
1-28-2023

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Recommended Citation

Minthorn, Robin Zape-tah-hol-ah; Youngbull, Natalie Rose; Wagnon, James D.; and Silverhorn-Wolfe, Amber (2023) "Reconceptualizing Indigeneity Within the Fraternity and Sorority Community," *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors*: Vol. 17: Iss. 3, Article 1.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25774/ec0a-0d53>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/oracle/vol17/iss3/1>

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Minthorn et al.: Reconceptualizing Indigeneity Within the Fraternity and Sorority
RECONCEPTUALIZING INDIGENEITY WITHIN THE FRATERNITY
AND SORORITY COMMUNITY

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The purpose of this article provides fraternity and sorority communities with an understanding of the impact of a Native American sisterhood on the cultivation in how it conceptualized itself, its centering an Indigenous structure, and how it affirms the women who join through building relationality. Through the first research inquiry of a Native American sisterhood, the findings reveal/highlight how the sisterhood has centered Indigeneity in its conception to how it lives today. Fraternity and sorority communities need to shift their culture to honor Indigenous ways of being.

Keywords: HNAFS, Native American, Indigenizing, Relationality

Opening¹

We write this article from various spaces across the State of Oklahoma and Washington. James David Wagnon Jr. works and resides within the ancestral homelands of the Caddo Nation, Muscogee Nation, and the Kickapoo Tribe. Natalie Rose Youngbull works and resides within the ancestral homelands of the Caddo Nation and the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes, land that is occupied by the University of Oklahoma. Amber Silverhorn-Wolfe works and resides within the ancestral homelands of the Caddo Nation and the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes and engages within higher education as a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma. Robin Zape-tah-hol-ah Minthorn works and lives on the ancestral lands of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, which her institution (the University of Washington Tacoma) occupies. We acknowledge that we are responsible for this land, to tell

a story that hopes to bring honor to our ancestors, other Indigenous scholars, the sisters of Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. whom we center here, and those who may come behind us (Wagnon et al., in press). We also connect ourselves to this research by sharing that Robin is a co-founder of Gamma Delta Pi, Inc., Natalie is a Beta Class member of Gamma Delta Pi, Inc., and James is a member of Iota Gamma, Inc. Amber is not a member of Historically Native American Fraternities and Sororities (HNAFS).

The purpose of this article is to provide fraternity and sorority communities with a greater understanding of the impact of a Native American sisterhood. Through the first research inquiry of a Native American sisterhood, early findings reveal how it was conceptualized, centered Indigeneity in its structure, and provided encouragement in affirming the women who joined through building relationality. This article begins with the creation story of Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. and provides a general overview and description of the Native American sisterhood. In *Genealogical Connections*, we

¹ We intentionally use opening and headers that reflect our Indigenous ways of being and honoring what is presented within that section. We ask that you read through this lens and attempt to understand that for years Indigenous people have been colonized to utilize the English language that center Western approaches and we are diverting from that in this small way to honor the voice of our research and heartwork.

then discuss prior literature on Historically Native American Fraternities and Sororities. Next, we provide an overview of the study and data collection before describing the findings. Then we discuss recommendations and future directions (implications) of HNAFS. This article closes out with a sharing out of how we are reconceptualizing fraternity and sorority communities by honoring Indigeneity that HNAFS provide as an essential shift.

Creation Story of Gamma Delta Pi, Inc.

The Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. (GDP) chapter was founded on August 27, 2001 at the University of Oklahoma campus. It was created by the Five Changing Women who represent tribal nations from across the midwest, southwest, and northwest regions of the United States - Jennifer Nez (Navajo), Sedelta Oosahwee (Cherokee/Mandan/Arikara/Hidatsa), Joyce Shield (Comanche/Osage/Chippewa-Cree), Robin (Williams) Minthorn (Kiowa/Apache/Nez Perce/Umatilla/Assiniboine), and Shema (Yearby) Lincoln (Seminole/Creek/Mississippi Choctaw). Changing Woman derives from the creation story of the Navajo Nation and she represents and brings about continuous renewal to the people (Witherspoon, 1975). The founders are referred to as the five Changing Women as they stand as representatives of the flourishing sisterhood of Gamma Delta Pi, Inc.

