

# Experiences of LGBT People in Fraternities & Sororities:

From 1960 to 2007

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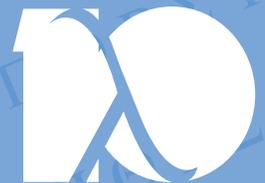
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**Lambda 10 Project**

An educational initiative of Campus Pride

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## Experiences of LGBT People in Fraternities & Sororities: From 1960 to 2007 Introduction

# Introduction

*I am and continue to be amazed by the changes for the positive for LGBTQ people. I had forgotten just how suppressed I was in college and can only imagine how my life then may have been different had I enjoyed the changes I have seen since.*

—fraternity member

Increased openness on the part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community and changing societal attitudes may directly relate to a recent increase in research on sexual orientation and the collegiate experiences of those who identify as LGBT (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Despite this shift in scholarly interest, surprisingly few studies have been conducted to examine the experiences of LGBT members of fraternities and sororities. “Fraternities” and “sororities”—terms for single-gender social organizations of male or female students in colleges/universities have been a part of higher education in the United States for more than 200 years. While there have always been LGBT people in fraternities and sororities, it is only in the last decade that they have been acknowledged. The invisibility of much of the LGBT population on college and university campuses and the “assumption of heteronormality” encouraged by fraternity and sorority culture may explain the present lack of research available on the subject (Case, Hesp, & Eberly, 2005, p. 16). This study intends to build upon this small body of research by examining the environment for LGBT individuals in fraternities and sororities.

According to Cass (1979) and D’Augelli (1994), lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity formation is a multi-stage process which may take place at any point over the lifespan. In Cass’s model, individuals go from a state of confusion about sexual identity, to tolerance, and eventually acceptance and feelings of pride. D’Augelli’s model notably takes into account the interaction between individuals and their environment, including the developmental influence of family and friends, an individual’s

own perceptions, and social norms. D’Augelli acknowledged that by leaving behind a heterosexual identity, individuals give up certain privileges and take on an identity degraded by much of contemporary society.

Sexual identity formation is generally recognized as one of many facets of individual development influenced by the experiences and interactions associated with collegiate life (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In a 2004 study, Antonio found that social groups within college and university communities have a profound impact on student development and socialization. According to Antonio, personal interaction strongly influences the development of shared social norms, to which individuals are often forced to adapt out of fear of being ousted from the group. In the case of LGBT students, whom climate studies indicate often experience discrimination and harassment within the campus community (Rankin, 2003), it seems logical that some students remain closeted<sup>1</sup> out of fear. It is also no surprise then that affiliation with student organizations may greatly influence the homo-emotional experiences of students identified as LGBT (Dilley, 2005).

Through his informal study Case (1996) shed some light on the experiences of non-heterosexual members of fraternities and sororities. Based on response to a 32-question survey, Case found that the lesbian, gay, and bisexual students joined fraternities and sororities for reasons similar to those of heterosexual students: friendship, social activities, and a sense of belonging. Respondents also noted lasting outcomes of joining Greek<sup>2</sup> organizations, including improved social and interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and long-term friendships (Case, Hesp, & Eberly, 2005). Case concluded that the one area in which LGBT students differed from heterosexual members of fraternities and sororities was in chapter leadership, with over 80% of non-heterosexual men and 60% of women holding at least one Greek executive committee position during their collegiate years. The results also found the heterocentric nature of Greek social activities, homophobic attitudes

<sup>1</sup> As used here, closeted refers to a person with a sexual or emotional attraction for the same sex without admission to themselves or others. For example, closeted individuals have not yet “come out of the closet” or disclosed their LGBT identity to themselves or others.

<sup>2</sup> “Greek” is a colloquial term often used for members of social fraternities and sororities. The term is used because most fraternities and sororities have Greek-letter names.

within organizations, and the perceived need to hide their sexual orientation detracted from the Greek experience for many LGBT students. Nevertheless, most respondents (85%) reported satisfaction with their overall Greek experience.

Case's (1996) results suggest that approximately 5-6% of fraternity members and 3-4% of sorority members were known by respondents to identify as LGBT. Nearly half (40%) of all respondents acknowledged revealing their sexual orientation to one or more members of their chapter while enrolled as students. Additionally, over 70% of respondents indicated having experienced homophobic or heterosexist attitudes within their chapter. This result supports the hypothesis that most students in fraternities and sororities "score higher on measures of homosexual intolerance" (Lottes & Kuriloff, 1994, p. 34). Notably, respondents in Case's study suggested that LGBT members often voiced no opposition to homophobic behavior for fear that doing so might reveal their own sexual orientation. This reaction (or lack thereof) may also have something to do with the fact that members of fraternities and sororities are encouraged to be loyal to both tradition and fellow members (Owen, 1998), often leaving LGBT Greeks no choice but to hide their true opinions and selves from their "brothers" and "sisters". Based on this data, it is important to note that chapters were often reluctant to offer membership to openly LGBT pledges<sup>3</sup>, yet were typically supportive when initiated members "came out" to the chapter.

Case's (1996) findings correlate to the results of several studies focused more generally on student involvement and/or Greek life. In a study on the influence of Greek life on development and the collegiate experience, Pike (2000) found that involvement in Greek social organizations was positively related to self-reported gains in overall abilities. In a later study, Pike (2003) confirmed that Greek students reported notably higher levels of involvement and gains than did non-Greeks. Upperclassmen and women involved in the Greek community were found to be significantly more involved in positive leadership roles than were first-year members, and therefore more widely reported the benefits of their Greek experience (Pike,

2003). Similarly, Logue, Hutchens, and Hector (2005) established that students who held leadership positions found their involvement to be beneficial and overall, a positive experience.

