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Within colleges and universities, fraternities and sororities face many of the same issues affecting the larger society. Each university fraternity and sorority community is a microcosm of the campus community in that the challenges within fraternities and sororities are reflected in the broader college and university environment. One of these challenges relates to race and ‘who gets counted.’ Given that “diversity initiatives regarding campus climate, retention, and representation [tend] to focus on Blacks and Latinos” (Accapadi, 2012, p. 78), the absence of the Asian/Pacific Islander/Desi-American voice in conversations about race epitomizes this broader, campus-wide problem. To date, fraternity and sorority research focuses heavily on organizations with predominately White membership. Only recently have scholars like Gregory Parks, Walter Kimbrough, Lawrence Ross, and Juan Guardia focused on the experience of Black and Latinx organizations. Still, there is a lack of research focusing on fraternities and sororities with a focus on Asian identities, resulting in the lack of effective support from university administrators.

Lions: A Brief History of Fraternal Organizations

Collegiate fraternal organizations have a strong history in America, starting with the founding of Phi Beta Kappa in 1776. Tobenson (2009) states:

The next recorded appearance of a Greek-letter organization occurred thirty-six years after the founding of Phi Beta Kappa. In 1812, four one-time initiates of Phi Beta Kappa at the University of North Carolina organized Kappa Alpha... It is very likely this fraternity was an offspring of one of the community chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, for its constitution, rituals, and secrets were very similar (p. 21).

Shortly thereafter, women’s fraternities were formed as an outlet and provided a similar experience to that of their men’s counterparts (Torbenson, 2009). Although the popularity of fraternities grew and the sorority movement gained momentum across colleges and universities, the exclusion of people of color reflected societal norms pertaining to race, institutional discrimination, and segregation.

At the turn of the century, membership and access to fraternities and sororities for people of color shifted, even though many remained racially segregated. It was not until the establishment of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. in 1906 at Cornell University that a group of Black men were able to collectively create a Greek-letter organization that would sustain to present day. In 1907 Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. expanded to Howard University, a historically Black college or university (HBCU), to start the Beta Chapter. Shortly thereafter, the first organization for Black women, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., was established at Howard University in 1908. Black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs) saw rapid growth with the founding of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. in 1911; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. in 1913; Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. in 1914; Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. in 1920; and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. in 1922. By 1937, these eight organizations comprised the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) (Parks, 2008, p. 19-140). In

1963 Iota Phi Theta was created, and joined the NPHC in 1996, completing the council as it stands today.

The rapid growth in Black Greek-letter organizations is not parallel to Latinx Greek-letter organizations or Asian American Greek-letter organizations. In the 1930s, a few Latinx and Asian Greek-letter organizations were formed, but it was not until 1970s and 1980s that Latinx-interest and Asian-interest fraternities and sororities saw more rapid development of new fraternal organizations (Munoz & Guardia, 2009). Additionally, the political and social movements of the 1960s “eliminated official constitutional stipulations that prohibited race-based membership” (Hughey, 2010, p. 656). Consistent with other societal trends related to institutional access, immigration, and civil rights, these organizations provide a lens to understand dynamics of race within higher education institutions.

Tigers: Racial Implications

Banks (1995) states that the “color line” associated with race is a social construct to show superiority and provide power to one race, more specifically to White people. Communities of color are also typically racially and ethnically divided—Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, etc. The term “Asian” is typically used to refer to East-Asian communities. However, there is more diversity and complexity within the Asian community than just East-Asians: “South Asian, Pacific Islander, and other communities, who are usually lumped into the Asian American category [do] not feel Asian American, so they often [do] not connect with the community” (Accapadi, 2012, p. 79). The acronym APIDA, coined by Dr. Mamta Accapadi at the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE), stands for Asian/Pacific Islander/Desi- American, has been adopted by some to be a more inclusive term for the identities represented at the “Asian” table (Accapadi, 2012).

South-Asian Greeks: The Representation of Desi Identities

According to the National APIDA Panhellenic Association (NAPA) website (2016), 14 Asian and South-Asian Greek-letter organizations convened to create the Asian Greek Alliance (AGA) in 2004, which “formed as a partnership in a grassroots ‘Get Out the Vote’ campaign with APIA Vote.” The AGA assembled for a meeting, which resulted in the formation of an umbrella organization for Asian and South-Asian Greek-letter organizations; this organization would later become the National APIA Panhellenic Association. Understanding the importance of representation, at the 2016 NAPA Annual Meeting, the 18-member organization of NAPA unanimously decided to change the APIA acronym within the organizations name to APIDA. The change from APIA to APIDA further emphasizes NAPA’s commitment to their Desi fraternal organizations.

South Asian-interest fraternities and sororities are still relatively young organizations. Delta Phi Beta was the first South Asian-interest Greek-letter organization founded in 1992. A few years after that, Iota Nu Delta was organized in 1994, followed by Sigma Beta Rho in 1996, and Delta Epsilon Sigma Iota in 1997. In 1998, there were increased representation and formations of South Asian Greek-letter organizations with Delta Epsilon Psi Fraternity, Inc.; Alpha Iota Omicron Fraternity, Inc.; Kappa Phi Gamma Sorority, Inc.; Chi Psi Beta Fraternity, Inc.; Delta Phi Omega Sorority, Inc.; and Sigma Sigma Rho Sorority, Inc.

Today, there are currently 16 South Asian-interest Greek-letter organizations, six of which were founded in the state of Texas. The existence of these organizations fill important gaps for APIDA communities on college campuses. Accapadi (2012) asserts, “[APIDA] sororities and fraternities felt marginalized in a predominately White Greek system” (p. 81), thus providing spaces for APIDA students to build community, maintain cultural strengths, and form professional networks.

Advising South-Asian Greek Letter Organizations

Although APIDA organizations are growing, there is little research on how to support and advise these organizations within campus communities. An advisor will be unable to have a research-based advising model without having adequate research. Bloland (1967) suggests that it is the role of the advisor to suggest that problems be solved with “a systematic research approach” (p. 30). Little is known about the experiences of student members of APIDA communities, and more specifically, Desi communities on college campuses. This lack of information can also be seen in scholarly work around South Asian-interest fraternities and sororities. Accapadi (2001) explains that there are few “studies [that] take into account the diversity between the history and development of White fraternities and sororities, as compared to the history and development of fraternities and sororities of color” (p. 54). For this reason, it is necessary for scholars and practitioners to continue to research this area in order to serve as better advisors for these organizations.

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