The five Changing Women envisioned a sisterhood open to all Native/Indigenous and interested women committed to creating a life-long bond while carrying on the ideals, cultural traditions, and legacy of Native/Indigenous women. The purpose of Gamma Delta Pi is to develop a sisterhood of Native/Indigenous women who uphold character, an appreciation of tribal and traditional culture, unity, respect, scholarship, and, most importantly, the sisterhood of Native/Indigenous women. To build this specific sisterhood, the emphasis is on cultural sisterhood rather than privilege of status (financially and socially) and exclu-

sionary practices in access to membership. The founders relied upon their cultural teachings and backgrounds to build the structure and outline fundamental principles of Gamma Delta Pi. Each stage of growth, set within the circular design of the medicine wheel, is representative of a particular number, color, direction, season, and order (J. Nez, S. Oosahwee, J. Shield, R. Minthorn, and S. Lincoln, personal communication, August 27, 2001).

Since 2001, Gamma Delta Pi has expanded to five chapters across three states (Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Kansas). In 2016, the GDP Governance Board was created to represent the sisterhood on a national level; the board's first goal and accomplishment was receiving incorporation in 2016. The governance board helped to establish the GDP annual conference in 2014. Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. just recently acknowledged their 20th anniversary and are looking forward to continuing to grow in representation through developing connections across sisters (both active members and alumnae), chapters, and in the roles each sister holds in their profession and careers. We/They are committed to upholding our motto of, "We are leaders of our Nation's, we rise to glorify our roots" (Wagnon et al., in press).

Genealogical Connections

This genealogical connection, which is also referred to as a literature review, examines the recent work written about Historically Native American Fraternities and Sororities and narrows down the influence of HNAFS on Indigenous women scholars. Although some Indigenous researchers have contributed phenomenal work about the conception and implementation of HNAFS, a gap still exists within the produced literature. To aid in closing the gap for future researchers, higher education practitioners, community members, and the Indigenous population overall, this research project explores individual perspectives of past and present Gamma Delta

Pi, Inc. sorority sisters. With continuous research focused on closing the gaps, post-secondary and higher education institutions can seek to disrupt, dismantle, and change the barriers within existing higher education policies that prevent the adequate serving of Indigenous students, specifically students who identify as Indigenous women. Thus, by studying Gamma Delta Pi's individual experiences, we can learn about the effect of HNAFS on their personal and professional growth. The data collected will further add to existing knowledge showing the impact of honoring Native voices and experiences. The research will also highlight the future possibilities of Native women who engage in higher education studies.

History of HNAFs

In 1994, four Indigenous women from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill decided to create a sisterhood to help Native women succeed academically, culturally, and to improve representation on campus (Peters, 2018; Shotton et al., 2013; Still & Faris, 2019). Thus, Alpha Pi Omega Sorority, Inc. was founded (APiO, 2016). Inspired by the potential to increase Native representation, honor cultural practices, and implement traditional ways of knowing, more Indigenous men and women followed suit by establishing Native fraternities and sororities on their respective campuses (Minthorn & Youngbull, 2019; Shotton et al., 2013; Still & Faris, 2019). Today, there are eight fraternities and sororities on over thirty campuses.

The Benefits of Native Sisterhood

Given the historical contexts and the current reality for Native American students in higher education, one can observe the immeasurable benefits of establishing a Native Sisterhood to combat low enrollment rates, low retention rates, and low graduation rates (Brayboy et al., 2015; Oxendine et al., 2013; Still & Faris, 2019). Native students make up only 1% of the

total population within higher education institutions (Shotton et al., 2013). The previous statement of Native student enrollment still exists today; in 2020 Native student enrollment at the undergraduate level was 103,003 out of 15,851,906 of Title IV degree granting institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Research shows Native women often face more obstacles than their peers who identify as Native men, non-Native men, and women (Shield, R., 2009; Shotton, 2017, 2018). For many Indigenous students, having a sense of belonging and family on campus can mean the difference between graduation and dropping out (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Tachine et al., 2017; Oxendine et al., 2020). Native Sisterhoods are pragmatic examples that exhibit a way higher education institutions can ensure student success. Having a Native Sisterhood has shown to help with increasing retention rates, increasing representation on campuses, providing a support system, honoring cultural identities, enacting service for the surrounding communities, establishing a sense of community, and overcoming the feeling of isolation (Peters, 2018; Shotton et al., 2013; Still & Faris, 2019).