In a study of students at 18 colleges and universities by Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Terenzini (1996) fraternity and sorority membership was negatively associated with students' openness to diversity. Additionally, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) pointed to a negative relationship between Greek membership and ethical conduct. It is no surprise then that Case, Hesp and Eberly (2005) described the "familial environment of the college fraternity/sorority" as both supportive and hostile – specifically for those in the minority (p. 16). In a study investigating the conflict between hegemonic masculinity as an influence/explanation for extreme drinking within all male groups, Capraro (2000) found that homosexuality is a direct challenge to the norms of homosocial "hegemonic masculinities" that under gird daily life within all-male groups.

Windmeyer and Freeman's (1998) anthology examining the experiences of gay and bisexual men in fraternities and (2001) companion anthology for lesbian and bisexual women in sororities supports the empirical research findings. Participants offer that the acceptance of gay, lesbian, and bisexual fraternity brothers and sorority sisters is relatively greater when members join the fraternity/sorority closeted, establish a close friendship and brotherhood/sisterhood, and then disclose their sexual identity. Participants also suggest that the experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual members vary greatly depending on the individuals within the chapter, the college campus climate, and the national fraternity/sorority leadership. Men and women who rush<sup>4</sup> openly gay, lesbian or bisexual are often denied fraternity/sorority membership. Both Windmeyer and Freeman (1998, 2001) and Windmeyer (2005) gave voice to the experiences of select fraternity/sorority members and their involvement in fraternity/sorority life. These anecdotal reports affirmed that some men and women who are openly gay, or who later come out, achieved and maintained membership in fraternity/sorority chapters. In addition, they suggest the progress around these issues over the last three decades.

<sup>3</sup> At the end of the formal recruitment period, the various organizations invite the visitors of their choice to pledge the fraternity or sorority. If the invitation, or "bid", is accepted, the student will be admitted to the chapter as a pledge until they are initiated as full members. Many fraternities and sororities have forgone the term "pledge" as part of their education process due to the negative association made by many people in the United States, and some organizations have completely eliminated both the term and process.

<sup>4</sup> The process of joining a fraternity or sorority commonly begins with "rushing", or "recruitment." The term "rush" refers to the historical practice where students would hurry to join fraternities at the beginning of the school year, in a large part to find housing. "Rush" is usually followed by "pledging," or committing.

# Introduction

Interestingly, Case (1996) reported that a large number of participants surveyed in his study of the experiences of gay and lesbian fraternity and sorority members had a “tendency toward ‘overachievement’” (p. 2). Likewise, the majority of participants in a more recent study (Hesp, 2006) held at least one leadership position in their fraternity chapters. Furthermore, of the 30 coming out stories chronicled in Windmeyer and Freeman (1998) and Windmeyer (2005), a strong majority contained references to the authors as officers or leaders. This “tendency toward ‘overachievement,’” Case reasoned, “may reflect a desire for validation and acceptance by the group” (p. 2).

In the mid-late 1990’s several national fraternities and sororities responded by adding sexual orientation to the non-discrimination language in organizational bylaws, by implementing chapter LGBT educational services, and by training staff members on LGBT issues. Currently, there are over a dozen men’s fraternities and four women’s sororities who have implemented these initiatives (Lambda10 - Out in Front Chapter).

To provide an opportunity to be “out” and in a fraternity Delta Lambda Phi became the first national social fraternity for gay, bisexual, and heterosexual progressive men in 1986. The purpose of the fraternity is not much different than a traditional fraternity. Free of heterosexism and homophobia, the fraternal environment provides a safe, comfortable space for men to develop a strong sense of friendship and a balanced sexual identity. Heterosexual members do not need to conform to gender norms or be concerned about “proving” their heterosexuality to be accepted by the fraternity brothers. These men are able to gain the promise of fraternity life—friendship, valuable leadership skills, and a positive self-esteem without homophobia and heterosexism present in many traditional fraternities (Yueng, Stompler, & Wharton, 2006). Delta Lambda Phi currently has over thirty chapters and colonies. Local GBT-focused fraternities have recently been established, including Alpha Lambda Tau (University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1999), Sigma Phi Beta (Arizona State University, 2004) and Sigma Epsilon Omega (University of California, Berkeley, 2007). The first lesbian-based collegiate sorority was Lambda Delta Lambda, founded at the University of California, Los Angeles in 1988. It later changed its name to Lambda Delta Omega since the original name was registered to another organization. Between its founding and 2005, the sorority had five chapters, but none existed for more than a few years. In 2003, a new LBT-focused sorority, Gamma Rho Lambda was established at Arizona State University and currently has four chapters and colonies.

While gay men, lesbian women, and bisexual men and women are beginning to find more opportunities to be a part of the fraternity/sorority experience, transgender students face a tougher battle, especially if they want to join existing chapters. In addition to encountering the possible transphobia in existing chapters, federal legislation is currently an obstacle for transgender students. The U.S. Educational Amendments of 1972, commonly known as “Title IX,” prohibit organizations that receive federal financial assistance from discriminating against people on the basis of gender. However, fraternities and sororities have the legal right to restrict their membership to men/women since they are granted an exemption by the federal government. Fraternities and sororities will need to address this challenge for future prospective transgender members.

As more and more students arrive to college as openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, there will be an increase in the number of these students who desire to be a part of the fraternity/sorority experience (Baker 2002). As a result, college administrators as well as national fraternity/sorority leaders will need to create policy, practices, and educational resources that affirm the presence and acceptance of LGBT members.

