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Comparing the Effects of COVID-19 on Fraternity & Sorority Members and Unaffiliated College Students

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Johnson et al.: Comparing the Effects of COVID-19 on Fraternity & Sorority Member
COMPARING THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON FRATERNITY & SORORITY
MEMBERS AND UNAFFILIATED COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Using data from the 2021 Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), this article compares the effects of COVID-19 on fraternity and sorority members' educational experiences a year after the pandemic began disaggregated by fraternity and sorority council membership and compared to unaffiliated students. Results show increases in negative effects for students in multicultural councils compared to IFC, NPC, and unaffiliated students on many measures and increased negative effects for NPC women on others.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, fraternity and sorority life, council membership

Background

In spring 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced nearly every college and university in the United States to suspend face-to-face instruction and eliminate on-campus gatherings and events. As the pandemic continued into summer 2020, colleges and universities announced a range of plans for Fall 2020. Some announced a return to face-to-face instruction, others announced an entirely remote or online fall semester, and most planned for a mix of face-to-face and online courses (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2020). Institutions also issued several safety measures in their reopening plans, including social distancing, reduced classroom capacities, mask mandates, testing and contact tracing plans, and restrictions on social gatherings.

As campuses began to plan for fall 2020, many administrators and community members were worried about the spread of COVID-19 and the role that fraternity and sorority life (FSL) members would play in the spread. Although not the only group of students with the potential to spread the virus quickly, many campus leaders implemented social event bans, suspended tradi-

tional recruitment events, and implemented punitive policies for student groups who flaunted the rules (Brown & Mangan, 2020; Thebault, 2021). For FSL students, formal recruitment activities relied on a mix of virtual events and smaller in-person gatherings that often required masks, reduced capacities, outdoor venues, and social distancing (Moody, 2020).

Once fall 2020 began, fraternities and sororities were in the spotlight as cases began climbing and the spread of COVID-19 were often traced back to chapter houses at gatherings largely held by fraternities. Recruitment parties and social events that failed to adhere to campus COVID-19 guidelines frequently were the cause (Grieve & Hao, 2020). As fraternities and sororities were commonly found to be the source of many outbreaks across the United States, institutions responded by cancelling fraternity and sorority events, placing chapters on suspension, urging students to reevaluate living in a fraternity or sorority house, and threatening severe punishments to those who ignored or skirted COVID-19 mitigation strategies (Higgins-Dunn, 2020). While many of these associations between FSL students'

behaviors and COVID-19 outbreaks were established via contact tracing, empirical studies corroborated these links. One study at a university in Arkansas showed that in-person gatherings were causing the spread of COVID-19 on their campus, and 91% of those gatherings were associated with fraternity and sorority activities, most notably recruitment activities at the beginning of the semester (Vang et al., 2021). This particular outbreak resulted in university administrators moving all recruitment events to a virtual format, which is similar to what other institutions did.

Most of what is known about the effects of COVID-19 on FSL students stems from news stories and a handful of single institutional studies that asked about students' experiences pivoting to online learning in spring 2020. The current study examines the experiences of FSL students at 70 four-year colleges in the United States approximately one year after the pandemic began using data from the 2021 Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL). The purpose of this study was to disaggregate and examine the effects of COVID-19 on FSL members, while also comparing these experiences to those of unaffiliated students. More robust data will allow FSL professionals and students to better understand the experiences and needs of FSL students and to better inform support mechanisms for the remainder of the pandemic and beyond.

Literature Review

Students' Experiences with COVID-19

Given the recentness of the COVID-19 pandemic, relatively little is known about college students' experiences during the pandemic. Data from the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey provide important early insight into students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was administered to 30,725 undergraduate students at nine universities and 15,346 graduate students at ten universities from May 2020-July 2020. Results show that students who identified

as Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC); students with mental health concerns; students who identified as caregivers; first-generation; transgender, nonbinary, bisexual, pansexual, or queer; and students with lower socioeconomic statuses experienced more difficulty during the pandemic. They experienced higher unemployment, increased financial hardships, more food and housing insecurity, increased difficulty learning, and a greater likelihood to live in unsafe environments (Horgos et al., 2020; Soria et al., 2020; Soria & Horgos, 2020). The authors argue that academic stressors associated with the pandemic may have also fueled an increase of mental health concerns, and overall, the pandemic had a negative effect on college students' mental health (Soria & Horgos, 2020).

