me then".

Identity and Sense of Belonging

College provides an opportunity for growth and self-exploration. Participants shared how their involvement with their sorority provided an opportunity for them to understand their cultural identity as well as a sense of belonging. One participant shared "at that time the group was smaller, more intimate and more Latina; it helped with such a big campus and I identified with the sisters' culture". Their respective organizations became the bridge that helped connect the culture from home to their college environment. As such, their sorority was the small fish in a big pond.

Being first generation, lower to middle class was an identifying factor for these women. These factors motivated them to find a support system at their institution that mirrored their own experience. Most participants shared they encountered members of the sororities in other social settings and that facilitated the conversation and understanding not only of the sorority, but also

of the women and their life experience. Because they knew the women and their stories who were a part of their respective sorority, participants identified themselves through the organization and its membership. Participants reiterated that joining their sorority facilitated the adjustment to campus life and provided a sense of belonging.

For all participants, their affiliation allowed them to feel at home which was imperative as all were away from home and away from the familiarity of an environment that was like their upbringing. When Lauren was asked why she joined her sorority she states, "felt most comfortable at the time; it was a family away from home. The women in it and the organization were founded on similar principles to the ones that were instilled at home". Nereida recalls "I was trying to identify more with my culture. Most of my friends in high school were black. If they were Hispanic, they were mixed. I didn't have a sense of knowing my own culture. My parents raised me very Americanized. They only spoke Spanish to me when I was getting yelled at. Joining was a way for me to connect with my heritage". Finding a group that identified with the participant's culture was also a predictor on whether a participant joined. Finding a group of women that emulated, understood, valued and respected the Latino culture was of high importance and led all the women to join their organization. The seven alumnae participants shared the impact of attending meetings or social gatherings and hearing Spanish being spoken; for the food to be familiar and the music to be Latina. The essence of the Latino culture lived within their group and helped the women cope and further develop their identity within their culture as well as provide a sense of comfort because they "belonged".

For each of these women, their respective organizations provided a connection between their culture and the university. The sorority assisted in their acclimation to the culture shock and the experience of being at home, away from home. Natalia explained "It is about having that

support system, but it is also about knowing who you are… you are not isolated that you are not the only first generation. You have a group of women who are trying to get ahead and make a name for themselves. That was so important; finding people with the same values and cultural background."

Furthermore, their affiliation gave them a platform, a voice to express who they were, their needs and impact their surrounding community. Without their affiliation their voice otherwise could have been lost or never heard. All participants shared that membership gave them the confidence in knowing that they belonged on the campus. Such confidence provided a platform and an opportunity to give a voice to those who were not a part of their group.

Values and Beliefs

Participants shared that their sorority often reinforced their values and beliefs system. While the diversity within the Latino community is vast, each participant felt that regardless of what Latino country their sisters were from they all had similar cultural beliefs and values. These values and beliefs included the respect for family, education and a work ethic. All participants shared that they identified with their respective organization's values. For example, Lauren, Yolanda and Nereyda participants from the same organization shared the value of "love and respect" were taught and has driven their respective families for generations. Four participants shared that a determining factor in joining their organization was the sorority's principle in academics, which reiterated education as a pivotal factor to "change lives". Nona stated, "Chi Alpha Sorority's purpose is to 'educate, elevate and empower all women' that is what resonated with me. My values as a sister are - leadership, sisterhood, service and character and those are things my family helped instill in me". Furthermore, the organizations motto of "Culture is Pride. Pride is Success" was indicative on the pride of the Latino culture. Additionally, participants, for

the most part were consistent in sharing that the sisterhood encouraged them to share their values and beliefs with each other. The sorority was place where values and beliefs were brought from home and shared with others who could relate to similar ideals. Generally, the participants exclaimed that their values and beliefs which are the foundation of their individual culture were reinforced by their sorority.

Academic Support

Greek letter organizations are founded with the purpose to enhance the extracurricular journey as well as the academic experience of its members. Joining an organization provided an avenue for the participants to have access to resources that would assist them as they navigated college. It also provided the participants an opportunity to affiliate with women who had similar backgrounds, as well as a support system which its primary foundation was academics.

When the researcher inquired about the academic support provided by their organization, each participant provided the job description for their academic chair/officer which is to "keeping the women focused" on academics. The academic chair/officer was charged with scheduling study hours, maintaining sisters' syllabi and test schedules and implementing specialized "study time" for individuals mandated to partake in library hours. Odette recalls "her academic chair planned out study hours at the library but also connected you with alumna who might have had your same major". Out of the four organizations in the sample, only two have specialized, national programs that are implemented for women who are in academic danger (falling below the required grade point average (g.p.a)).