Although studies on sexual identity formation and the experiences of LGBT college students have increased in recent years, additional research on the experiences of non-heterosexual fraternity and sorority members is needed to assist program planners and policy decision-makers. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity theory and student development research both point to the fact that identity development is a process affected by the campus environment and interactions with others. The stereotypically homogenous environment fostered by fraternities and sororities may therefore have a lasting impact on the collegiate experience and overall development of LGBT members. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of LGBT fraternity and sorority members in colleges and universities.

Following are summaries of the demographic characteristics of the respondents, quantitative data, and qualitative responses. Readers are encouraged to review the full report for more specific details. The next steps in this project are to use the results to identify specific strategies for addressing the challenges and support positive initiatives. A summary of the recommendations is also provided.

## Sample Demographics

440 surveys were returned representing the following:

- 347 men, 88 women, 1 transgender<sup>5</sup>
- 300 gay, 59 bisexual, 36 lesbian, 18 heterosexual, 15 queer, 4 same gender loving
- 18-22 years (n=159); 23-32 years (n=174); 33-42 years (n=76); 43-52 years (n=19) years; 53 years and over (n=12)
- 73% White/Caucasian (n=322); 27% People of Color<sup>6</sup> (n=120)
- 97% US citizens (n=428); 3% International (n=12)
- Region by chapter joined: Great Lakes (n=130); Southeast (n=93); Mid-Atlantic (n=77); Southwest (n=56); West (n=42); Northeast (n=16); Midwest (n=13); Northwest (n=10)
- 49% Alumni/ae (n=216); 40% Undergraduate student (n=165); 13% Graduate/Professional student (n=59)
- Fraternity/Sorority joined: International (n=384); Local (n=49)
- Fraternity/Sorority joined: General Fraternity/Sorority (n=348); Focused on specific ethnic/racial group affiliation (n=25); focused on specific religious/spiritual group affiliations (n=10); LGBT focused (n=13); Other focused (n=42)
- Chapter Size by Gender/Race: The most common size of fraternities/sororities consisted of 25-49 individuals (38%, n = 166) followed by 50-74 individuals. People of color were more likely to be members of a smaller fraternity or sorority with less than 10 members (13%, n = 15), while White people were more likely to belong to larger chapters. Similarly, women were more likely to belong to smaller chapters (less than 10 members) than men.

# Sample Demographics

<sup>5</sup> “Transgender” refers to identity that does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of male or female gender, but combines or moves between these (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2003). OED Online. (2004, March). Oxford University Press. Retrieved February 17, 2006, from <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00319380>>.

<sup>6</sup> In this survey, the following were considered “People of Color” identities: “Black,” “African,” “African American,” “American Indian,” “Alaskan Native,” “Asian/Asian American,” “Latino(a)/Hispanic/Chicano(a),” “Middle Eastern,” “Pacific Islander,” and “Hawaiian Native.” While recognizing the vastly different experiences of people of various racial identities (e.g., Chicano(a) versus African-American or Latino(a) versus Asian-American), and those experiences within these identity categories (e.g., Hmong versus Chinese), it is necessary to collapse some of these categories to conduct the analyses due to the small numbers in the individual categories.

## Summary of Findings

### Why did you join?

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Participants were asked to rate how important a number of activities were in their decision to join their fraternity/sorority. The most important activity, regardless of current status, was to pursue friendships (76-81%). Support groups and leadership opportunities were secondary and tertiary important reasons to join a fraternity/sorority for both undergraduate students and alumni/ae. Meeting members of the opposite gender to pursue sexual relationships (72-81%), meeting members of the same gender to pursue sexual relationships (74-76%), and passing as heterosexual (53-74%) were the activities of least importance in participants' decision to join a fraternity/sorority. An interesting finding is that 10% of alumni/ae indicated passing as heterosexual was a very important reason for which they joined a fraternity/sorority, while 0% of current undergraduate students reported this reason.

### Leadership Positions

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56 of the alumni/ae respondents and 21 of the undergraduate respondents were presidents of their fraternity/sorority. 27% (n = 119) of participants were pledge/new member educators and 26% (n = 116) were vice-presidents. 35% reported "other", which includes but is not limited to academics chair/scholarship, alumni relations, historian, house manager, kitchen steward, philanthropy chair, risk management officer, and webmaster. Almost one-third (33%, n = 144) of respondents were members of the Greek governing board at their institutions. 27% (n = 121) also reported that they were part of the student body or had a government elected position. 28% (n = 124) reported "other" positions, which include but are not limited to College Republicans, Gay/straight alliance, honor society, newspaper, orientation leader, LGBT Club, residence life, and student activities board.

### Level of "Outness" Reported by Participants

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*"I came out after several years here, during my term as Vice-President. I waited this long because there were members who were openly hostile to homosexuals and I was waiting for them to graduate..."*

*"I came out during a chapter meeting. My brothers were very supportive in general. They gave me a standing ovation after I*

*gave my speech, and most treated me more kindly after my coming out than before."*

At the time of the study, more than half of participants are out to all friends (58%, n = 256) and nuclear family (52%, n = 232), while one-third (34%, n = 148) of participants are totally closeted to their extended family. Between 59-78% of participants indicated that they were completely closeted to friends, nuclear family, and extended family when they started college. 73% (n = 322) and 66% (n = 292) of participants were completely closeted to their nuclear and extended family, respectively, when they participated in the recruitment/rush/intake process of joining a fraternity/sorority. More than half (51%, n = 225) were totally closeted to friends during this time. Participants continued to be totally closeted to their extended (74%, n = 320) and nuclear (64%, n = 282) families when they were initiated into a fraternity/sororities, but began to disclose their sexual orientation to friends after initiation.