The Piazza Center for Fraternity and Sorority Research and Reform collected data in summer 2020 on FSL students' attitudes and perceptions about returning to campus in fall 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic (Timothy J. Piazza Center for Fraternity and Sorority Research and Reform, 2020). Their sample comprised 18 institutions and students from 145 chapters and examined differences by four councils (i.e., IFC, MGC, NPHC, PHC). Their results showed trends similar to other COVID-19 studies of college students. The Piazza Center study (2020) found that students from IFC chapters were more likely to report that they were not directly impacted by COVID-19 beyond limiting interaction and travel (28.1%) compared to their MGC (25.7%), PHC (22.2%), and NPHC (8.3%) peers. NPHC students were most likely to report that they had been diagnosed with COVID-19 or know someone who had (62.5%), followed by PHC students (52.0%), MGC students (50.7%), and IFC students (46.1%). NPHC members were also most likely to know someone who passed away due to COVID-19 (33.3%) compared to MGC students (17.8%), PHC students, (14.2%), and IFC students (11.6%). Their study also showed NPHC students were less likely to

plan to continue their education at their current institution and maintain the same level of credit hours in the fall. Further, they found IFC students were less likely to plan on exercising protective measures to mitigate spread of COVID-19, including wearing a mask in classrooms, social distancing, getting tested for COVID-19, participating in contact tracing, isolating or quarantining, and submitting to temperature scans in fall 2020. The Piazza Center (2020) study also asked students about their plans to engage in informal gatherings or parties, which showed 53.5% of IFC students and 49.1% of PHC students responding somewhat or very likely to attend compared to just 12.5% of NPHC and 22.9% of MGC students. Other questions showed similar trends in IFC and NPC students the more likely to plan to attend chapter-sponsored gatherings/parties and go to bars. Lastly, the survey showed that IFC students were least likely to be concerned about finances, health, and housing.

In a white paper from Dyad Strategies, McCreary et al. (2021) reported on data from three national fraternities from 2018 to 2020, which provided noteworthy trend data on fraternity members' attitudes before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their data showed that fraternity binge-drinking increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, as did motivation for hazing future new members (McCreary et al., 2021). They hypothesize that FSL students are dealing with a lack of connection and bond brought on by the pandemic in unhealthy ways, which is central to the FSL experience. They argue that educators need to intervene with FSL chapters to support members dealing with lack of connection in healthy and meaningful ways such as helping members reimagine member education, additional training for new members, and partnering with mental health and wellness professionals on campus (McCreary et al., 2021).

Beyond the obvious and important health impacts on members and the larger US society are the ripple effects of the pandemic

on fraternity and sorority members. A survey of 82 campus-based professionals and 218 fraternity and sorority students found that fewer students joined fraternities and sororities across all councils, most recruitment activities were virtual, recruitment was more stressful than previous years, and students had mixed feelings about virtual recruitment (Coffey-Melchiorre, 2020). Respondents agreed that sororities did a superior job adapting to virtual recruitment and chapter activities than fraternities and that many MGC or NPHC groups did not take new members, often at the direction of their national organizations. This study also showed that new members joined because they wanted connections with other people and that professionals and students alike voiced significant concerns about retaining current members because of the pandemic (Coffey-Melchiorre, 2020).

Methodology and Methods

The research question guiding the current study was: Are there statistically significant differences in the experiences of students who are part of multicultural, NPC, and IFC fraternity and sorority councils; and unaffiliated students during the COVID-19 pandemic?

