Liquid Bonding: A Cultural Analysis of the Role of Alcohol in Fraternity Pledgeship

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Qualitative methods were used to discover how the pledgeship experience shapes alcohol use of fraternity members. Regulating alcohol use is a key element in a complicated system of rewards and sanctions administered by active members designed to socialize newcomers to group norms and values.

Fraternity membership is at an all-time high. Approximately 400,000 men and 250,000 women, about 15% of the White, undergraduate population (Wilkerson, 1989), belong to Greek-letter organizations. Compared with non-members, the bonding of member-to-member and member-to-institution that occurs in fraternities results in such positive outcomes as higher levels of self-confidence, assertiveness, satisfaction with college, graduation rates (Astin, 1975, 1993; Carney, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), and participation in annual fund solicitations (Griffith & Miller, 1981; Nelson, 1984). Although fraternities offer these and other benefits (Johnson, 1972; Malaney, 1990; Owen & Owen, 1976), it is not possible to ignore the shadow side of fraternity life, particularly the hazardous use of alcohol.

The heaviest, most frequent, and most problematic drinking in college is done by fraternity members (Faulkner, Alcorn & Gavin, 1989; Globetti, Stem, Marasco & Haworth-Hoeppner, 1988; Goodwin, 1990; Hendren, 1988; Kraft, 1985; Mills, Pfaffenberger & McCarty, 1981; Miser, 1981; Tampke, 1990). This is the case despite strongly-worded policy directives issued by national fraternity executives, information about risk management from house corporations, lectures about personal and group responsibility by university officials and chapter advisors, and espoused group purposes. The charters, of most national organizations are based on values consonant with those expressed by the National Interfraternity Conference Decalogue (Robson, 1977, p. 848):

> The college fraternity stands for excellence in scholarship [and] accepts its role in the moral and spiritual development of the individual. Recognizing the importance of physical well-being, the college fraternity aims for a sound mind and a sound body.

The differences between what a group says it believes and what its members do is a function of the group's culture. According to Moos (1976), if a group can create and sustain a culture that reinforces health-enhancing attitudes and behaviors, students will adopt those attitudes and behave accordingly. Therefore, a potentially illuminating approach to understanding alcohol use by fraternity members is to examine the cultural context in which they use alcohol, including patterns of norms, practices, values, and assumptions that guide their behavior as a group (Kuh & Hall, 1993; Kuh & Whitt, 1988) and whether certain properties of fraternity cultures sanction—even encourage—the use of alcohol.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to discover the role of fraternity culture in shaping alcohol use of new members. The guiding research question was, "How does the pledgeship experience, as a socialization process, influence alcohol use?" The paper does not provide a balanced, complete picture of life in a fraternity house. Rather, it is a careful, systematic description of a slice of fraternity life: those events at which alcohol is featured that violate the group's own publicly asserted alcohol policies.

GUIDING PERSPECTIVES

Two related sets of theoretical perspectives guided this inquiry: (a) culture as an interpretive framework, and (b) socialization—the process by which students learn what their peers value.

Culture is a holistic, complex set of properties that influence the behavior of people. Many definitions of culture exist (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). In this study, culture will be viewed as a system of reciprocal interactions among fraternity members, the physical manifestations of the setting(s) frequented by the group, and symbolic meanings unique to this group.

Socialization is "cultural learning" (Louis, 1983; Merton, 1957). Fraternities teach new members the culture of the organization through intentionally designed and carefully orchestrated rush and pledgeship experiences. Rush is the process whereby the fraternity first identifies individuals who appear to be worthy of consideration for membership. After accepting an invitation to join the group, the pledge begins a weeks-long, rigorous experience, during which the group provides guidelines for how much time to spend on curricular and extracurricular activities and how to relate to faculty, administrators, and other students (Bushnell, 1962; Hughes, Becker & Geer, 1962). Pledges have frequent contact with one another, particularly those who live in the chapter house; they develop strong loyalty to each other and the group, which makes them even more susceptible to group influence (Leemon, 1972). Thus, rush and pledgeship ensure the complete socialization (acculturation, induction, integration, incorporation) of newcomers (Leemon, 1972; van Gennep, 1960). Although new members learn a good deal about their fraternity from rush (Arnold & Kuh, 1992), this paper focuses exclusively on the pledgeship period.