Participants reported whether they were out to members of their fraternity/sorority. The majority of participants (79%, n = 348) indicated that they were out to members of their chapter. By current status, one-quarter (25%, n = 54) of alumni/ae reported that they were not "out" to members of their fraternity/sorority, while 83% (n = 137) of undergraduate students were "out". By region, all participants from the Northeast (100%, n = 16) indicated they were "out" to members of their chapter, while twenty-seven percent (n = 25) of participants from the Southeast were not "out" to members (Figure 27 below). Overall, the majority of participants (73-100%), regardless of region, were "out" to members of their fraternity/sorority.

Participants were also asked whether their coming out was voluntary, when their coming out occurred, and to indicate the reactions of other members. The majority of participants (82-90%), regardless of their current status, reported that their coming out was voluntary.

More than one-third (39%, n = 53) of undergraduate students came "out" while they were undergraduate members of their fraternity/sorority, while 29% (n = 39) came "out" during recruitment/rush. More than half of graduate students reported that they came "out" while an undergraduate member. Almost half of alumni/ae (47%, n = 76) indicated that they came out after graduation.

# Summary of Findings

Between 86-90% of participants, regardless of current status, described the reactions of the majority of members in their chapter as very supportive or supportive.

### Climate in Campus Chapter

Approximately 50% (n = 98) of undergraduate students described their chapter as non-homophobic, while 47% (n = 100) of alumni/ae described their chapters as homophobic. More than half of undergraduate students (56%, n = 92) described their chapter as positive for bisexual individuals, while 43% (n = 93) of alumni/ae indicated their chapter was biphobic. The majority of participants (47% - 75%) reported that their campus chapter was transphobic. More alumni/ae (75%, n = 161) indicated this rating than undergraduate students (47%, n = 78) and graduate/professional students (66%, n = 39).

Participants from the Northwest region (70%, n = 7) were most likely to describe their campus chapter as non-homophobic, while participants from the Southeast (43%, n = 40) indicated their campus chapter was homophobic. More than half of participants from the Northeast (56%, n = 9), West (50%, n = 21), and Northwest (50%, n = 5) indicated their chapter was positive for bisexual people, while 46% (n = 43) of respondents from the Southeast described their chapter as negative for bisexual people. The majority of participants (48%-80%), regardless of region, described their chapter as negative for transgender people. Participants from the Northwest (80%, n = 8) and Southeast (73%, n=68) were most likely to report that their chapter was negative for transgender individuals.

Participants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their undergraduate fraternity/sorority experience. All participants, regardless of current status, indicated they were very satisfied and satisfied with their undergraduate fraternity/sorority experience as opposed to unsatisfied or very unsatisfied.

The majority (91%, n = 315) of participants who were “out” to other members indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with their undergraduate fraternity/sorority experience, while 77% (n = 79) of participants who were not “out” indicated they were very satisfied or satisfied. Between 50-70% of participants, regardless of region, indicated they were very satisfied with their undergraduate fraternity/sorority experience.

More than one-third of undergraduate students (36%, n = 59) were very likely to participate in

campus LGBT events, while alumni/ae (44%, n = 96) reported that they were very unlikely to participate in campus events when they were undergraduates. More than half of undergraduate students (59%, n = 97) were very likely to engage in same-gender sexual activity, while alumni/ae reported that when they were undergraduates they were very unlikely to engage in same-gender sexual activity (19%, n = 41). More than half (52%, n = 113) of alumni/ae, 45% (n = 74) of undergraduate students, and 34% (n = 20) of graduate/professional students were very unlikely to engage in same-gender sexual activity with another chapter member.

Participants were asked to rate the climate in their fraternity/sorority for LGBT people, and the climate of their campus fraternity/sorority community for LGBT people according to various scales. Almost three-quarters (74%, n = 122) of undergraduate students rated the climate of their chapter for LGBT people as friendly, while 33% (n = 71) of alumni/ae rated the climate of their chapter as hostile. Seventy-one percent (n = 117) of undergraduate students rated the climate of their chapter for LGBT people as respectful, while one-third (35%, n = 76) of alumni/ae rated the climate of their chapter as disrespectful. Interestingly, more than half (60%, n = 208) of participants who came “out” to other members of their fraternity/sorority rated the climate of their chapter for LGBT people as friendly, while 43% (n = 39) of participants who did not come “out” to members rated the climate of their chapter as hostile.

Between 54-80% of participants of all regions, excluding the Midwest and the West, rated the climate of their chapter as friendly. More than half (54%, n = 7) of participants from the Midwest and 41% (n = 17) of participants from the West provided a “neutral” response.

### Current Undergraduate Student Experiences

Participants were asked to report information related to their personal experiences as an undergraduate fraternity/sorority member within their chapter. Almost three-quarters (72%, n = 119) of undergraduate students, and more than half (59%, n = 126) of alumni/ae reported that they never feared for their physical safety because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Forty-two percent (n = 70) of undergraduate students indicated that they never concealed their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression to avoid intimidation, while 40% (n = 86) of alumni/ae reported that they often concealed their sexual

orientation, gender identity, or gender expression during their time as undergraduates. Approximately one-third of all participants, regardless of whether they were “out” to other members, reported that they never concealed their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression to avoid intimidation, while one-quarter (26%, n = 91) of participants who were “out” and forty-two percent (n = 38) of those who were not “out” indicated that they often concealed sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Twenty-two percent (n = 37) of undergraduate students indicated that they were victims of harassment due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. When reviewing the data by level of “outness”, the most common forms of harassment for students who were both “out” and not “out” to other members of their fraternity or sorority were derogatory remarks (91%, n = 30, 100%, n = 4, respectively) and direct or indirect verbal harassment (46%, n = 15, 100%, n = 4, respectively).

One-quarter of undergraduate students who were not “out” to other members indicated the harassment included threats to expose their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression (25%, n = 1) and threats of expulsion from their chapter (25%, n = 1).