When reflecting on whether academic resources attained through their organization helped them persist, the women were consistent - being in the sorority helped but did not determine whether they would be successful. Participants were adamant in sharing that the

organization provided a space for Latina students to envision themselves as successful leaders and professionals however, the participants did not explicitly share that the academic support provided facilitated retention; it did however, provide personal and emotional support. Natalia shared "I don't believe the committee, or the group had anything to do with m persistence. At the end of the day anyone can give you advice or tips, but if you don't take them or do anything with them, you won't be successful. I chose not to be mediocre".

Through the participants' interviews it was glaringly obvious that while the sorority's academic resource provided support it was not the reason why they persisted. Rather they persisted and maintained their GPA because they wanted to stay active within their organization but most of all they persisted because they had grit.

Summary

The purpose of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to bring to light and reflect upon the lived meaning of the experiences of the participants. The themes that emerged confirmed that Latinas involved in Latina-based sororities were profoundly impacted during and after their undergraduate experience by their respective organization. The inquiry led to the emergence of four themes – sisterhood, identity and sense of belonging, values and beliefs, and academic support. Through participant interviews, it was evident through the reiteration of themes and experiences that all participants felt that sorority membership had a profound impact on their collegiate experience. Participants reiterated time and time again that their respective organization provided a family/support system not expected, helped them with their cultural identity as well as secure a sense of belonging on a predominantly White campus. The nurturing of sisterhood and identity and sense of belonging are due to the shared experiences provided by their sorority membership. As previously shared, the pledging process provided experiences

which helped the women become close-knit; experiences after their initiation further enhanced

the sisterhood bond created. When discussing the academic support received, it was evident by

participants' responses that their organization provided resources to help navigate the academic

system. However, all participants, including undergraduates, shared that their membership or the

resources provided were not the primary contributors to their current or past academic success.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Following completion of the data analysis and the interpretation of the findings, the researcher found that the findings of this study supported several ideas noted in the academic literature, while also contributing insights to the needs and experiences of Latinas in Latina-based sororities in a predominantly White institution. In this chapter, the researcher discusses findings and provides the implications for research and practice. Lastly, the researcher provides a conclusion.

Summary and Interpretation of Findings

This study sought to explore and understand how membership in a Latina-based sorority impacted the college experience of Latinas, particularly whether their membership assisted in their persistence. From the data collected four themes emerged: sisterhood, identity and sense of belonging, values and beliefs, and academic support. The findings of this study are best interpreted using one of the three focuses of Astin's Student Involvement Theory. Using this theoretical framework is one way to understand the themes that emerged as crucial parts of the sorority experience for Latina women. Astin's theory details the context of the influences that the students have before and during their time which leads to the specified outcome.

In this study, the participants and their respective sororities functioned as their primary environment, outside of their family environment. Their environment is a family unit which operates as their main support group. The effect of being a part of their organizations is the similarities with their own families which stem from the organization's core principles: academics, sisterhood, and Latino culture. The sorority has an influence as a family and support system through the bond and sisterhood created. In this context, the sorority reminded the women of their own family which is how the bonds of sisterhood were created. Each participant

shared the unique, almost unspoken yet understood life-long bond they created with their sisters. As sisters, their commitment went far beyond their time as pledges or college students. The women were committed to each other in all life's pursuits.

Another theme that reflects the bond they shared is their sense of belonging and their values and beliefs. Each participant discussed that they chose their organization because they wanted to explore or find a group of women with similar upbringing. Through their membership, these women felt empowered and found a sense of belong on their college campus. Through their organization, they found a home away from home.

A final theme that arose was the academic support received. While the women credited grit for their academic success, the support provided by their respective organizations indirectly assisted in their persistence and success. Participants maintained focus on their academics mainly because that is what they wanted, but ultimately because not doing so would affect their participation within their organization.

