



## DIFFERENT STROKES:

### Engaging University Alumni in Hazing Prevention Efforts for Black, Latino and Multicultural Fraternities and Sororities

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Approaching hazing the same way in different contexts is like trying to play a movie on VHS tape in a DVD player. Conceptually, the content of the movie doesn't change it's just presented in a different format. Functionally, the tape and the player are designed in different ways, at different times, for different reasons.

Attempting to integrate diverse technologies inevitably causes a communication disconnect. No matter how well intentioned the integration is it inevitably falls short of achieving the goal - watching the movie.

Similarly, Black, Latino and Multicultural fraternities and sororities, are founded on values-based principles shared by other social fraternal organizations:

brotherhood/sisterhood, scholarship, leadership and service.

Historically, however, these values were born out of a different context. For example, in the book *Black Haze* the author notes,  
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“One reason that the five organizations [Black Greek Fraternities] under consideration were formed was because WGFs [White Greek Fraternities] would not admit black participants.” (Jones, 2004). Preservation of identity, celebration of culture and developing overall support networks are common themes that Latino Organizations shared in their inception, as well. Similarly, “Latino Greek-Lettered Organizations (LGLOs) were formed out of a need to academically and socially thrive at Predominately White Institutions, to organize a united force to combat anti-Latino agendas, and to provide a safe-haven where Latinos could be themselves.” (Munoz and Guardia, 2009). Some multicultural organizations share these correlations as they originally began as Latino organizations and later diversified their membership, thus broadening their scope.

Schein (2010) indicates that organizational culture is defined as:

... a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive,

think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 18)

The emphasis of cultural empowerment is present within the historical fabric of culturally-based fraternal organizations. Based upon Schein’s (2010) definition, the evolutions of BGLOs and LGLOs, as enumerated in the work of Dr. Kimbrough (2003) and Munoz and Guardia, (2009) respectively, one can argue that it was imperative to the founders of these organizations that they be different. These differences ultimately led to the formation of a distinct organizational culture, in and of itself.

These unique cultural signatures include such things as organization calls, hand signs, line jackets and stepping are shared between Black and Latino organizations. (Kimbrough, 2003). More specifically, these correlations are attributed to a direct nexus that consists of observational and cultural influences. In some instances, LGLOs had a direct connection with BGLOs. For example, Sigma Lambda Beta, one the largest multicultural fraternities with Latino-based roots, was influenced by one of its founders, Baltazar Mendoza-Madrigal, who, “...began to explore the idea of establishing a Latino-based fraternity at the University of Iowa. Having seen the impact organizations like Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity [NPHC

fraternity] had on their constituency.” (www.sigmalambdabeta.com, 2015). In addition to observational influences, cultural connections began to originate out of societal necessity. “Historical accounts show that while in the earlier period there existed a strong cultural and political unity among all Cubans and Latinos along national and linguistic lines, the impact of post-Reconstruction and Jim Crow conditions escalated the anti-black racism and increased the need for solidarity with other blacks.” (Appiah and Gates, 2005). These similarities and relationships coupled with a shared experience of feeling marginalized at PWIs created an environment for cultural exchange. On a local level these two groups shared benefits from each other's' experiences. This is illustrated by Munoz and Guardia (2009) who note “Personal friendships with Latino Greek and some Black Greek Fraternity members became pivotal as was their willingness to share whatever they could about how their organizations were started, how they defined their uniqueness and official university standing and how they programmed.”

Categorically, it is therefore understandable, that pledge processes amongst CBFOs are similar. Kimbrough notes that, “...some of the

articles (written about Latino organizations) indicate that Latin fraternal organizations are experimenting with pledge programs that clearly mimic those established by Black fraternal organizations in the 1920s.” (Kimbrough, 2003).