The most common locations where the harassment occurred for all undergraduate students was in a public space on campus (46%, n = 17) and within their fraternity/ sorority house (43%, n = 16). The sources of harassment for both undergraduate students who were “out” and not “out” were another member (58%, n = 19, 75%, n = 3, respectively) and an undergraduate student (46%, n = 15, 75%, n = 3, respectively).

In response to the harassment, more than half of undergraduate students who were “out” to other members of their fraternity/sorority reported that they felt embarrassed (58%, n = 19) after the harassment, or told a friend (55%, n = 18). 46% (n = 15) of those who were “out” also avoided the harasser. Half of undergraduate students who were not “out” to other members of their fraternity/sorority ignored it (50%, n = 2) or confronted the harasser as the time (50%, n = 2).

The most common sources of harassment for undergraduate students included another member of their fraternity/sorority (60%, n = 22) and another undergraduate student (49%, n = 18).

More than three-quarters of undergraduates reported they felt very comfortable or comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to another member of their fraternity/sorority (78%, n = 129) and another undergraduate student (77%, n = 127).

31% (n = 50) of undergraduate students indicated they felt very uncomfortable or uncomfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to their chapter advisor, and 29% indicated they felt very uncomfortable or uncomfortable disclosing to their academic advisor (n = 47) and another chapter’s advisor (n = 47).

Between 52-100% of all undergraduate students, regardless of region, indicated they were very comfortable or comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to their roommate(s), while 28% (n = 10) reported they were very uncomfortable or uncomfortable.

Between 44-100% of all undergraduate students, regardless of region, indicated they were very comfortable or comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to their entire chapter, while 24% (n = 7) of students from the Mid-Atlantic, 28% (n = 10) from the Southeast, and 29% (n = 6) from the West were very uncomfortable or uncomfortable.

Between 44-100% of undergraduate students, excluding those from the Midwest, indicated they were very comfortable or comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to an alumni member of their fraternity/sorority, while 67% (n = 2) of students from the Midwest were unsure. One-third (34%, n = 12) of students from the Southeast were very uncomfortable or uncomfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to an alumni member

More than one-third (38%, n = 62) of undergraduate students indicated that they strongly agree or agree that they received less satisfaction from their chapter social activities because they were heterosexually focused, while 35% (n = 57) strongly disagreed.

Almost half (44%, n = 72) strongly disagreed that it was difficult to get close to other members of their fraternity/sorority because they were not “out” to them. Almost two-thirds (61%, n = 100) strongly agreed or agreed that they were able to meet and form close friendships with other LGBT students on their campus. 48% (n = 79) of students indicated that they were able to bring same-sex dates to fraternity/sorority functions, and 62% (n = 102) were able to invite “out” LGBT individuals to prospective rush/recruitment/intake activities.

# Summary of Findings

## Implications of the Study/Recommendations

It was the intent of the research team that the results be used to identify specific strategies for addressing the challenges facing LGBT communities within fraternity/sorority life and to support positive initiatives as catalysts for change. These recommendations provide a starting point for administrators, fraternity/sorority national organizations, local chapters and LGBT campus community members to maximize educational outreach efforts and create more inclusive, welcoming LGBT fraternities/sororities. A written plan inclusive of the recommended actions should be created including time-lines, resources (both human and fiscal), individuals responsible for the implementation of the recommendations, and a system of accountability. Change requires committed leadership in both policy and goal articulation.

### **Recommendations for College and University Administrators and Advisors**

- Develop confidential support programs for LGBT members of fraternities and sororities. Many campuses have “coming out” groups for LGBT students, but few have support networks specifically for LGBT fraternity and sorority members. These students have unique needs. In particular, as the results indicate, most of today’s fraternity and sorority members choose to “come out” to their brothers and sisters at some point during their collegiate experience, which can be a very stressful experience. Support programs can provide LGBT chapter members a forum to share experiences and advice and provide mutual support.
- Implement Safe Zone programs on campus and within the fraternity/sorority community. Many campuses have established “Safe Zone” programs so that LGBT students and students who are questioning or exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity can identify empathetic and accepting faculty, staff and student allies who can provide support and affirmation. These programs should be expanded to include leaders and other members of fraternities and sororities so that LGBT and questioning students can have trained peer allies whom they can contact for advice, resources and encouragement.
- Organize training programs for volunteer alumni on LGBT issues related to fraternity/sorority life. Over the past generation there has been a sea change with regard to LGBT visibility/acceptability within fraternities/sororities. While most alumni seldom or never had to deal with LGBT issues during their collegiate experience, it is almost inevitable today that chapters will address LGBT issues, and volunteer alumni need to be trained to provide appropriate guidance to the chapters they advise.
- Develop LGBT ally programs on campus and within the fraternity/sorority community. The model of Gay-Straight Alliances that have been established in high schools in recent years can be adapted for the fraternity/sorority community. Such groups can take the lead in organizing educational programs, creating Greek Safe Zone programs, and serving as a liaison between campus LGBT organizations and the fraternity/sorority community.
- Develop and administer assessment tools for determining the LGBT climate within chapters. Confidentiality of results is essential so that chapters are not singled out as homophobic/heterosexist, although it would be beneficial to provide positive reinforcement to chapters that demonstrate a high level of acceptance. In fact, unless confidentiality is assured, respondents may tend to skew results to portray their organization in a favorable light. The results can be used to assist in developing appropriate interventions for chapters and the fraternity/sorority community.
- Establish a zero tolerance policy for anti-LGBT actions/behavior within the fraternity/sorority community. All hostile comments and actions should be confronted. Incidents of insensitivity can provide opportunities for education. Incidences involving harassment or violence need to be referred to the institution’s student judicial process.
- Make proactive steps to work with fraternity and sorority programs (e.g., Greek Week, etc.) to ensure the programs do not have an unnecessary heterosexist frame.