Context of Findings

Sisterhood. As shared, little research has been done on the experiences of Latinas; in particular Latinas in Latina-based sororities. Furthermore, even less research has been conducted focusing on Latina alumnae who are members of Latina-based sororities (Bovell, 2009; Garcia, 2005; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Nuñez, 2004; Patterson, 1998; Reyes, 1997; Sanchez, 2011). The findings from this study indicated that participants viewed their sorority as more than just a social circle, but rather a place where they found comfort and experienced growth. Such experiences affirm the existing research highlighting the importance of student involvement in out of the classroom activities during college (Astin, 1984; Garcia, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Torbenson 2009). Through their sisterhood, the women found a support system that helped

in their acclimation to college. Furthermore, the participants experienced that their sisterhood assisted them in life transition - such as job placement. Participants' experiences through sisterhood and the bond that emerged from their membership affirmed that their sorority experience was important during college and after.

Findings of this study indicated that sisterhood had a positive impact on the lives and experiences of its members. The fact that the participants sought after women with similar experiences and backgrounds that could help them become acclimated to college supports the notion of studies by Bovell, 2009; Garcia, 2005; Guardia & Evans, 2007; Nunez, 2004 which support the idea that sororities have the potential to impact the academic success of Latina students. Participants indicated that the sorority through their respective "academic officer or chair" encouraged and assisted them to succeed academically by providing opportunities such as study groups or allowing participants to by-pass attending events or chapter meetings so that they could concentrate on their academics. These studies and theories that support them demonstrate how student engagement and involvement promotes personal growth, development, and facilitates academic achievement.

Identity and sense of belonging/Values and beliefs. Participants in the study reported that the sorority provided a space where they could feel proud of their Latina heritage, learn about their culture, create life-long bonds and uphold their values and beliefs. Validation and understanding their ethnic cultures was imperative to promote sense of belonging and acclimation to college. Olivas' (1996, 2004, 2006) findings that Latinas often join these organizations to maintain and/or reconstruct a Latina identity was confirmed through participants' responses. Certain affirmations, such as understanding one's identity and "figuring out" where one belongs are necessary for the personal, social and academic growth of college

students. These feelings are confirmed by student development studies and theories on the general student population (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Reisser, 1993, Phiney, 1993a; McNamera & Ricjard, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Sue & Sue, 1990; Tinto, 2002; and Phinney 2007b). Furthermore, it is affirmed by the limited studies addressing Latina/o student development (Chaze & Guido-DiBrito, 1999, Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Hurtado & Carter, 1997, Montelongo, 2003, Rendon, Garcia & Person, 2004; Torres, 2003).

Findings of this study demonstrate that a Latina-based sorority can serve as an influential role in sustaining Latina students through college life experiences and academic learning. Outside of providing a "home away from home", Latina sororities can serve as place where the values and belief system participants were raised with can be reinforced.

Academic support. Some studies indicated that sororities have the potential to impact the academic success of Latina students (Bovell, 2009; Garcia, 2005; Guardia & Evans, 2007; Nunez, 2004). This study found that membership to a Latina-based sorority facilitated resources for the women to be successful, it provided an incentive to stay in good academic standing, but most importantly reminded the participants of their inherent desire to succeed. Each organization provided the women with individuals to connect with and resources they could have access to for their success. In doing so, their respective organizations held them responsible for their academic progress and success. The fact that participants were required to maintain a certain grade point average provided an incentive to stay in good academic standing. Lastly, it kept their grit at the forefront of their involvement.

Knowing that Latina/o students are most likely the first in their families to attend college, it is understood that once in the post-secondary educational institutions, these students are confronted with a set of new experiences which may not be aligned with their expectations or

abilities to navigate (Sweat, Jones, Han, & Wolfgram, 2013). Academic integration is a concept often referred to in the literature as a factor in the persistence of college students (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Participants highlighted how their respective organizations facilitated resources for them to be successful academically that provided personal and emotional support which assisted the women during their academic journey. In their responses, the women affirmed that the sorority had a positive impact. Activities like study hours at the library, study-groups, and guidance on courses and network opportunities with alumna provided structure services aimed at assisting participants to remain on course. These findings are supported by Martinez Aleman's (1997) study which high lights the value of female friendships. The participants in her study saw their outside conversations with other women as opportunities to test out new ides in an environment free of expectations. Aleman defined that the learning that occurred through those conversations as intellectual practice that linked women's academic selves and college. Through their responses, it is affirmed that participants benefited from associating with women who had navigated certain aspects of college and that could share knowledge and inside information.

Findings of this study indicated that sisterhood has a positive impact on the lives and experiences of its members. Furthermore, these factors are known to promote retention and academic achievement. Participants indicated that the sorority through their respective "academic officer or chair" encouraged and assisted them to succeed academically by providing opportunities such as study groups or allowing participants to by-pass attending events or chapter meetings so that they could concentrate in their academics.