To address the research question, we used data from the 2021 MSL, which comprised 49,307 students from 70 US-based four-year campuses. The study collected data in spring 2021, with 234,851 students receiving an invitation to complete the survey. The resulting response rate was 21%. Data were collected in spring 2021 with most students having a full calendar year of navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

We made several reductions of the data from the larger MSL national sample. First, we removed students who did not indicate their gender and or FSL affiliation. We also removed 258 students from the dataset who indicated they were part of both a multicultural social fraternity or sorority as well as a social fraternity or sorority. We suspect that the wording of the question was confusing,

thus causing them to indicate membership in both councils. Other missing data (e.g., did not complete COVID-19 questions used in the analysis) were excluded listwise (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Thus, the final sample was 16,128 ($n=5,227$ or 32.4% affiliated with FSL; $n=10,901$ or 67.6% unaffiliated with FSL). For those indicating they were part of FSL, 1,011 (5.9%) were part of IFC; 3,452 (17.3%) were part of NPC; and 764 (5.4%) were part of a multicultural council. More women completed the survey, which is typical of college student survey response rates and past iterations of the MSL (Dugan & Komives, 2007). The FSL subpopulation closely reflected the percentages of men and women completing the survey overall.

We determined council membership by MSL survey questions that asked students to indicate their involvement in fraternity and sorority life. One question asked about membership in “Multicultural Social Fraternities and Sororities (e.g., National Pan-Hellenic Council [NPHC], groups such as Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., or Latino Greek Council groups such as Lambda Theta Alpha)” and the other asked about membership in “Social Fraternities or Sororities (e.g., Panhellenic or Interfraternity Council groups such as Sigma Phi Epsilon or Kappa Kappa Gamma).” We separated membership in social fraternities or sororities by gender and labeled them “IFC” and “NPC” while we kept multicultural social fraternities and sororities as one group to reflect how many councils are structured on campuses. Ideally, we would have been able to distinguish between NPHC and various multicultural FSL councils (e.g., United Greek Council, Multicultural Greek Council), but we were not able to do so given the limitations of the data set.

To address the research question, we used two sets of questions on the MSL about students’ experiences with COVID-19. The first set of 12 questions asked students about factors that were an obstacle to a successful transition to their current education

context during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., inability to learn effectively in an online format, a family member or close friend passed away from COVID-19). For these questions, students could respond “yes” or “no” depending on if something was a barrier to their adjustment to their education during the pandemic. For these analyses, we used Chi-square tests of independence given the presence of a dichotomous dependent variable (Muijs, 2011). A second set of questions we used asked students to rate their level of concern about eight potential issues on a scale from not at all concerned to very concerned. Here, we collapsed response categories of “concerned” and “very concerned” into one variable, which also allowed us to use Chi-square test of independence.

In all our analyses, we disaggregated FSL students by three different council memberships given the different experiences students can have within them based on history and structure. We took guidance from other students that have shown the importance of examining FSL experiences by council and also comparing them against unaffiliated members (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Bureau et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2015; Shalka & Jones, 2010). Comparing the experiences of FSL students disaggregated by council membership to those of unaffiliated students helped us contextualize FSL students’ experiences with COVID-19 and allowed us to provide a more robust picture of their experiences and concerns.

Limitations

As noted above, the fraternity and sorority life membership categorizations on the MSL do not allow for delineation among fraternity and sorority councils that typically represent the myriad organizations that primarily comprise students of color. This limited our ability to examine potentially important differences between these various councils that should be explored in future studies. Additionally, we used cisgender categories (i.e., man, woman) to record

Table 1

Percentage of Students Indicating “Yes” to Factors that were an Obstacle to a Successful Transition to their Educational Context during the COVID-19 Pandemic

	IFC Council Students	NPC Council Students	Multicultural Councils Students	Unaffiliated Students	Largest Disparities
Loss of reduction of income of other family members	28.6%	33.3%	45.7%	34.3%	17.1% Multicultural to IFC
A family member or close friend contracted COVID-19 requiring hospitalization and eventually recovered	19.3%	20.7%	33.6%	21.0%	14.3% Multicultural to IFC
Lack of access to an appropriate study space or distracting home environment	55.6%	65.5%	65.0%	68.1%	12.5% Unaffiliated to IFC
Loss of wages from employment	33.6%	39.1%	46.1%	37.2%	12.5% Multicultural to IFC
Lack of interaction / communication with other students	80.5%	84.9%	75.2%	81.9%	9.7% NPC to Multicultural
A family member or close friend passed away from COVID-19	11.6%	19.4%	20.9%	13.9%	9.3% Multicultural to IFC
Inability to participate in campus activities that I would normally engage in	82.5%	86.9%	78.5%	82.1%	8.4% NPC to Multicultural
Inability to learn effectively in an online format	71.6%	74.8%	66.9%	69.9%	7.9% NPC to Multicultural
Lack of access to tech necessary for online learning	22.6%	22.6%	30.2%	24.4%	7.6% Multicultural to IFC & NPC
Loss or reduction of scholarship or grant aid	9.9%	17.0%	16.1%	11.0%	7.1% NPC to IFC
Inability to access learning support services	30.4%	26.9%	30.7%	25.3%	5.4% Multicultural to Unaffiliated
I contracted COVID-19 requiring hospitalization	2.2%	1.9%	4.5%	1.6%	2.9% Multicultural to Unaffiliated