# Recommendations

## Recommendations for National Fraternity/Sorority Organizations

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- Conduct training sessions on LGBT issues for staff and volunteer alumni. As previously noted, older alumni in particular may not be comfortable addressing LGBT issues. Training programs should involve all levels of staff and volunteers.
- Include educational sessions on LGBT issues during regional leadership conferences and national conventions.
- Develop guidelines for volunteer alumni and chapter leaders on how to best support LGBT members in the coming out process and, or who are closeted or questioning.
- Adopt and promote non-discrimination and non-harassment clauses. "Sexual orientation" should be specifically included in such policies so the intent is clear. All non-discrimination and diversity statements need to be widely prominently disseminated and proximately displayed, along with instructions on how to deal circumstances where members appear to have engaged in acts of discrimination, harassment or intolerance.
- Adopt policies regarding transgender members. Although this study focused on sexual orientation, fraternities and sororities will increasingly need to address gender identity/gender expression. Unlike other student organizations, fraternities and sororities are permitted to be single-gender organizations. National organizations should have clear membership policies regarding pre- and post-operative policies regarding transgender members.
- Periodically review local and national traditions, such as songs and events, to be sure that language and actions are inclusive of people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.
- Umbrella organizations such as the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC), National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), and the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organization (NALFO) and professional associations such as the Association Fraternity Advisors (AFA) and Fraternity Executives Association (FEA) should have an active, visible role in LGBT fraternity/sorority issues. These organizations should assist with research on

sexual orientation and gender identity/expression within the fraternity/sorority community as well as provide LGBT resources to member organizations.

- Umbrella organizations and professional associations should develop ongoing relations and collaborate with the Lambda 10 Project and LGBT-focused national fraternities and sororities.

## Recommendations for LGBT Campus Community

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- Look for opportunities to provide outreach and education to the fraternity/sorority community. Often times, stereotypes or bad past relations keep members of the LGBT campus community from attempting outreach and education programs for the fraternity/sorority community. Facilitate and promote educational programs tailored toward fraternity/sorority audiences.
- Build relationships for collaboration with the fraternity/sorority community, its governing councils, and individual chapters, etc. The leadership of these organizations, much like others on campus, is in constant flux and opportunities arise every year with new leadership. Encourage collaboration beyond LGBT specific events and consider partnering with philanthropy projects around causes such as World AIDS Day to build individual relationships among the communities.
- Enlist fraternity/sorority alumni who are LGBT and allies to be actively involved in fraternity/sorority community outreach efforts. Specifically work to design a fraternity/sorority specific component of LGBT campus speaker panels to include LGBT fraternity/sorority members and alumni. Ask for support from alumni in direct work and actions with specific local chapters.
- Recognize the value in working with the fraternity/sorority community despite stereotypes/prejudice that may alienate one another. Often, as indicative of this research, fraternity/sorority communities are the ones who need influence, support and direction to become more LGBT-friendly.

## Recommendations for Chapters

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# Recommendations

# Recommendations

- Sponsor and support LGBT events that contribute to understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression issues. This might be the local chapter participating in educational sessions sponsored by the LGBT campus community and, or sponsoring/cosponsoring such events. Not only does this breakdown stereotypes of the fraternity/sorority communities but it also creates valuable awareness for LGBT fraternity/sorority member needs (closeted or out) and builds valuable relationships on campus.
- Develop policies and practices that are inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. This should go beyond the policy of non-discrimination and rather should consider how the organizations practice LGBT inclusiveness. Examples of topics to consider are how a local chapter treats a prospective member who rushes as an openly LGBT student; how individuals in the local chapter can best support a brother/sister coming out; bringing same-gender dates to chapter functions, and how local chapter deals with a brother/sister going through a period of transition in his/her life as a current or alumni member.
- Implement a zero tolerance policy for jokes, name-calling, and the display of demeaning images or messages in the fraternity/sorority regarding sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. The atmosphere of the fraternity/sorority should be inclusive where chapter members committed to learning about LGBT issues. The topic of LGBT people should not be considered taboo or limited to quiet discussions; rather it should be another celebrated aspect of the fraternity/sorority community.
- Develop a procedure for addressing harassing behaviors, including those directed at people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity/gender expression.
- Participate in climate assessment programs that measure whether the local fraternity/sorority chapter accepting of LGBT members and to explore the attitudes and perceptions of others. The Lambda 10 Project offers a checklist of a climate of acceptance and many campus communities conduct similar assessments to understand LGBT attitudes and perceptions.
- Participate actively in Safe Zone programs and consider ways to make the fraternity/sorority local chapter a Safe Zone.
- Enact a guest/alumni policy to communicate clearly that it is not acceptable to use demeaning language or harass members on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