While the term “pledging” is commonly used in IFC and NPC, as well as CBFOs, the meaning, the context and activities associated with them are usually different. For example, in BGLOs, Kimbrough further states, “Pledging is generally justified as something entirely different from hazing, which is difficult to explain given the fact that pledging (especially within the Black Greek context) did not evolve until after higher education began to move toward abolishing the hazing of freshman.” These organizational cultural distinctions have an impact on how hazing originates and evidence supports these differences. Dr. Ricky Jones, in *Black Haze*, synthesizes Hank Nuwer's listed reported hazing incidents and deaths from his book *Broken Pledges* and compares IFC and NPHC fraternities. He notes the disproportionate amount of alcohol-related hazing incidents reports in IFC relative to the amount of physically violent related hazing incidents in NPHC. Further examination of these distinctions, correlations,

shared culture and relationships provide insight into addressing the unique challenges that exist when engaging university alumni in hazing prevention efforts geared towards CBFOs.

#### The San Andreas Fault of Black Greeks: Membership Intake

In order to gain a more directed perspective on involving culturally-based fraternal organization (CBFO) alumni in these types of hazing prevention efforts, one must first understand the shift that occurred in the new member processes for Black Greek-Letter Organizations (BGLOs). This central shift reverberated to the extent that years later still impacts CBFOs from its “aftershocks”.

In 1990, the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), the umbrella organization serving, the then eight member organizations, passed the following resolution:

Whereas these NPHC organizations are likewise committed to promoting self-respect and dignity of all persons seeking membership in the respective organizations...Whereas “pledging” has been officially abolished as a process for membership and pledge “lines” have similarly been abolished; and all members and prospective members are

prohibited from engaging in hazing [and] the elimination of pledging and have instituted within the respective organizations a revised membership development and intake process.

As a result, BGLOs quickly changed their pledge process to a new system, known as the Membership Intake Process (MIP). This change limited the physical interaction between members and aspirants, shortened the duration required for new members to join, and removed risky activities.

At the time many BGLO members refused to accept and/or conform to the newly established Membership Intake Process (MIP). The pre-1990 above ground pledge process in their eyes instilled in pledges a certain work ethic, dedication, responsibility, accountability and loyalty to the organization. During this process, pledges experienced trials and tribulations that included weeks, sometimes months, of discomfort, pain and sacrifice in which other members, the college campus and surrounding community could be spectators of their dedication for their soon to be organization . Some BGLO members felt that MIP missed many of these “valued” elements which led the MIP dissenters to create ways to “unofficially enhance” the new membership

intake process resulting in underground pledging--a means by which to re-infuse a process for one to validate his/her worthiness for membership (Kimbrough, 2003).

Consequently, underground pledging resulted in nearly twice as many hazing related deaths post-1990 than before 1990 in NPHC organizations (Nuwer, 1990; Parks, 2006).

“Prevention requires understanding the factors that influence violence.” (Center for Disease Control (CDC), 2015) The CDC uses a four-level social-ecological model to better understand violence and the effect of potential prevention strategies (Dahlberg & Krug 2002).

“This model considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors.” (CDC 2015) Stapleton and Allan (2014) further suggest that effective hazing prevention requires utilizing an ecological model to engage various levels of stakeholders by developing individuals’ skills and increasing their knowledge to support policy and organizational change.

Accordingly, university alumni in Black, Latino and multicultural fraternities and sororities are key stakeholders and therefore influential in formulating and sustaining the cultural norms as key influencers in the societal layer of this four-pronged model.

Schein (2010) argues “...whether or not a culture is ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ is ‘functionally effective,’ or not, depends not on the culture alone but on the relationship of the culture to the environment in which it exists” (Schein, 2010, p. 14).

From a phenomenological framework, a type of qualitative research method that studies individuals’ lived experiences (Merriam, 2009), I have conversed with alumni throughout the years about their pledging experiences.

Through these exchanges I developed a deeper understanding of the feelings and values attached to their experience that, frankly, academic research has yet to fully ascertain and explain. Thus, hazing prevention strategies are lacking a key component in engaging alumni members. This alumni demographic, who may not be financial active or engaged in their respective organization, still share some affinity to a pledge process that goes formally unrecognized. This is indicative of why a pledging culture persists. Accordingly, in traveling the country, visiting with CBFO members and alumni, I find the shift to the MIP impacted the cultural norm in the societal layer of the social ecological model. As a result, this shift created divisions within the CBFO university alumni. On one side of the