students who identified as being part of social fraternities and sororities to either IFC or NPC and excluded individuals who identified as genderqueer/gender non-conforming/non-binary or questioning/unsure ($n=41$ students in multicultural social fraternities and sororities; $n=65$ in social fraternities and sororities). Our intent, of course, is not to erase those students who identify outside of cisgender man and woman, but given the limitations the fraternity & sorority life questions on the MSL, we had no ability to accurately place these students into council membership. Readers should also keep in mind the timeframe in which these data were collected (spring 2021). This was almost exactly one year after COVID-19 was first detected in the United States and most institutions shifted to remote instruction. COVID-19 vaccines, although developed and approved, were slowly being administered at this time and cases were still high in the United States. The concerns students expressed on the survey should be situated in this time period, as they undoubtedly continue to evolve.

Results

We first explored potential differences in the first set of 12 questions on the MSL that asked students about factors that were an obstacle to a successful transition to their current education context during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because these questions had “yes/no” response categories, we used Chi-square tests of independence to determine any potential significant differences between IFC, NPC, multicultural council, and unaffiliated students on these 12 different COVID-related questions. The results of the Chi-square tests of independence indicated significant differences between the four groups ($p < .001$). The effect sizes (Cramer’s V , ϕ) were all small (Muijs, 2011). Results are listed in Table 1. We ordered the results in the table by questions that had the largest disparity between students indicating “yes” across the four groups. Full results of the Chi-square analy-

ses are excluded here to enhance readability and clarity but are available upon request.

Overall, FSL students reported their top three obstacles to a successful transition to their educational context during the COVID-19 pandemic as: (1) Inability to participate in campus activities that I would normally engage in, (2) Lack of interaction/communication with other students, and (3) Inability to learn effectively in an online format. Students who belonged to multicultural councils indicated the greatest percentage of “yes” responses ($n=7/12$) to factors that were an obstacle to successful transition to their educational context during the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by NPC students ($n=4/12$), and unaffiliated students ($n=1/12$). IFC students did not report the highest percentage of any of the 12 factors that were obstacles to a successful transition to their educational context during the COVID-19 pandemic but reported the lowest about of “yes” responses in 7/12 questions. Of note, FSL students were slightly more likely to contract COVID-19 that required hospitalization when compared to unaffiliated students (0.3%-2.9%). Students in multicultural councils were twice as likely to report having COVID-19 that required hospitalization than their IFC and NPC counterparts.

Many of the questions had considerable disparities between the percentage of students from the three councils and unaffiliated students who identified various factors as being barriers to a successful transition to their educational environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The largest disparity was in students who identified loss of reduction of income of other family members, with 17.1% more students who are part of a multicultural council naming this as a factor compared to IFC students. Students from a multicultural council were also 14.3% more likely to name having a family member or close friend that had COVID-19 and required hospitalization as an obstacle compared to IFC students. The smallest disparities between the four groups were on the

percentages of students naming contracting COVID-19 and requiring hospitalization, inability to access learning support services, and loss of reduction of scholarship or grant aid. Unaffiliated students had the highest percentage of responses indicating that lack of access to an appropriate study space or non-distracting home environment. Unaffiliated students were also the least likely group to contract COVID-19 requiring hospitalization by a slight margin (0.3% to 2.9%).