Results of the study contribute to the limited research conducted to date. In 2009, Bovell conducted a study that inquired about the gender identity development of students in Latina-based sororities. Studies by Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013, Mendoza-Patterson, 1998 and

Reis, 2004 highlight the positive impacts membership in Latina sororities have on academic persistence, on academic integration and as an agent for retention, respectively.

Implications for Research

The four themes that emerged in this study originate first from the influences each of the participants came to college with, followed by the influence of the sorority. Such a framework helps in understanding the experiences of Latina students in a Latina-based sorority and how those experiences led to their persistence. More research is needed on the experiences of Latina students in higher education, specifically those that explore the direct impact of extra-curricular activities that result in retention. Such research would allow educators and practitioners to proactively develop programs and resources that will assist Latinas to be successful. Only a few studies have explored the influences of Latina student organizations have on student development and academic experience however, less can be found on the impact Latino sororities have on Latinas (Bovell, 2009; Garcia, 2005; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Nuñez, 2004; Patterson, 1998; Reyes, 1997; Sanchez, 2011). Evidently more research and scholarship are needed to transform practices that will assist in the matriculation and persistence of Latinas at predominantly White institutions.

It is recommended that more research be directed towards the different ways Latina sororities influence their members academically, personally and professionally. The findings show that participation in a Latina-based sorority influenced their members positively in their academic and overall college experience. Findings indicate that involvement may have an impact on Latinas and how their identity is developed. Future research could explore how sorority membership helped Latinas develop their sense of self away from home. Next, the researcher recommends that a variety of methods be used to widen the scope of understanding. Studies that

examine the experiences of a larger segment of this specific population would enhance the overall understanding of Latina based sororities.

Another opportunity for research is investigating why non-Latinas choose to join Latina-based sororities and while Latinas choose to join historically Black sororities or traditional White sororities. Through alumnae and undergraduate participants' responses the researcher found that many of the current undergraduate chapters have a diverse membership that does not include Latinas. Their reasoning may differ but can open the door for further research about Latina and self-identification and sense of belonging. In contrast, research highlighting why non-Latinas joined Latina –based sororities can serve as stepping stone in understanding culture and its boundaries.

Implications for Practice

There are several implications for educators and practitioners at college and university campuses. The results of this study, echoing the limited scholarship written to-date, provide evidence confirming the positive impact of Latina Greek-letter organizations on Latina student success in college. Membership in Latina-based sororities can provide a multitude of benefits, including positive adjustment, retention and academic success. Student affairs administrators and faculty and staff advisors can advocate for the needs of students involved in Latina-based sororities by utilizing studies to help advocate for additional resources.

Next, the researcher recommends that institutions, as well as the national organizations overseeing Latina-based sororities, provide the resources needed to support Latina-based sororities' academic efforts. Many of the women highlighted undergraduate members within their respective organization supported their academic efforts through academic workshops and career planning activities. While this is a positive aspect of membership, these types of

resources should be facilitated and incorporated into a curriculum for all Greek-letter organizations. Thus, faculty and staff advisors of Latina-based sororities should assist the leadership board in organizing these activities by connecting them to valuable resources such as a colleague that can lead workshops that will help lead to academic and personal success. Additionally, they can work with students to develop semester-long programming that addresses the academic needs of the membership. It is imperative that educators and practitioners alike recognize the benefits of participation in a Latina-based sorority, take the time to learn more about the unique experiences of sorority members, and facilitate intentional and responsive programming that best supports the academic, personal and professional pursuits of Latina students.

Limitations

The researcher anticipated many limitations. First, only four Latina sororities were interviewed out of the five that are currently active at the institution. Narratives not shared by other members of other organizations may express a different experience that could allow for the researcher to explore. Next, different experiences were shared by members of the same organization however, entered college at different times. An unanticipated challenge found by the researcher was the diverse membership within each of the organizations represented in the study. While the organizations were Latina sororities, their undergraduate membership was not composed of Latinas, thus causing a limitation on the number of Latina undergraduate participants in the study. A traditional student (those who entered college immediately after high school) versus a non-traditional student (one who entered college a few years after graduating high school) had a different reason for membership and the impact the organization had in their persistence.