## Recommendations for Further Research

- **Research experience of bisexual members.** Over a third of the women and almost 10% of the men surveyed identified as bisexual. How do their needs and experiences differ from gay and lesbian members?
- **Research attitudes of heterosexual members in fraternities and sororities.** This study focused on the experiences and impressions of LGB-members. Creating a more inclusive fraternity/sorority community, however, will require a better understanding of the attitudes of heterosexual fraternity and sorority members.  
Areas to be studied might include:
  - degree of openness to having LGBT members in their chapter
  - number of LGBT friends heterosexual members have
  - knowledge of any LGBT members in their chapter or other chapters
  - degree of acceptance of having LGBT members
  - reasons why heterosexual members may object to having LGBT members
  - questions heterosexual members have about LGBT issues
  - feelings about LGBT members bringing same-gender dates to functions
  - their assessment of their chapter's openness to LGBT members
  - advice heterosexual members would give to an LGBT person who wanted to join their chapter or to an LGBT member who wanted to "come out"
- **Research on attitudes toward LGBT members in culturally-based chapters.** Only 25 respondents to this survey were members of culturally-based chapters, so making definitive conclusions about their experiences is difficult. Securing a large sample of LGBT members of culturally-based fraternities and sororities may be difficult; therefore a qualitative study with in-depth interviews may be more enlightening.
- **Research on transgender issues.** As indicated, this study focused on sexual orientation issues. On this topic, a qualitative study would also be more appropriate. Research can also address the positions of national organizations with regard to transgender membership issues.
- **Research on links between sexism and homophobia within the fraternity/sorority community.** Fraternities and sororities are unique by virtue of being single-gender organizations and therefore more prone to sexism and homophobia. The dynamics of group attitudes regarding gender roles in single-gender organizations should be studied to determine methods to minimize negative gender-based attitudes.
- **Include sexual orientation in demographic data in the AFA/EBI assessment and other assessments.** This would allow campus professionals to determine how the experiences of LGBT students may differ from other students. It would also provide valuable data regarding the prevalence of LGBT members within the fraternity and sorority community.

# Further Research

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## About Lambda 10 Project



The Lambda 10 Project National Clearinghouse for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Fraternity & Sorority Issues works to heighten the visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members of the college fraternity by serving as a clearinghouse for educational resources and educational materials related to sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as it pertains to the fraternity/sorority experience.

The Lambda 10 Project was founded in the Fall of 1995 at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana and is an educational initiative of Campus Pride, the only national nonprofit organization 501(c)(3) for LGBT and Ally student leaders and campus groups. The Lambda 10 Project is also an associate member of the Association of Fraternity Advisors and serves as a resource for many inter/national fraternity/sorority leaders. The Project created the first educational resources solely dedicated to this topic titled *Out on Fraternity Row: Personal Accounts of Being Gay in a College Fraternity* released by Alyson Publications, Inc in 1998, *Secret Sisters: Stories of Being Lesbian & Bisexual in a College Sorority* released by Alyson Publications, Inc. in 2001 and most recently *Brotherhood: Gay Life in College Fraternities* released by Alyson Publications, Inc. in October 2005.

For more information about the Lambda 10 Project:

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**Lambda 10 Project**

## Lamda 10 Project Research Associates

### **Susan R. Rankin, Ph. D.**

Susan R. Rankin is a Research Associate in the Center for the Study of Higher Education and Assistant Professor of Education in the College Student Affairs Program at The Pennsylvania State University. Rankin earned her B.S. from Montclair State University in 1978, a M.S. in Exercise Physiology from The Pennsylvania State University (1981), and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration in 1994, also from Penn State. Before moving into her current position, Rankin served for 17 years as the Head Coach for Women's Softball and Lecturer in Kinesiology at Penn State. She has presented and published widely on the impact of sexism, racism and heterosexism in the academy and in intercollegiate athletics. Rankin's current research focuses on the assessment of institutional climate and providing program planners and policy makers with recommended strategies to improve the campus climate for under-served communities. In her role as a consultant, Rankin has collaborated with over 50 institutions/organizations in implementing assessments and developing strategic plans regarding social justice issues.

### **Douglas N. Case**

Douglas N. Case is the Coordinator of Fraternity and Sorority Life at San Diego State University where he has been involved in advising the fraternity and sorority community since 1978. Case has been an active member of the Association of Fraternity Advisors and has held several leadership roles in the professional association including serving as President in 1991. Case has conducted groundbreaking research on LGBT issues within the fraternity/sorority community and has written several articles and chapters on the topic for various publications, including the introductory chapter to *Out on Fraternity Row: Personal Accounts of Being Gay in a College Fraternity* and the concluding chapter to *Brotherhood: Gay Life in College Fraternities*. He is an initiate of Kappa Sigma Fraternity and is an honorary member of Delta Lambda Phi Fraternity, the national social fraternity for gay, bisexual and progressive men. He has served as the Chapter Advisor for the San Diego chapter of Delta Lambda Phi since it was founded in 1992, and serves as the National Risk Management Coordinator for the fraternity.

### **Shane L. Windmeyer, M.S., Ed**

Shane L. Windmeyer, M.S., Ed., is a leading author on gay campus issues, national leader in gay and lesbian civil rights and a champion for LGBT issues on college campuses. He is cofounder and executive director of Campus Pride, the only national organization for student leaders and campus organizations working to create a safer college environment for LGBT students. Released Fall 2006 by Alyson Books, Windmeyer is the author of *The Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students*, the first-ever college guide profiling the "100 Best LGBT-Friendly Campuses." He is also the editor of *Brotherhood: Gay Life in College Fraternities* and co-editor of the books *Inspiration for LGBT Students & Allies*, *Out on Fraternity Row: Personal Accounts of Being Gay in a College Fraternity* and *Secret Sisters: Stories of Being Lesbian & Bisexual* in a College Sorority.

### **Charles G. Eberly, Ph.D.**

Charles G. Eberly's line of research is the American College Fraternity, with more than 35 presentations or publications to his credit. He was the first recipient of the BGSU Greek Award in 2002 from his Alma Mater, Bowling Green State University, for a lifetime of service to the college fraternity. He is Professor of Counseling and Student Development at Eastern Illinois University, where many of his students have completed Masters theses on fraternity and sorority topics. He is a member of Omicron Delta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, Gamma Sigma Alpha, and Order of Omega honorary societies, and a recipient of the Order of the Golden Heart from Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity. In 2005 he helped to found *Oracle, The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity Advisors*. He is currently a member of the Advisory Board and a reviewer for Dr. Gregory S. Parks and Dr. Matthew W. Hughey for an "edited volume on empirical studies of Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs)". Eberly also serves as the NASPA IV-East representative of the Men and Masculinities Knowledge Community.