METHODS

Cultural research attempts to learn how phenomena that are essentially tacit shape behavior (Kuh, 1990). Therefore, pencil-and-paper survey instruments designed to assess, for example, frequency of alcohol use and characteristics of users were inadequate to accomplish the purpose of the study because they do not provide the depth of information needed. We employed qualitative methods (i.e., data in the form of words) that were more likely to increase our understanding of why alcohol use is so widespread and difficult to control in fraternities. This allowed us to develop a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of relevant aspects of fraternity culture.

The research strategy used was the culture audit (Fetterman, 1990; Kuh et al., 1991; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Whitt, 1993) adapted for use in multiple settings (Whitt & Kuh, 1991). The culture audit is a "systematic process of discovery that can be conducted by insiders or outsiders or, preferably, both working in cooperation . . ." (Whitt, 1993). Culture audits are characterized by multiple data sources, an iterative, interactive process of collecting and analyzing data, and a check of the trustworthiness and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the audit results by sharing emerging constructions and interpretations with respondents to obtain their feedback ("debriefing") on the veracity of the investigators' descriptions and understandings.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data gathering occurred between June, 1991, and September, 1992. Data collection and data analysis were conducted concurrently in order to inform collection and interpretation of additional data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). That is, as data were collected, preliminary interpretations were formed and used to guide the collection of additional data. For example, we began by noting visible artifacts (e.g., physical properties of the house, written goals) of the groups under study, although not knowing at this point their meaning in the cultural milieu of the organization. Through continued contact, we learned about the groups' values—both espoused and enacted—recording inconsistencies between what the group members said was, important and what they actually did. Finally, with the help of group members, we began to discover some underlying assumptions of these organizations, the core of their cultures (Schein, 1985). In this manner, we continually strived to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of the fraternity cultures under investigation.

The institutions. Fraternities at two different types of institutions participated in the study. One was a large, state-supported, research university, where about a quarter of the 20,000 undergraduates were affiliated with Greek chapters. The student code of conduct prohibited alcoholic beverages in university supervised housing, including fraternity houses. The second institution was a small, private, liberal arts college, where about three of every four students were affiliated with a fraternity or sorority. "Responsible alcohol use" was permitted under certain conditions (e.g., compliance with state law, no common containers such as kegs). Permission to conduct research at each institution was obtained in July, 1991, from the chief student affairs officer at each institution.

The fraternities. Student affairs staff at both institutions were asked to assign the fraternities on their campuses to one of two categories, those that had made progress in recent years adhering to the student conduct code concerning alcohol, and those that had not made progress. After reviewing additional information (e.g., house grades), we solicited the cooperation of the national headquarters of each fraternity we intended to pursue and began contacting groups to ascertain their willingness to participate in the study (one so-called "responsible group" and one "no progress group" from each campus). Following these initial discussions, we did not share any information about any specific fraternities with institutional agents or fraternity executives during the remainder of the study.

Data sources. Information was collected in three ways: interviews, observations, and document analysis. Seventy-four people were interviewed, either individually or in focus groups. The majority ($n = 66$) were fraternity members; the remainder were campus administrators and other students (e.g., sorority women). Initially, a list of questions was developed to elicit responses regarding alcohol use in the fraternities. As our knowledge about these groups increased, we used these protocols less and less and focused more specifically on aspects of fraternity culture that seemed to be important to understand alcohol use (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviews averaged about an hour in length and were tape recorded with the permission of the participants. For the initial round of interviews and focus groups, information was compiled on Interview Summary Forms (Miles & Huberman, 1984) in order to identify relevant themes (e.g., the nature of pledgeship events where alcohol was available to pledges) and questions that needed to be answered. In subsequent interviews and reviews of tapes, detailed notes were recorded on 5×8 index cards.