spectrum there are pledging advocates, a hard core group of alumni who still subscribe to the pre-1990 pledge process--many of whom affiliated after the change. On the other side of the spectrum there are membership intake advocates, who follow the strict letter of the "law" adhering to the zero tolerance hazing policies and procedures outlined by national organizations, colleges/universities and state law. Finally, there is a third group--the "X" factor, or outliers that fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. This is the group who believe in a blend of both, inevitably this approach manifests itself as the "pledge remix". The "X factor" can influence the organization's new members based on a sliding scale relative to their time within the organization (the older the more influential), pledging ideology and their level of respect. This respect or "street cred" is not exclusively tied to service based work performance, work product or even financially active membership. It is often grounded in their either surviving a pledging experience and/or implementing "successful" pledge, or underground, pledge programs within their own organization. Their influence, however, is more credible to their members since it is not to either extreme but a more reasonable and moderate view.

Accordingly, leveraging this "X factor" university alumni group, the middle ground, or proverbial swing vote, is key to building allies. Strategically engaging and incorporating them to leverage their much needed social capital and influence can increase the likelihood for success in implementing hazing prevention efforts. There are typically three responses to social influence: (1) compliance, (2) identification and (3) internalization (Aronson, 2008). In conceiving a plan of action, it is essential to incorporate these responses into key steps that foster a sense of collective ownership for hazing prevention amongst key stakeholders.

#### Undergrads: Keep Things in their Proper Context

Younger members generally take older members' word as bond, or truth. No further inquiry, or investigation- just point blank acceptance. Not that an older brother or sister would purposefully deceive a younger member; but, sometimes, many parts of their pledge "war stories" are omitted. Younger members, can overcome these biases and inconsistencies by respectfully and genuinely seeking more information. For example, they can ask questions about the most and least

beneficial part(s) of their “big’s” new member process. Suggested language might include:

- How did your process help develop you personally or prepare you professionally?
- If you had to do your process over again, what would you do differently?
- With the new membership processes in place, what suggestions would you make to develop a legal alternative to teach specific values that you feel are missing?

Additionally, younger members should be sure to keep their questions and responses within proper context. For example, less violent physical activities, more limited in scope, that were expressly, or implicitly, accepted during the 90’s and early-2000’s pledge culture are from a time period when members more readily accepted illegal activities. During this time period members may have been more tolerant of running or calisthenics as “part of the process”. We currently live in a more litigious society that is not as tolerant, nor as accepting, of behaviors that can potentially harm others. This is especially true with regard to more intrusive physical activities that are violent, such as paddling and punching. They all now fall in the purview of a stronger

societal stance rejecting violence as seen on a larger level, particularly around a more heightened awareness with long standing issues such as bullying, domestic abuse and police brutality. This heightened societal awareness, yielded reshaped attitudes, increased sensitivity and decreased tolerance of these violent activities, and hazing is no exception. A broader societal perspective provides much needed insight to supplement the personal context from more seasoned members. It also makes complying with rules and regulations a little easier when one has an increased understanding of why things changed. Remember, fraternities, sororities, and colleges/universities are all microcosms of society. This correlation is not static; therefore different times demand different expectations. Consequently, a balance between fraternal tradition, societal relevance and historical purpose must always be considered, challenged and, if necessary, recalibrated.

#### Alumni: Lose the Guilt Trip

Alumni should stop making younger members feel badly because of their differing experiences. Generally, many members from the 80’s and 90’s had a different Greek experience due to a number of varying factors. The demographic of the institution--

Historically Black College or University (HBCU) or Predominately White Institution (PWI)--at the time created significant differences. Additionally, whether they attended a school in an urban, suburban or rural area shaped their experiences. The fact of the matter is that a member cannot control the process in place when he/she joins. They join and have enough expectations to address without older members belittling them because of their new member process. Instead, alumni should reassure current undergraduates by sharing their positive Greek experiences beyond their own process, and build holistic relationships that focus less on how an undergraduate joined the organization and more on mentorship and professional development. Additionally, alumni can express their concerns with the state of the membership processes by taking responsibility and legally addressing it to the leadership of their organization that has the authority to effectuate change. This process requires participation in committees, meetings, and conferences in their respective organization as a financial member. Don't re-victimize the participant, revamp the system. Re-victimization just reinforces a lack of unity,

encourages poor communication and widens the gap between members.