It is also important to note that Historically Native American Fraternities and Sororities have no "central" structure. Instead, each brotherhood or sisterhood differs throughout its organizational framework, processes, and establishment requirements set by its organization and its respective university or college. Often, this reality may cause Native brotherhoods and sisterhoods to be forced to be "fit" into a specific institution's structure. For example, HNAFS are often categorized and placed within Multicultural Greek Councils (MGC), and HNAFS must adjust accordingly. These steps can involve updating GPA requirements or meeting the minimum number of members expected for each university chapter. Yet, the reality remains that *every* HNAFS experience differs. This process speaks to the

diversification of HNAFS sisterhoods and brotherhoods as it informs others who may believe they are homogenous. In reality, HNAFS significantly differ from fraternities or sororities within Interfraternity or Panhellenic Councils - both procedurally and culturally.

As we embark on this journey to close the gaps concerning the impact of HNAFS on Indigenous women, it is imperative to hear these individual voices to gain some understanding as to why HNAFS are beneficial to Indigenous students. Higher education institutions, often willingly, make perceptions and assumptions about what campus diversity, equity, and inclusion should look like and wonder why there is a need for fraternities or sororities such as GDP when their institution already has existing sororities they believe to be inclusive. There is a misconception that these already established sororities were designed for a diverse population when that is not the case. There is also an assumption that just because a higher education institution is perceived to be diverse and inclusive, every student's needs are met and therefore have all they need to reach their educational goals and make it to graduation without any obstacles.

Overview of Study and Data Collection

This study is grounded in Indigenous collective approaches to conceptualizing and understanding the impact of the Native American sisterhood. The objective of this study was to better understand the impact of a Native American sisterhood regarding retention, career and personal development, and to understand the unique value a Native American sisterhood brings to Native American women. This study used a qualitative approach that centered the Native American sister voices from Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. In this section, we will share the theoretical framework that guided our approach to interpreting and understanding the findings as well as the overall theoretical frameworks that serve as anchors

for this research. We will also share more about the methodology, data collection process, and participants.

Theoretical Framework(s)

For our theoretical framework, we identified a few overarching theoretical frameworks for the overall research project and then identified a guided theoretical framework for findings. The two overarching theoretical frameworks we chose that fit this research study were Storywork (Archibald, 2008) and Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit; Brayboy, 2005). Through Storywork, we centered this research study in honoring the voices and lived experiences of Native women in Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. through storying together the impact of the sorority on their lives and in their higher education journeys. We also chose to include Tribal Critical Race Theory (Brayboy, 2005) as the premise of situating tribal sovereignty and the political identity of Native Americans and honoring our knowledge systems is central to it. We chose four tenets that we saw as connected to this research. We utilized the Indigenous Research Paradigm (Wilson, 2008) as the lens for how we understood and honored the findings in this article. We incorporated Indigenous centered theoretical frameworks as a way of honoring Indigenous knowledge and ways of being. This is a necessary approach to reclaim and center Indigenous voices in the research we have cultivated in understanding the impact of Gamma Delta Pi, Inc.

Storywork (Archibald, 2008)

Indigenous storywork is articulated by Archibald (2008) as a way of weaving our teachings and cultural beliefs through stories that are translated through oral and written ways. Indigenous storywork includes seven principles that provide a foundation for how to utilize and integrate stories in our heartwork. These principles are respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, inter-relatedness, and syn-

ergy. We center these values and ways of being as we interact with the sorority sisters and even as we interact as Indigenous scholars and researchers in this process. Indigenous storywork provides space in academic and western spaces and verifies the need and use in the places we navigate. We centered Indigenous storywork and telling within the approach of virtual talking circles centered as a way of honoring the Native women perspectives of Native American sisterhood.