Observations included a formal tour of each house, led by the chapter president, and attendance at seven formal events. Many other informal activities were observed while in the chapter houses conducting interviews. Notes from these observations were made on 3×5 index cards, with interpretations dictated into a tape recorder immediately following a visit to the house. Thus, countless others participated due to their presence at the various events and activities we observed.

Finally, institutional documents (e.g., grade-point averages for fraternities and other groups, student code of conduct, student newspapers) and fraternity materials (e.g., pledge education files) were collected and analyzed at various times throughout the study.

Most of the students in the study were under the age of 21; thus, their participation required them to describe their involvement in unlawful behavior. To inform respondents about the study and their rights as participants, and to allay fears about divulging self-incriminating information, participants were asked to sign a consent form that indicated that their contributions would remain confidential, their identity and the identity of their group would not be divulged, the researchers' notes and other material were protected by a federally-issued *Certificate of Confidentiality,* and they could withdraw from the study at any time. No one did. Indeed, despite the relatively sensitive nature of certain issues, most participants seemed comfortable in discussing their college and fraternity experiences as well as their own and friends' use of alcohol.

Data analysis. Interview summaries, observation summaries, some field journal entries, and tape-recorded field notes included elements of analysis and interpretation. For example, impressions, interpretations, and speculations about important aspects of pledgeship related to alcohol use were entered each day of data gathering in a field journal. "Immersion" in the data was accomplished by reviewing periodically all written materials—with particular emphasis on the Interview Summary Forms and other interview notes. Selected interviews were transcribed which offered rich descriptions of socialization processes and other cultural properties associated with alcohol and alcohol-related behavior (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To check the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, debriefing sessions were conducted with several groups of respondents. Also, various iterations of this report were shared with some key respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although members took issue with some of our interpretations, as will be seen later, they agreed that their group and their pledgeship experiences were described accurately. Additional information about the data collection and analysis procedures were reported in Arnold and Kuh (1992).

RESULTS

The results are presented in two sections. In the first section, some general observations are offered about alcohol use, using information from all four fraternities. In the second section, the role of alcohol in pledgeship is described using one group as a case study. Pseudonyms are used to refer to groups, events, and practices. In creating alternative labels, an attempt was made to convey accurately the nature and function of the respective activity, event, and organizational value(s).

General Observations

The physical properties of fraternity houses revealed the importance of alcohol to group life. For example, group members readily pointed out places where kegs and other containers (e.g., cases of beer) could be hidden from institutional agents. An inventory of items visible from the sofa of one student's room included the following: On the wall to the right were a bar with a television facing the room and a room-size refrigerator behind, two beer pitchers with fraternity letters hanging from the ceiling, about a dozen shot glasses arranged on a ledge, a model airplane constructed of beer cans hanging from the ceiling, a large, elegantly framed beer sign (this one advertising a light beer), an electric, framed malt liquor sign, and two beer-can "huggers" on top of a stereo speaker. On the wall across the room were a framed imported beer sign, another electric beer sign, a poster (ape on a bike), and a print of a framed watercolor. On the wall to the left were a large, unframed poster of a photograph of shelves stocked with a variety of brands of hard liquor and wines, a 15-inch-high simulated six-pack of an expensive beer placed on top of a stereo speaker, and an unframed baseball poster. Finally, on the wall to the rear were a clock representing a brand of beer, another framed beer sign, an air conditioner, and the outside windows.

A sorority member explained what this may convey to visitors:

Most fraternity rooms have stuff like that, and I think it's indicative of the way alcohol is thought of here, something that's a big part of people's lives . . . When I see a sign like that, I don't notice it because it's not out of the ordinary, or not normal—or not accepted—to have that, because it's advertising drinking, and drinking is something that's done.

At both campuses, alcohol was featured at many social events to the degree that exhausting the alcohol supply signalled the end of most social events. During a Thursday night "four way" (two fraternities, two sororities), a former president of one of the groups predicted when this event would end:

It's always the same—the party lasts as long as the beer does [112 cases of cans on this particular night]. We get the beer, the girls come, the guys come, the beer runs out, the girls move on and then so do the guys. Every one of these is identical.

According to one sorority member:

I think without alcohol, parties would be nonexistent, because I've been at parties where the beer has run out and the party just emptied, you know, like that! Or they say it's going to be like a dry party, and no one goes, you know?