Another set of questions we used asked students to rate their level of concern about eight issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic on a scale from not at all concerned to very concerned. To examine potential differences, we first collapsed the two highest response categories (i.e., “concerned” and

“very concerned”) into one group and all other responses into another category. For this set of analyses, we report on the percentage of students who indicated they were “concerned” or “very concerned” to the eight questions. Like the first set of analyses, we used Chi-square tests of independence to determine any potential significant differences between IFC, NPC, multicultural council, and unaffiliated students on these eight different COVID-related questions. The results of the Chi-square tests of independence indicated significant differences between the four groups ($p < .001$). The effect sizes (Cramer’s V, phi) were all small (Muijs, 2011). Full results can be found in Table 2. Mirroring Table 1, we ordered the results in the table by questions that had the largest disparity between the percentages of

Table 2

Percentage of Students Indicating “Concerned” or “Very Concerned” about Issues because of the COVID-19 Pandemic

	IFC Council Students	NPC Council Students	Multicultural Councils Students	Unaffiliated Students	Largest Disparities
Ability to pay for your education in the future	25.6%	33.0%	49.8%	37.5%	24.2% Multicultural to IFC
Ability to meet routine financial obligations	18.0%	20.5%	34.8%	21.9%	16.8% Multicultural to IFC
Sustainable employment for parent/guardian	19.4%	22.5%	33.6%	24.8%	14.2% Multicultural to IFC
Adequate medical care	12.0%	10.7%	24.8%	14.2%	14.1% Multicultural to NPC
Sustainable employment for self	36.3%	36.1%	46.5%	34.4%	12.1% Multicultural to Unaffiliated
Ability to continue your education	19.8%	18.7%	33.0%	22.7%	11.3% Multicultural to NPC
Sustainable access to housing	7.5%	6.0%	15.7%	8.0%	9.7% Multicultural to NPC
Sufficient access to food	6.4%	5.4%	13.1%	6.1%	7.7% Multicultural to NPC

students indicating “concerned” or “very concerned” across the four groups.

Overall, FSL students noted the greatest amount of concern for: (1) sustainable employment for self, (2) ability to pay for their education in the future, and (3) sustainable employment for parent/guardian. Students in multicultural fraternities and sororities were more likely to report concern over various COVID-induced issues ($p < .001$) when compared to IFC, NPC, and unaffiliated students on all eight measures with ranges of 24.2% to 7.7% greater concern. The largest disparities between students in multicultural fraternities and sororities were in ability to pay for their education in the future (24.2% difference compared to IFC), ability to meet routine financial obligations (16.8% difference compared to IFC), and sustainable employment for parent/guardian (14.2% difference compared to IFC).

Unaffiliated students tended to express more concern than IFC and NPC students on the eight measures in Table 2; the only exception was that unaffiliated students expressed slightly less concern about sustainable employment for self compared to IFC and NPC students (1.9% and 1.7% respectively). Unaffiliated students also expressed less concern than students in multicultural fraternities and sororities on all measures.

Recommendations for Practice and Future Research

Based on the data presented above, we offer recommendations for both practice and future research.

Recommendations for Practice

We offer specific recommendations for practitioners supporting FSL students. We first present recommendations for all groups, followed by specific recommendations for working with students from different councils.

Easing Financial Concerns

Although concerns brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic were multi-faceted,

the largest concerns centered around finances – sustainable employment for self or parent/guardian and concern about students’ ability to pay for their education. While financial challenges did not originate with the pandemic, there is sufficient evidence they worsened for many students during this time. NPC council members were the highest group to note barriers surrounding the loss of reduction of scholarship or grant aid. Multicultural council students were the highest on other financial concerns. IFC members, although lowest on most financial measures, still demonstrated significant concern and several financial barriers because of COVID-19. Fraternity and sorority professionals should work with chapter leaders to examine their budgets to see where they can decrease dues or offer more member scholarships, so they can provide financial relief for their members experiencing loss or reduction of scholarship or grant aid. Any other potential financial barriers at the community and council levels should also be audited with an eye towards reduction and/or flexibility. For example, financial barriers to participating in recruitment, council dues, and costs to participate in community activities should be examined and reduced or removed if possible. Revisiting dues structures and other costs noted above, even temporarily, may provide to be an invaluable source of support for members affected financially by COVID-19. Fraternity and sorority professionals should specifically market financial resource opportunities to those student populations. Partnerships with campus-based financial wellness and literacy offices, alumni with backgrounds in personal finance, as well as scholarship and grant offices should also be pursued.