Campus-based Professionals: Explore social influencers as "X factors"

Identify "X factors" in your campus community so they can possibly serve as allies. How? Be observant. Notice who undergraduate members often refer to with admiration in casual conversation. Pay close attention at new member presentations (old school "probate shows") to see who undergraduate members flock to before/after the show. In some cases, they may even pay homage to these "X factors" during the show. Be sure to always consult with the advising graduate chapter to determine the best way to approach the alumni; it may be a team effort. Remember, as a campus-based professional (i.e. Director of Fraternity & Sorority Life, Director of Multicultural Affairs, on-campus advisor) one of your leadership roles is manager. A key component of managing is assembling a team, which requires multiple messengers some of which are more influential than you. Never confuse authority with influence. Leadership is a process, not a position. Your campus position doesn't necessarily equip you with the social capital you need to succeed. Schedule informal

meetings with alumni and encourage your allies to attend. The purpose of the meeting is to explore how they can support the university's efforts to ensure the safety and well-being of the current undergraduate student experience. You may be surprised at their level of interest and willingness to support. The "it takes a village..." concept holds true in this instance, especially in familial environments like culturally-based fraternal organizations. Don't be afraid to be a part of this family.

#### National Organizations: Values Rehab

Sanctions, fines, suspension and expulsions are all reactive measures to enforce hazing violations. Are they appropriate and necessary? Yes, at times, under certain situations where inappropriate or even dangerous behavior has occurred. However, inter/national organizations must be willing to address the "heart and soul" of the issue by first acknowledging and understanding the values that many of its members once attached to a pledge (above or underground) process. This may require developing and distributing a survey to all alumni members, regardless of financial status; conducting focus groups; and/or holding one-on-one meetings with individual members in an effort to understand

the pledge experience from their vantage point. Utilizing that information to build hazing prevention education that addresses behaviors that can no longer be sustained is the true next step towards successful change. There is a clear gap in the research related to the psyche, emotions, and values connected to the old pledge process. Thus, BGLOs, through evidence-based research, have struggled to eliminate the practice entirely.

Arguably, pledging could be seen as a cultural practice, a tradition of sorts, which did not have time to fade out, but was halted in its tracks, a proverbial arrested development of sorts. Therefore, the people who found value in such a process did have time to process this change and continued to engage and pass down activities and behaviors that they believed were necessary and appropriate. CBFOs must consider addressing hazing prevention beyond just legal and policy compliance. You cannot just regulate organizational change. They must develop educational models that incorporate theories and best practices from organizational and social change research. Additionally, this educational effort must include all alumni, not just those who are financially current with the organization. As indicated previously, many of

those individuals who can serve as the “X factor” for a specific institution and respective undergraduate chapter are not current.

This education and enforcement balance is necessary to protect the organization legally from hazing activities while also removing an individual’s motivation and desire to participate in it. This cultural change requires internalization, a shift in mind, body and soul, through consistent, comprehensive interactive and candid engagement. The most effective ministers and ambassadors are often those who have learned from their mistakes, can sincerely relate those mistakes to the masses and encourage others on how to overcome these challenges. Coupling these experiences with the influence that university alumni possess provides a powerful opportunity for them to connect with young members and influence them to work within the system and not outside it.

In closing, be patient, understanding and sensitive throughout this transformational process. When engaging university alumni in hazing prevention efforts, manage expectations accordingly. Hazing did not start overnight nor will it end overnight. Hazing is a complex web of multidimensional challenges that intertwine legal, administrative, operational

and cultural problems that often get more complex as time goes on. Accordingly, there is no single, linear, neat “packaged” answer, or silver bullet that will solve the hazing problem. There is a need for more focused evidence-based research on CBFOs to apply more effective best practices in this area. For now, strategically addressing it, however, with a level of specificity, tempered with history and culture, is a step in the right direction. Coupling this strategy with a hazing prevention plan that utilizes university alumni and incorporates young members, campus-based professionals and inter/national organizations will provide a methodological framework that one may find beneficial in deconstructing a hazing culture in Black, Latino and multicultural fraternal organizations.

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