Pledgeship and Alcohol: The Case of Iota Nu Sigma

Although the cultural properties of the four fraternities differed in various ways, some aspects were similar with regard to the role of alcohol in group life. In this section, key events and activities from one group are described to illustrate how fraternity culture influenced alcohol use during pledgeship. The group, Iota Nu Sigma (INS), had a house grade-point average that compared favorably with those of other high-achieving groups on campus; its members also were involved in other aspects of campus life (e.g., intramurals, student government).

The group asserted that pledgeship—typically a nine- or ten-week period—was "dry" (i.e., alcohol-free). Some fraternity-sponsored events were, for pledges, alcohol free. At most events, however, active members were, or had been, drinking; at some events, typically those which included hazing, many actives were inebriated (Arnold & Kuh, 1992). This double-standard (actives can drink anytime; pledges cannot on specified occasions) was an early, obvious clue as to the important role alcohol played in socializing newcomers. Moreover, at certain events and activities during their pledgeship, pledges were expected to drink. We focus on this latter category of events and activities in order to understand better why alcohol remains so prominent in the life of college fraternities. Six such activities warrant a brief description:

Rookie Week. According to Pledge Education documents, Rookie Week, the several days immediately preceding the Fall term, was designed so that "members of the new pledge class meet each other and become accustomed to living together . . . No rules as such (are) placed on the pledges [during this time]." One recent initiate described Rookie Week: "It was generally boring. We watched tennis during the day and partied at night. Brothers would go out and buy beer . . . We'd 'dorm storm,' invite girls over . . . During the day we did absolutely nothing." A former Pledge Educator (PE) confirmed that members would buy the beer

that week, and that pledges would get pretty drunk: "The brothers sort of encourage that because [the pledges] do stupid things."

Weekends. Pledges were expected to stay together at all times, including weekends. According to one first-year student pledge, "A lot of the best memories were the weekends." Perhaps this is because even though INS pledgeship rules prohibit pledges from drinking, pledges were considered "off" (similar to off-duty) on weekends. As three members told us: "We weren't supposed to drink during pledgeship, but it wasn't really enforced, like on the weekends . . ." "We all got together, drink, laugh about what happened during the last week—who screwed up the most—[and would] say, 'Whew, that was rough!'" The third, a senior, recalled: "There's no question that when we're away from the house we would drink . . . You [might as well] ask, 'Why are we alive?' I don't know why everybody has to do this, but it's something there's no question about; of course we are [going to drink]."

Luau. In addition to the weekends "off," there were several house-sponsored events for which the no-alcohol rule for pledges was suspended. The first of these was the annual fall Luau.

> For a week we had to shovel sand and get the house decorated . . . [The actives] bought us alcohol for the Luau . . . 'Hairy Buffalo,' [they called it] . . . vodka, Everclear, fruit punch, and fruit pieces . . . the most disgusting thing . . . made by the trash can . . . Worst part is that the next day everybody was hung over, and what you built in a week you have to clean up in a day.

Dads Night. Another event for which the no-alcohol rule was suspended was the evening when members of the pledge class were assigned their Fraternity Dad. According to the Pledge Education files:

> Each freshman will receive a fraternity father during the second or third week of the program . . . The Dads will be responsible for monitoring their son's academic progress, as well as his general well being [and] shall serve as their son's confidante, friend and mentor.

A former PE told us:

> We do what some might consider hazing . . . [we] yell at the freshmen, blindfold them, tell them how rotten they're doing . . . yell at them some more and lead them down to the dining room, [and] when the blindfolds are removed their Dad is there saying, "Have a beer."

This PE emphasized that drinking was not required of pledges on Dad's Night. If a pledge had a test or paper due the next day, he could be excused from participating in the drinking and serenading. However, another former PE said, "They'll drink plenty. They've been yelled at for drinking, but now they're able to do it. They drink because they want to." A first-year member admitted: "It was expected that drinking would occur during Dad's Night. A lot of us drank more than we should have. Everybody was laughing, running around having a good time." A recent initiate told us: "Had they not had alcohol that night ('two or three kegs . . . we drained 'em'), I don't think it would have gone quite the same. I think that loosened us up . . . I know that's bad to say."