Tribal CRT (Brayboy, 2005)

Tribal Critical Race theory provides an overview and articulation of how and why Indigenous people are unique in our political status and culture and language when we are inserted in conversations of Critical Race Theory (Brayboy, 2005). Within Critical Race Theory there is a conception of race but not tribal sovereignty. We acknowledge within Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. that we are the conglomeration of many Tribal Nations whom each sister belongs to as citizens or umbilically. Within this research study we focus on four of the nine tenets posed by Brayboy. We provide a short narrative of those four tenets below:

“Tenet 1: The primary tenet of TribalCrit is the notion that colonization is endemic to society. By colonization, I mean that European American thought, knowledge, and power structures dominate present-day society in the United States.” (Brayboy, 2005, p.430)

“Tenet 5: Fifth, TribalCrit problematizes the concepts of culture, knowledge, and power and offers alternative ways of understanding them through an Indigenous lens. In so doing, TribalCrit migrates away from western/European notions of culture, knowledge, and power and moves to notions that have been circulating among Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. In TribalCrit, culture is simultaneously fluid or dynamic, and fixed or stable.” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 434)

“Tenet 8: the eighth tenet of TribalCrit

honors stories and oral knowledge as real and legitimate forms of data and ways of being. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory.” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 439)

“Tenet 9: The final component of TribalCrit is that there must be a component of action or activism—a way of connecting theory and practice in deep and explicit ways. Building on what Williams (1997) has called Critical Race Practice, TribalCrit must be praxis at its best. Praxis involves researchers who utilize theory to make an active change in the situation and context being examined.” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 440)

We want to uplift these four tenets as they speak directly to our research and how we acknowledge the impact of colonization in the original formation of fraternities and sororities and how HNAFS are Indigenizing them in structure, purpose, and values. We also acknowledge that Indigenous/Tribal knowledge and stories are what guide HNAFS creation and the members within them. Lastly, action is undoubtedly the next step we need for HNAFS to be recognized as unique contributors to the fraternity and sorority community.

Indigenous Research Paradigm

The Indigenous knowledge and research paradigm is grounded in the belief that when Indigenous (Native American) researchers are part of the research process the element of the non-Native researcher as outsider is removed. This allows inherent Native knowledge, values, and lived experiences to strengthen the research and to be seen through Indigenous eyes. Part of the supposition is that the research is not being conducted on people or participants but *with* participants (Wilson, 2008). The components of an Indigenous research paradigm are conceptualized as a circle composed of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. Each piece is interconnected and does not have more importance than the other. This guiding

theoretical framework is essential as we are conducting grounded research in understanding the importance of Indigenizing structures of fraternity and sorority systems that were founded in western and European conceptions of sisterhood. The articulation of how we center Indigenous ways of knowing, understanding, and centering the lived reality of a Native American sisterhood becomes central to understanding the findings we present here.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach including Talking Circles (similar to focus groups) of unique membership groups within the Native American sisterhood. Talking Circles are also referred to as sharing circles (Tachine et al., 2016). We acknowledge that we centered the stories as an Indigenous methodological approach (Kovach, 2009) for this research study to honor the voices and lived experiences of the Native American sisters who shared their time with us.

Participants and Data Collection Process

The participants were selected for this research project by their past and current membership with Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. (e.g., alumnae, Chapter Founders, past/current members, etc.). Twenty-four sisters were selected to participate in these Talking Circles, which centered on Indigenous philosophies by honoring individual voices, sharing experience/knowledge, and decolonizing research (Brown & Lallo, 2020). Participating sisters' ages ranged from 18 to 45. Sisters were sent recruitment information via email and social media flyers with details that listed dates, times, and Zoom links for every Talking Circle hosted. All participants chose to use their real names for this research study.