Providing Support for Loss

Many students reported losing a family member or close friend to the pandemic. The emotional impact of an unexpected loss is difficult to measure. NPC and students in multicultural councils reported the high-

est percentage of loss, but members from each council were affected by this trauma. Coupled with having to persist academically and a lack of connecting to support networks, FSL professionals should hold space in advising or council meetings to discuss dealing with trauma. These efforts, where appropriate, should be done in concert with trained counseling staff members on their campus. At minimum, fraternity and sorority professionals can talk about loss of loved ones and connecting students to resources in their communications with students. Partnerships with campus counseling services could provide professionally moderated space to discuss grief with community support in individual or group settings. Additionally, it is important to provide support and understand that many students who lost a family member, especially a parent or guardian, may result in financial struggles that the student must now face with one less supporter. Councils should take time to address financial struggles of students who permanently lost a source of income and emotional support.

Targeting Support for Students in Multicultural Councils

The results of this study show that students who are part of multicultural FSL councils were most negatively affected by COVID-19. The MSL data from spring 2021 closely mirror SERU data gathered in summer 2020 that showed BIPOC college students experienced more difficulty during the first few months of the pandemic. SERU data showed that BIPOC students expressed concerns about their adjustment to the pandemic in the areas of housing, financial hardships, and adjusting to remote learning (Horgos et al., 2020; Soria et al., 2020; Soria & Horgos, 2020). The results of the current study also show similarities to the Timothy J. Piazza Center for Fraternity and Sorority Research and Reform (2020) report in summer 2020, which showed NPHC and MGC students were most likely to report being negatively affected by the

pandemic. The 2021 MSL data, collected nearly a year later, corroborate the SERU and Piazza Center data. Students in multicultural councils faced more obstacles in their transition to their educational context during the COVID-19 pandemic: loss of reduction of income of other family members, family or close friends contracting COVID-19 and passing away, loss of wages from employment, family members, lack of access to technology necessary for online learning, inability to access learning support services, and contracting COVID-19 that required hospitalization.

FSL professionals should recognize and operate from an understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic affected FSL members differently based on their council memberships, and ostensibly, social identities. Understanding the differential and disproportionate impacts of the pandemic is an indispensable precursor to efforts intended to address the pandemic's lingering effects. Multicultural council students reported higher levels of impact for 7 of the 12 factors in Table 1. Many of these factors are directly related to the health and financial wellbeing of self, family, and close friends brought on or exacerbated by the pandemic. The Piazza Center research shows that early impacts of the pandemic on NPHC and MGC students' health already were most prevalent in this demographic. These students reported higher rates of contracting, or someone close to them contracting, the COVID-19 virus. As reported by the SERU survey, these same students faced higher unemployment, increased financial hardships, greater food and housing insecurity, difficulty in learning, and a greater likelihood to live in unsafe environments (Soria et al. 2020). Not only are these factors detrimental to academic success but mental health and physical wellness as well. FSL professionals should focus their time on understanding how students in multicultural councils were affected by both the pandemic and various social injustices that happened during the same time period (e.g., deaths of

Breonna Taylor and George Floyd), what support students they may need to continue their education, and potential ways to lessen financial barriers given the greater likelihood of these students to name obstacles in their educational journey.

Targeting Support for NPC Council Members

Results of the study showed that NPC council members had three areas that proved to be greater obstacles in their transition to their education context during the pandemic compared to their counterparts in other FSL councils. The first obstacle was that they felt a greater lack of interaction and communication with other students. The second obstacle was they felt a greater impact from the inability to participate in campus activities in which they would normally engage. The final obstacle they reported at a greater rate was feeling an inability to learn effectively in an online format. All three of these obstacles have a similar theme of feeling a lack of connection, whether they were caused by quarantining/isolating, social distancing, academic and social activities moving to virtual platforms, and/or the cancellation of social activities altogether. Social support has been identified as being a powerful predictor of well-being during times of stress; the stress in this situation refers to students experiencing various aspects of a pandemic, such as social isolation and academic stress (Holtzman et al., 2017). Recent research showed that when someone experiences distress, there was a higher level of positive effects on emotional well-being that came from in-person support versus support over digital platforms like texting (Holtzman et al., 2017). In-person support led to higher relationship satisfaction than support over digital alternatives (Holtzman et al.). Women tended to use text messaging, social media, and online video calls more frequently than men (Kimbrough et al., 2013); however, physical social isolation because of a pandemic had never before been a factor. A study conducted by Frey et