The Walkout. As with other pledgeship activities, this was a planned event where the pledge class took a trip to visit an INS chapter on another campus. According to the Pledge Education files, the event is:

organized and assisted by the freshmen advisors, who will plan any activities, such as chartering a bus or contacting the chapter they will be visiting. They will be allowed to leave whenever they desire, but advised not to leave the house until at least Wednesday for the week they are walking out.

Drinking was expected. A first-year member, freshman observed:

> The whole idea of The Walkout is to be all together because if [the actives] capture you they take you back [to the house]. One year they taped a pledge to a chair and put him out on the sidewalk . . . Saturday morning we left on the bus and went to [another college where we] had about twenty cases [of beer]. [The PEs] got us alcohol. People there didn't know where the INS house was . . . [It was a] real animal house.

Pledge Party. The Pledge Education documents stated:

> The pledges will be allowed to have a dance during their program. The planning and organization is left to them, with assistance from the freshmen advisors. All pledges will be encouraged to attend with a date. The dance will be held in the chapter house, and be open only to the pledges and their dates. The date [of the event] will be announced when appropriate by the Pledge Education Committee.

Here is how the event actually unfolded:

On the day before the Pledge Party, about midway through pledgeship, the pledge class was informed that they would be allowed to have a party the next night. Everyone had to get a date; otherwise the event would be canceled. As one first-year member recalled, "[This was] another surprise [like Dad's Night] . . . We had about 36 hours' notice." The pledges were to arrange for the music and prepare the house as well: "We had to decorate and figure out how to get music and stuff. . . We didn't know [how to do] any of this stuff. [The actives] got us the alcohol . . ." Actives were designated to drive pledges and dates home after the party because pledges were expected to drink a lot and, typically, ignore their dates.

Recent initiates described the event this way: "Everybody sort of ignores the dates. The members told us that we wouldn't be taking our dates home . . . I told my date that she'd have a ride home." "Most of us got lucky and picked girls we didn't know that well, and then we just got hammered . . ." "Most of the girls were a little upset [so] then we got really hammered to really piss 'em off . . ." "Everybody got just blitzed that I know of." "I don't think that any date that came over here would speak to the person they came with again . . ." "I got pretty sick . . . One of the PEs had to take care of me [but] I wasn't close to death or anything."

It was at events such as this where the language of fraternity life was learned. "Beer courage," "liquid courage," "beer goggles," and "beer goggling" described a situation where "after eight or nine beers, girls that are rather large tend to look a little thinner . . ." Often these terms were used in concert with "mash and dash," as in "hook up with a girl for the night, beer goggling and stuff," and sorority seniors' "mash lists"—a roster of fraternity men with whom they have "mashed," posted for all to see at a dinner held in their honor before graduation.

DISCUSSION

Events similar to those of Iota Nu Sigma described earlier were incorporated into the pledgeship programs of all four groups. These experiences provide some clues to what it means to be a fraternity member and how one is to behave in various circumstances. In this section, we use a cultural-perspective framework to make sense of the role of alcohol in fraternity pledgeship.

Properties of Fraternity Culture that Promote Alcohol Use

Cultural properties can be assigned to three interrelated layers of culture as described by Schein (1985) and others (e.g., Kuh & Hall, 1993; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Lundberg, 1990): (a) artifacts, (b) strategic perspectives and values, and (c) assumptions and beliefs. These cultural properties are mutually shaping and work together in complicated ways; thus, it is not always possible to link clearly every observable manifestation of culture (artifacts) with underlying values, perspectives, and assumptions. Also, the description of the cultural properties that influence alcohol use during pledgeship is admittedly incomplete; that is, the cultures of these groups are much richer and more complex than presented here. Moreover, fraternities do not exist apart from the societies and institutions that create and support them. They are products of the larger cultural context in which they are found—the particular college or university (and its history, traditions, and mission), the region of the country and locale where the college is located (Kuh, 1993a; Kuh & Whitt, 1988), and a society that associates alcohol with a dominant, masculine model of success.