The Talking Circles were guided by an interview protocol that included an opportunity for sisters to share their tribal affiliation(s), chapter and class, and role(s) held within the sisterhood. Additionally,

sisters were able to describe GDP's ability to instill a sense of belonging on campus and future goals of the sisterhood. The Talking Circles provided an opportunity for sisters to share their experiences through stories and to expand upon those stories with each other. After the Talking Circles, the researchers presented the sisters with the opportunity with follow-up questions if they wanted to add more information or could recall stories, they had not shared in the initial Talking Circle. The interviews were then transcribed, shared with the sisters for final approval, and a collective analysis process among the researchers was completed to uncover codes and reoccurring themes (Wagnon et al., in press, 2022).

Findings

For the findings of this article, we focused on the following research question: Can you share your first memories of how you connected or came to know/conceptualize Gamma Delta Pi, Inc.? It was important for us to understand how the sisters came to understand and know about Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. There were three overarching themes that stood out in regard to the voices and stories shared by the sisters: visioning and conceptualizing a Native American sisterhood, Indigenizing the structure of a Native American sisterhood, and relationality and holistic approaches to connecting to a Native American sorority. Intertwined across each of these three findings are narratives shared from the sisters of the Gamma Delta Pi, Inc.

Visioning and Conceptualizing a Native American Sisterhood

One of the findings of this research study was honoring the voices of the sisters who shared how it came to be, its creation story. Star shared her connection to it from the very beginning, "my very first memory of Gamma Delta Pi was before it was even Gamma Delta Pi... Those are your choices. She (referencing

to one of the co-founders) did her research. I had really pushed her. I was like, “That’s an amazing idea.” I said, “It would take a lot of work, but, why don’t you do the research while you’re working here with like starting a student organization.”” At the time, Star was the Director of American Indian Student Services office and had one of the co-founders of the sorority, Joyce, as her student worker. Joyce shared her connection and some of her memories of how Gamma Delta Pi started.

And, just trying to brainstorm some things, like, ‘wouldn’t it be awesome if we had our own sisterhood?’ And, then, we just kind of started throwing out ideas and concepts and pieces of our culture that could be incorporated and I felt like we just had this giant mindmeld. And it just kind of kept going and we just kept talking and talking and talking and we’re like, ‘we gotta write this down!’ (laughs) ‘Gotta keep this going!’ But, um, yeah, I remember just feeling really pumped and all that energy and that creative energy that we all had together just putting it together.”

At the time, Joyce was a graduate student and worked in the women’s resource center at the university. What is important to note is that space was created for the visioning and creation of Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. because some of the co-founders were connected to the university’s student affairs offices and knew the employees who could support its creation.

One of the conversations in the talking circles was how the sorority sisters came to know or hear about the sorority. They heard about it through friends or family and then they were able to see the Native American sorority sisters at on-campus recruitment events. This highlights the importance of relationality. Natalie talked about her experience and memory of Gamma Delta Pi, Inc., “I remember attending the American Indian- or new student orientation at OU...I think my very first memory of GDP, and I-I remember thinking like

that you know it was kind of cool to see all of the sisters in their letter shirts. Additionally, Briana who joined the sorority about five years later mentioned how Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. was present and visible:

And then, the biggest thing that stuck out to me was that there were sisters from GDP that showed up. So when they showed up, you know, back in the day they had the really nice jackets like with the letters and everything on it, and I thought that was the coolest thing. You could tell they were all really good friends. They just had this really good chemistry about them. And then you could tell that they also loved the organization.

Dawn talked about how she received encouragement from her mom to join,

at the time, too, my mom wanted me to rush a sorority. She was like, ‘There’s a lot of benefits for it. You can make a lot of good friends and have some really good connections and a sisterhood that could be valuable.’

The visibility of Gamma Delta Pi and hearing within the tribal community there was a Native American sorority was finding its way to prospective Native American women who started to see themselves joining something that centered their cultural ways within the fraternity and sorority community.

Lastly, Sedelta shared how her role in GDP’s co-founding ended up working out when they did not know how it would unfold but it has continued to have a positive impact on the sorority sisters who have joined.