Conclusion

This qualitative study set out to explore how membership in Latina-based sororities impacted the experience and persistence of Latinas in a predominantly White institution. Astin (1999 & 2001), Tinto (1974, 1993), and Kuh's (1995) research on the college experience shine light on the impact extracurricular activities have on students. In this study, the researcher wanted to understand if membership in a Latina sorority the same kind of impact on Latinas' lives as previous research would have had indicated. Through a demographic questionnaire and one-on-one interviews, the researcher found that indeed participation in Latina-based sororities enhances the collegiate experience. Additionally, the factor that the participants were part of a support system that encouraged and provided academic support also assisted with the persistence of Latina members.

Participants asserted that they wanted to be a part of an organization with women who had similar backgrounds and experiences, their membership helped them step out of their comfort zone, showed them how to navigate their college campus, and established their niche within the larger campus community. In analyzing the role membership played in the participants' experience, it is concluded that membership laid a foundation conducive to academic, personal and professional success.

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Appendix A
Recruitment Letter

Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

To whom it may concern:

My name is Luz Randolph and I am a doctoral student in the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education at Nova Southeastern University. Currently, I am looking for participants to be a part of my research study focusing on the impact membership to a Latina sorority has on the academic persistence of Latina undergraduates. This study aims to contribute to the field of higher education, specifically student involvement with Greek letter organizations, as research on this topic is limited.

You are invited to participate in this study. Participation in the study consists of the following:

1. Filling out a demographic form;
2. Participating in one (1) one-hour interview.

All interviews will be scheduled at a time convenient for participant and the researcher.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you will **not** be compensated. If you choose to participate, your identity, sorority, and university will remain anonymous during and after the study.

Criteria for qualifications - undergraduate:
1. Are an active undergraduate member of your sorority for at least one full academic year;
2. Self-identify as Hispanic/Latina and as a woman;
3. Must be 18 years old or older.

Criteria for qualifications - alumna:
1. Are an alumna member of your sorority;
2. Self-identify as Hispanic/Latina and as a woman;
3. Must be five years or more removed from undergraduate classification.

For undergraduate participants, "active" status is determined by using each respective organization's definition.

If you are an undergraduate and would like to participate in this study, I will be available to answer questions at your next entity's meeting. If you are an alumna member and are interested in participating, please reply to me via email at lr1308@nova.edu no later than January 30th.

For further inquiries, please contact me at lr1308@nova.edu

Thank you,

Luz D. Randolph
Nova Southeastern University

Appendix B
Participant Demographic Form

Appendix B: Participant Demographic Form

General Information
Name: _____Ethnicity/Race: _____
Classification, circle one: Sophomore   Junior   Senior   Alumna
Membership Affiliation (sorority)
_____
Major(s): _____Minor: _____
If you're an alumna, please list your profession
_____
Are you a first-generation college student? YES   NO
Background Information
Hometown: _____ Are you or your family native to the
U.S.? YES NO
If "No", please list your country of origin
_____

Growing up, how would you describe your socio-economic status? Low   Middle   High

In a few words, describe the community you grew up in?
_____
_____
_____
_____
Why did you choose/chose to attend this institution?
_____
_____
_____
_____

College and Sorority Membership Information
When did you become a member of your sorority? Please list academic term and year
_____

In a few words, please share why did you choose to join your organization?
_____
_____
_____
_____
Have you held any leadership positions within your sorority? If so, please list them below.
_____
_____
_____
_____
If invited to participate, would you be willing to provide an in-person (video call) on campus
interview? Yes No

Appendix C
Interview Protocol

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

General Undergraduate Experience
- Please describe your undergraduate experience, as it relates to your academics, extracurricular activities, and overall campus life.
- Why did you choose to attend this university?
- Describe any experiences, positive or negative, you have encountered as a student that relate to your ethnicity.
- Describe any experiences, positive or negative, you have encountered as a student that relate to you being a woman.

General Sorority Experience
- Please tell me a little about your sorority.
- Why did you choose to join this sorority?
- Did your undergraduate experience change once you became member of the sorority? If yes, how so?
- Describe what the sisterhood means to you.
- What has been your most significant experience in the sorority and why?
- How do you think others on campus view your sorority?
- How similar are the values and beliefs of your sorority sisters to those of your family? Please explain.
- What type of academic support has the sorority membership provided?
- How has that resource assisted in your persistence to graduation? Please explain.
- What impact has membership in a Latina-based sorority had for you as a Latina at a predominantly White institution?