EXPLORING “INVISIBLE” SOCIAL CLASS IN FRATERNITIES & SORORITIES

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DISCOVERY ILLUMINATES STUDENT SUCCESS.
Introductions

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**DISCOVERY ILLUMINATES**
**STUDENT SUCCESS.**
Overview of Session

• Social class in contemporary society
• Social class in higher education
• What we've learned: results from a research study on social class & fraternities/sororities
• How can we apply these findings to professional practice?
Social Class in America

One’s social class position shapes the ways in which he or she experiences, views, and understands the world (Aries & Seider, 2007)

Barratt (2011) noted that individuals have three class identities:
- a social class of origin
- a current felt social class
- an attributed social class (how others perceive one’s social class)
Social Class Artifacts in America

Social class influences

- language and mannerisms
- style of dress
- behaviors
- cultural norms and values
- one's understanding of norms and customs
- one's sense of belonging in a variety of contexts
Social Class in America

Two television families during the same time period...what is their social class? How can you tell?
Social Class in America

Two television families during the same time period...What is their social class? How can you tell?
Does social class matter in higher education? What are your thoughts?
Social Class Matters in Higher Education

• Students from lower social class and SES backgrounds are less likely to
  o enroll in college (e.g., Perna & Titus, 2004)
  o choose a four-year college (Carnevale & Rose, 2004)
  o persist and graduate (e.g., Astin, 1993; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001)

• Among HS grads in 2004, 43% of students with family incomes under $30,000 attended college compared with 75% of students with family incomes over $50,000 (Long, 2008)
Social Class Matters in Higher Education

• Working-class students may face alienation, estrangement, and imposter phenomenon in higher education (Beeghley, 2005; Goldthorpe, Llewellyn, & Payne, 1987; Ostrove, 2003)

• Students from lower social class backgrounds are less involved in extracurricular activities (Walpole, 2007), culminating in a lower sense of belonging and less social capital
Social Class Matters in Higher Education

• Working-class students have higher class awareness, class consciousness, and implications (Stuber, 2006)

• “Class background structures a sense of who belongs and who does not” (Ostrove & Long, 2007, p. 380)

• Class matters!
How does popular media portray social class in fraternities and sororities?
What is the social class of the members of this fraternity?
What is the social class of the members of this sorority?
How might these media portrayals of social class influence fraternities and sororities?
What are some ways you see social class play out in the fraternity/sorority community on your campus?
Research Questions

• Do students from different social class backgrounds participate in fraternities and sororities at the same rate?

• Are there differences between low/income-working class and middle/upper-class students' perceptions of campus climate and their sense of belonging depending upon whether they live in fraternities or sororities?
Methods

● Instrument:
  – Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey
  – Civic and community engagement module

● Participants:
  – 213,160 undergraduate students, spring 2011, nine large public research universities
  – 37.7% response rate, $n = 80,225$
  – 20% randomly assigned to module ($n = 16,878$)
## Fraternity & Sorority Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Affiliated with a Sorority or Fraternity</th>
<th>Affiliated with a Sorority or Fraternity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5637</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8124</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-first-generation</td>
<td>9989</td>
<td>74.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-generation</td>
<td>3440</td>
<td>25.6</td>
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## Fraternity & Sorority Membership

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<th>Affiliated with a Sorority or Fraternity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>.4</td>
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<td>African American</td>
<td>778</td>
<td>5.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1593</td>
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<td>Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2308</td>
<td>16.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7682</td>
<td>55.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other/Unknown</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>3.6</td>
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# Fraternity & Sorority Membership

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Class</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealthy</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper-middle or professional-middle</td>
<td>4031</td>
<td>1421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-class</td>
<td>5916</td>
<td>1052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working-class</td>
<td>2605</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-income or poor</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Social Class & Fraternity/Sorority Membership

• Do differences between the participation rates of students from different social class backgrounds persist when controlling for additional factors?
  – Yes! Our findings suggest that
    • working-class students are **1.22 times less likely** than their peers to participate
    • wealthy students were **3.18 times more likely** to participate
    • upper-middle class students were **1.55 times more likely** to participate
Participating in Fraternities/ Sororities

Sense of belonging factor (M = 0, SD = 1):
Participating in Fraternities/ Sororities

Campus climate factor (M = 0, SD = 1):
Discussion & Implications

• **Who’s** more likely to participate in fraternity/ sorority life? the pattern is clear – upper-middle class & wealthy students are significantly more likely to participate & working-class students are significantly less likely

• Membership in a fraternity/sorority appears to have a compensatory effect for working-class & low-income students sense of belonging
Discussion & Implications

• Working-class & low-income students in fraternities/sororities appear to have less favorable perceptions of campus climate than their non-member peers

• Access to fraternities/sororities may provide opportunities for social and cultural capital to which working-class and low-income students might not otherwise be exposed
Discussion & Implications

• Perhaps (inter)national organizations and universities should consider subsidizing the fraternal experience (e.g., dues) for working-class and low-income students

• These findings suggest involvement in a fraternity/sorority has a significant impact on working class & low-income student’s sense of belonging; this finding adds nuance to prior research suggesting working class & low-income students struggle to find a sense of belonging in college
Where do we go from here?
Questions?
References


References


References


References


Thank you!

- Krista Soria, ksoria@umn.edu
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