al. (2006) concluded that college women experienced higher levels of psychological distress when they had a lower sense of peer and community relational health compared to the college men who participated in the study. Women college students placed an importance on interdependency and intimacy in social connections, more so than college men. Thus, providing a potential explanation for the NPC council members of this study feeling a lack of interaction and communication with peers, the inability to participate in campus activities, and the inability to learn effectively online. As a result of these findings, fraternity and sorority professionals working with NPC council member students should prioritize creating safe “in-person” activities to accommodate their need for in-person interactions to positively affect their emotional well-being. Safe in-person recruitment activities should continue to be prioritized because of the importance that women students place on intimate social connections.

Targeting Support for IFC Council Members

For professionals who advise IFC, it should be noted that IFC council members in the study reported the fewest “yes” answers to obstacles and had the lowest concern rates reported among most MSL questions. Even though they reported the fewest concerns, FSL professionals should continue to work with IFC chapters on safe strategies to engage their members socially and connect them with resources to support their members who were impacted by the pandemic, especially given McCreary et al.’s (2021) finding that IFC members’ support of hazing increased during the pandemic. There may also be opportunities to use the data in this study to discuss why IFC members reported being less affected by COVID-19 and why other FSL members were more affected. FSL professionals may find these discussions a useful springboard into helping explore important differences among how FSL members are situated so-

cially, economically, and politically within their communities and work toward greater understanding and community building, as prior research has shown that IFC members are least likely to take on and incorporate others' perspectives (Johnson et al., 2015).

Recommendations for Future Research

Disaggregating Data

Another implication from this study is directed at those doing research, assessment, and evaluation on their campuses. Early data about students' experiences during the pandemic (Horgos et al., 2020; Soria et al., 2020; Soria & Horgos, 2020; Timothy J. Piazza Center for Fraternity and Sorority Research and Reform, 2020) showed important differences when student data were disaggregated by various social identities (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic status) and FSL council. The current study also showed noteworthy differences upon disaggregation. Statistically significant differences were found for most questions when FSL students were disaggregated by council. Although those differences were relatively small, they suggest that there are at least some important differences worth considering. Lumping FSL students together as a monolithic category, at minimum, obscures potential important differences in students' experiences and likely misrepresents their experiences. Future studies should continue to disaggregate data by council and other relevant social identities to provide more nuanced and accurate data, echoing similar calls for disaggregation within FSL research (Bureau et al., 2021; Sasso et al., 2019).

Using Initial Surveys to Navigate Change

Finally, we were struck by how clairvoyant studies in summer 2020 were asking FSL students about their perceptions, intentions, and concerns for the upcoming academic year. The Piazza Center study highlighted some important inter-council differences in how the pandemic had affected them in just a few months' time that aligned closely

with the data we found in the MSL a year later. Both the Piazza study and the MSL data showed that IFC students were less likely to be directly affected by COVID-19 and that students in multicultural councils had greater concern about continuing their education and were more likely to report being diagnosed with COVID-19 or know someone who had. Thus, FSL students were quite consistent in reporting their experiences over the course of nearly one year. The value of early surveys about students' concerns and experiences should not be overlooked and could be applied to future concerns or larger changes in students' experiences (e.g., overhauling recruitment, changes to educational delivery models). Well-formulated surveys delivered early in students' experiences proved to be reliable, predictive, and valuable. FSL professionals should seek to partner with their offices of institutional research or perhaps an outside entity to increase the chances of truthful and accurate responses.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic affected college students significantly and in ways that are not yet fully realized. Using data from the 2021 MSL, this study provides a more robust exploration of the effects of COVID-19 on FSL students. Members of multicultural councils were more likely to experience health, familial, employment, and technology hardships brought on by COVID-19, while NPC members were more likely to experience difficulty related to social constraints. FSL professionals should be mindful of the lingering effects of these difficulties in the 2021-2022 academic year and beyond by providing more intentional outreach to members, forging stronger partnerships across campus with key support services, and recognizing the differing needs of their chapters.

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