It seems to have worked because it seems like what we envisioned and what we wanted to do has really seemed to come to fruition. I’ve had the chance to meet with some sisters here and there who expressed gratitude and who may-like they said that they loved it because they felt like they belonged, they felt that support, they felt that sisterhood, they felt that community. All the words that can be made a word cloud. All the stuff that we wanted to do, that’s what they

felt and that's what Gamma Delta Pi has given them, so, I guess I'm just so happy that it worked and it continues to work. She reiterated how even though the co-founders were young adults trying to create a space that represented Native women, it has now grown into this space where Native women find belonging on campus. This wasn't necessarily the vision initially but has become much more than imagined.

Indigenizing the Structure of a Native American Sisterhood

In the talking circles, specifically the one with sorority co-founders and a chapter co-founder, members were sharing how they saw their presence on campus, and how the sorority's creation began to Indigenize and provide a cultural footprint that was not there before. Sedelta shared how the co-founders were very intentional in how they chose the titles for officers and those who would hold leadership positions in the sorority to the colors and symbols that represented it.

And all of those things like the clan mother and all those different chairs that we kind of came up with had counterparts in other sororities, but we named them differently to kind of be more reflective of us and who we are. And so we used colors from like the medicine wheel, and then we had clan mother versus like president because we wanted to kind of Indigenize what sisterhood looked like and how it was because you know if we just went and had a president, it would be like any other sorority, you know so it's like how do we make this different and more reflective of us. Joyce added to this storywork and built on the inter-relatedness and synergy that was being shared:

We were just trying to make this organization ours and reflective of our tribal experiences as young women. Not to just copy the rest of the panhellenic organizations. We wanted to be part of them, but also to be unique and that was one

way, by identifying different leadership roles, but calling them something different, something that was more connected to our culture, more meaningful.

Both founders shared an essential part of the process was being intentional to Indigenize the structure through asserting our Indigenous identities and approaches to governance and in the creation process.

Sedelta further shared about the process for how the sorority was organized and created:

I remember Monday evenings we would sit there, and meet and go over things and make decisions about all- and everything was, looking back, it was so intentional. I'm surprised at how intentional (laughing) we were, you know, to Joyce's point. You know, every symbol, every color, everything had a reason and a rationale and something that corresponded with it. And, nothing was done just like 'oh, yeah, we'll just do this number or that,' or we'll just, you know, everything was really thought out.

When we think about Indigenizing structures, what is represented in this storywork is that it was a collective effort amongst co-founders of the sorority to bring meaning into everything that was connected to the sorority and realizing each founder brought their tribal cultural values with them and they were intertwined in the symbolism as well. Later, Lindsey shared how one of the first chapters outside of the founding chapter for Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. did not have a Native presence on campus, but they were able to bring a cultural footprint that was previously non-existent with all of the intentionality that was infused into the sorority. Lindsey offered additional insight about her experience as a chapter co-founder, "Oklahoma City University does not have a huge, like, cultural footprint or historically, it didn't have a huge footprint."

Relationality and Holistic Approaches to Connecting to Native American Sorority

One of the themes that stood out was how sisters found out about Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. and how they were encouraged to join whether they were a first-year student, a transfer student, or had taken a break from college. Dawn spoke about being encouraged by sisters to consider joining Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. after taking a break from college:

So, life events happened. Didn't go to school for several years, but then I had some other friends tell me, "Hey, if you come back to OU, I've heard they're getting ready to try to start a Native sorority here." And I'm like, "Oh, really? Well, I hope that happens because I was excited to hear about that happening." I was actually with the roughneck little sisters at the time during that fall semester. And that's how I met Noetta Harjo. And so, she became one of my mentors through that. She was the one that told me, after GDP was formed, she was like, "It happened, we have now a Native sorority, if you ever come back to OU, please, please rush." She was the one encouraging me, and also Alice Kassanavoid who's also an alumni... She was like, "Yeah, you should rush if you go back to OU." So, coming back, I had a lot of friends that I knew from back then, and now, "Okay, you need to rush. You'd be back on campus, you should rush. It's an amazing group and stuff.