**Grahaeme A. Hesp, Ed.D.**

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Grahaeme A. Hesp is director of fraternity & sorority life at the University of California, Berkeley. He is a long-time and active member of the Association of Fraternity Advisors, Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity, ACPA: College Student Educators International, and NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, where he is the public policy coordinator for the GLBT Knowledge Community. He is a graduate of The Florida State University where his dissertation research was on sexual orientation within historically White fraternities.

**George Miller, M.S, Ed.**

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George Miller, M.S., Ed. serves as the Director of Meetings & Events for Delta Sigma Phi Fraternity. Miller is a member of Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity and graduated from the University of Evansville with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration. He holds a Master of Science degree in Student Affairs in Higher Education from Florida State University and worked as a campus-based administrator for several years before joining the Fraternity staff in 2002. In addition to his volunteer work with Lambda 10 Project, Miller is involved locally with Indy Pride, the Indiana Youth Group and serves as a member of the steering committee for Lambda Legal's Indiana Benefit Dinner.

**William Molasso, Ph.D.**

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Billy Molasso is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education Administration and Program Coordinator of the Higher Education Program at The George Washington University. He joined the GW Faculty in the Summer of 2007, following three years as an Assistant Professor at Northern Illinois University, and over 10-years as a student affairs practitioner at Michigan State University, the University of South Carolina, and the University of Florida. He is actively engaged in research on the problem behaviors of college students (alcohol and other drug abuse, HIV and Gay Identity Development), assessment in student affairs, the fraternity/sorority experience, and how college students experience having a sense of purpose in life.

# Research Associates

## Acknowledgements

*Shane L. Windmeyer  
Coordinator of the Lambda 10 Project  
& Executive Director of Campus Pride*

The Lambda 10 Project is proud to publish this national study exploring the LGBT experience within fraternities and sororities. We believe that the results are invaluable in developing educational resources and in advancing further research to assist fraternities and sororities in creating safer, more inclusive environments for their LGBT brothers and sisters. We know you will agree.

First, it is important to thank the LGBT fraternity and sorority members who participated in this national study. Without your voice, none of this would have been possible. Because of your participation, we are able to offer direction for the future of LGBT issues in fraternities and sororities. We thank you. A tremendous debt of gratitude also goes to the leadership of Susan R. Rankin, our lead researcher, and the team of Lambda 10 Project Research Associates. The Lambda 10 Project wishes to thank each and every one of them, especially Sue, for the level of expertise, time and devotion to this study. For each it was a labor of love and at times a daunting task with several projects going on at once. Also, we would like to extend a special thanks to the ongoing support of LGBT pioneers like Douglas N. Case. He has truly supported the Lambda 10 Project and provided amazing leadership over the years. He is a gift and a blessing to fraternities and sororities. Thank you, Doug.

Indeed, the fraternity and sorority world has come a long way since 1960—and as evident in this study, we still have a long way to go. We need everyone to be involved in this change—individual members, chapter advisors, headquarter staff, national fraternity/sorority organizations, alumnae, and college/university administrators. Nobody can be absent if we are to continue transforming the next decade of LGBT experiences for the better.

Lastly, thank you to the many colleagues and friends in the Association of Fraternity Advisors who have been there for the Lambda 10 Project. There are so many of you and we could not have done this without you. Your contributions make a difference. Thank you.

Sincerely,



# Acknowledgements

## About Campus Pride



# Campus Pride

Campus Pride is the leading national nonprofit organization 501(c)(3) for student leaders and campus organizations working to create safer, more LGBT-friendly colleges and universities. It continues to grow in national prominence and exists to give “voice and action” in building future LGBT and ally leaders. The organization is a volunteer-driven organization “for” and “by” student leaders and is considered to be a trailblazer for its online resources, grassroots mobilizing efforts and programs for LGBT and ally student leaders/campus groups.

Campus Pride believes in empowering youth for social justice work and to be a catalyst for positive change in society. The primary objective of Campus Pride is to develop necessary resources, programs and services to support LGBT and ally students on college campuses across the United States. Signature programs include Campus Pride online ([www.campuspride.org](http://www.campuspride.org)), the LGBT-Friendly Campus Climate Index ([www.campusclimateindex.org](http://www.campusclimateindex.org)), the Queer. undergraduate journal, LGBT & Ally Summer Leadership Camp, and the landmark Lambda 10 Project ([www.lambda10.org](http://www.lambda10.org)).

Founded in the Fall of 2001 and launched a year later in October of 2002, Campus Pride started as an online community and resource clearinghouse under the name Campus PrideNet. In 2006, the organization broadened its outreach efforts and restructured as the current educational non-profit organization Campus Pride.

For more information about Campus Pride:

Website: [www.campuspride.org](http://www.campuspride.org)  
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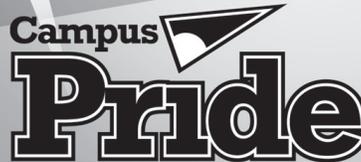
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## **Lambda 10 Project**

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An educational initiative of Campus Pride  
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## **Donate to Lambda 10 Project**

Your gift – no matter the size – makes a difference for future LGBT and Ally leaders.  
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The Lambda 10 Project National Clearinghouse for LGBT Fraternity & Sorority Issues is an educational initiative of Campus Pride, the leading national nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization for student leaders and campus organizations working to create safer, more LGBT-friendly learning environments at colleges and universities.

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