Dawn was encouraged to join even before returning to college, and this really speaks to how GDP is changing the perceptions of the fraternity and sorority life by being open to women joining at different stages in their lives, not just those in college who are traditionally aged.

Every person that identifies as a woman deserves to be in GDP if they see it as a place for them. This was also the case for Noetta who had started college then took a break and came back. She had heard from some people about GDP and ended up

joining after returning to college at OU and heard about the sorority from the American Indian student life professional and she had seen them in the community.

My story's a little bit different because I went to college right out of high school, and I took a lot of time off and then came back (laughter). When I came back, GDP had already been established at OU. But I had heard of them just from being around the community and seeing the girls around campus. But whenever I came back to school, I didn't know any of the ladies and it was suggested to me by the student life coordinator at the time to check them out to see if maybe it's something I might want to join.

The intergenerational connections and how sisters were encouraged to join is a unique part of the sisterhood and HNAFS. Bianca talked about the encouragement she received from her aunt to look into the sisterhood:

When I decided, I was going to come to OU, it was my aunt, Jennifer Hill Kelly, who's also an alum from OU. But she let me know, "Oh, hey, there's a Native sorority on campus. You should check it out." And, that was the first time I'd like ever heard of a Native sorority or even thought of something like that. I just didn't know- I wasn't aware that something like this existed.

Bianca's reflection speaks to the importance of connecting with alumnae who can share out to their relatives and friends about the option to join a Native American sisterhood and how much relationships are a part of helping future sisters find their pathway to the sisterhood.

The pathway to becoming a sister for Gamma Delta Pi, Inc. has looked different than how we perceive fraternity and sorority life to look. Because it is open to graduate students as well, it opened the opportunity for sisters to join who were unable to in their undergraduate degree journey. Joleen talked about this:

Later on, whenever I was getting my

master's, I decided to - I kept thinking about maybe, maybe I'll join this year. And, so, I finally just sent in an application, but I was also kind of reintroduced to it from another sister. It was from, I was at, like an AISA meeting. Kind of getting back into the Native Community because I was separated from it, like, for a little while. I went to an AISA meeting and Cordi (Cordelia Falls Down), she came up to me and was like, "Hey, have you heard of GDP? Have you heard of Gamma Delta Pi?" I was thinking, "Yeah, I have." But, I don't know, she was really friendly, and it was really nice. So, I was like you know, I'll apply. She seems really nice, I want to get to know her more. So that's... here I am!" (Joleen)

Alice also talked about this as GDP was founded during her undergraduate program, but she had become a mom and though she was interested, she did not think it was the right time to join:

GDP started when I was in my undergrad and I had always regretted not joining because at the time I was like, 'I have two little kids, like toddlers' and I was like, 'There's no way I have time to do that so.' When I finally started back in my Master's program, in 2014, I was like I know I wanted to do it because it's something that I had regretted for all those years that I didn't do. Whenever I did, I was really thankful, because at first, I was just like...When I was joining, I was like it's really selfish of me to take away from my kids because they were all still in you know high school, middle school, and elementary, and then I was just like, Well, I'm just going to do it because it's something that I had always wished I had done before, and you know at the time I was really hesitant about it because I was like, I am too old to be joining a sorority right now. But, you know, I'm really thankful that I did.

Though Alice prioritized her young family as an undergraduate over joining the

sisterhood, GDP did not put limitations on who could join, so joining GDP was an option for her in graduate school. For Alice and Joleen, their pathway to the sorority was not a straight pathway and that is the uniqueness of how GDP was created for all Native women regardless of their life's journey. Across the themes, many sisters shared their experiences receiving encouragement to join the sisterhood by family, friends, and alumni from the sisterhood. This encouragement relates to how the sisterhood is holistic and relational in fostering connections and creating community.

Recommendations/Future Directions

Gamma Delta Pi's influence on the many Indigenous women who have been a part of the sisterhood has made a positive influence on the individual sisters' experiences and within the surrounding communities they have served. The sisterhood has also been a staple for many during their 20-year tenure on different campuses spread across various tribal homelands. We provide recommendations below for the sisterhood and for future research/scholarship.

Recommendations for the Fraternity/Sorority Community *Acknowledge and Respect HNAFS Existence and Indigenous Centered Structures*

In this article we explained how the founders of the sorority were intentional in centering tribal values and culture in the creation process. This is true for all the HNAFS in existence today. Sometimes it has been the fraternity and sorority offices on campus that have failed to acknowledge and respect the uniqueness and value of HNAFS. This is also true for national organizations that support the continued invisibility of HNAFS within fraternity and sorority life. We recommend that the national organizations and campus level offices that support fraternity and sorority life and reinforce structures should work to build relationships to established HNAFS on their campuses. It is important for our

uniqueness and culturally centered organizations to be seen as a value to what exists today. This explicitly ties back into tenet five of TribalCrit, which problematizes the concepts of culture, knowledge, and power and offers alternative ways of understanding them through an Indigenous lens. This can be done by engaging in advocacy for HNAFS within on- and off- campus structures and supporting them to create their own culturally based structures.

Support the Evolution and Growth of Fraternity/Sorority Communities

In general, the sorority and fraternity community narrative has been rooted in settler colonialism and was situated in elitism within institutions of higher education. Meaning, only those who could afford the membership, dues, and living in houses were able to access fraternity and sorority life on campus. This stereotype and reality still exists in many predominantly white institutions. It is time to create opportunities for evolution of fraternity and sorority communities that develop their understanding and authentic relationship building with culturally based fraternities and sororities. This needs to also be done on a national and local level to create opportunities for growth and learning where there may be racism, elitism, and indoctrination into a system that has only served specific groups of people. An internal and external mapping and reflexivity on what exists and where transformation needs to take place is needed to be able to create healthy spaces for HNAFS to coexist. Mapping and taking action is connected to tenet nine of TribalCrit, there must be a component of action or activism, this inherently allows for space that is authentically Indigenous and rooted in our values as a form of reclaiming and visioning Indigenous futures.

Decolonize the Current Structures That Impede Culturally Based Fraternity/Sorority Communities

In this recommendation we suggest that

all fraternities and sororities associated with AFA look at the histories that are the foundation of their creation and how they might be rooted in settler colonialism. How are the narratives and stories of members from Communities of Color being told and shared? How does the fraternity and sorority in general acknowledge how it has potentially caused harm to Communities of Color historically and in contemporary realities? Are there ways that structures are currently harmful for members from minoritized communities that exist and need to be recreated to be more inclusive and supportive? Answering these questions critically and addressing them is reiterated in tenet one of TribalCrit, the notion that colonization is endemic to society. These are the ways that local and national organizations can start the decolonization process.

Recommendations for Future Research and Scholarship

This is one of the first research projects that has focused on the impact of one Native American sorority to understand its legacy after being in existence for 20 years. The talking circles and stories shared have provided stories and testimonies on the impact of a Native American sisterhood. What are ways that local and national fraternities and sororities gather stories of members and the impact it has had on them? It is essential we give voice to the experiences of all members and be open to our own growth and development. This could provide a pathway to understanding how to evolve as a fraternal movement. Centering storytelling of HNAFS is tied back to tenet eight of TribalCrit, which encourages honoring stories and oral knowledge as real and legitimate forms of data and ways of being.

Closing

In closing, we have opened this space for more stories to be told. As collectors of these stories, we wanted to honor these narratives and share them in a way that

readers can embrace a deeper understanding of the value the creation of a Native American sisterhood has in higher education. We hope those who read this article will do an internal self-reflection of their own stories and experiences in their fraternity or sorority as well as how we can grow in our movements to create more open pathways for those who come behind us. Specifically, by sharing one sorority's pathway in the HNAFS movement we hope to engender institutional and structural change that welcomes our Indigenous voice and narrative. This can be done through being reflexive of your own understanding of the fraternity and sorority movement, recognizing how it has silenced the voices of HNAFS through the existing structures, and working to become a co-conspirator and good relative in the spaces you occupy.

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