Artifacts. Artifacts are the most visible level of a culture, "its constructed physical and social environment" (Schein, 1985, p. 14), manifested in interactions, patterns, language, conversational themes and images, daily and periodic rituals, behaviors rewarded and punished, ceremonies, symbols, formal and informal rules, and procedures and artifacts (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Morgan, 1986; Van Maanen, 1984).

The physical environments of the fraternity houses suggested that alcohol played a prominent role in group life. Party rooms and member rooms had such alcohol-related accoutrements as beer mugs, electronic signs, and empty and occasionally full containers of beer, wine, and various forms of distilled spirits.

Alcohol also was featured in the lexicon of the fraternity. Conversations among members and their dates were peppered with descriptions of experiences with alcohol, or of behavior at events where alcohol was present. Alcohol use by pledges frequently was accompanied by sexist behavior as illustrated by intermingling phrases such as "beer-goggling" and "mash-and-dash." These observations were consistent with those of Rhoads (1992): Women almost always were relegated to instrumental roles in organized fraternity functions when alcohol was available. Recall the required presence of women at the Pledge Party, for example, where pledges were expected to get drunk and ignore their dates.

Strategic perspectives and values. The second category of cultural perspectives is comprised of strategic values and norms specific to the group-fundamental "oughts" determined by influential members in the past and present

(Lundberg, 1990). To discover the values and norms of these groups, we compared what they said they stood for (espoused values) with what they did (enacted values). As with their counterparts, both contemporary and historical (Strange, 1986), these fraternities espoused intellectual and humanitarian values. Among their high ideals were an emphasis on scholarship, health, and acceptance of others without regard to race, creed, sex, or sexual orientation (Maisel, 1990). The groups in this study, however, typified the "college man" culture (Horowitz, 1987), characterized by hedonistic, anti-intellectual behaviors and attitudes.

Organized social events rarely occurred without alcohol. Actives (whether of legal age or not) consumed alcohol whenever they wanted and regulated the consumption of alcohol by pledges. Dry pledgeship—the externally imposed policy to reduce the influence of alcohol on group life—was in force only when actives said so. For example, during Rookie Week, pledges felt they were part of the organization because they could do whatever they pleased; actives even procured alcohol for them. Alcohol, which was already viewed as a desirable commodity by 18-year-olds, became even more desirable when it was withheld.

Pledge Educators provided, or withheld, alcohol at various times to teach newcomers how to behave in social settings or to underscore the differences in membership status between actives and pledges. That is, alcohol use during pledgeship was sanctioned either when women participated in the event, or when the event was designed to bond members of the pledge class to each other or to a significant other figure in the group, such as their Fraternity Dad. Thus, alcohol use became a privilege, symbolizing full membership in the group, an important goal for most newcomers, given what they had to endure to attain such status (Arnold & Kuh, 1992; Leemon, 1972). This form of social control was used by the fraternity to attain its primary goal: getting newcomers to conform.

Assumptions and beliefs. Every organization with some history develops a set of core assumptions and beliefs about the nature of relations among its members and other groups (Schein, 1985). Taken together, these underlying assumptions and beliefs constitute a world-view shared by the members of the group (Lundberg, 1990). Assumptions are so basic, so taken-for-granted, and so strongly held by group members that any other way of thinking or behaving is practically inconceivable (Schein, 1985). Assumptions, in this sense, have become, or are, organizational "reality," the product of the shared "reality construction" (Morgan, 1986, p. 128). To discover the assumptions of a fraternity, they must be inferred from other, more visible manifestations of the group's culture.

We did not spend enough time with these groups to discover many of their core assumptions and beliefs. However, we are confident that one assumption common to the fraternities in this study was that members of these groups viewed themselves as "special," or different from, other students and other campus groups. One of the incontrovertible, nonconfrontable, and nondebatable beliefs (Schein, 1985) of INS members was: "We can do whatever we want," as long as no one beyond the group knows or is directly affected. This elitist self-perception was demonstrated by the propensity of fraternity members to rationalize those aspects of organizational functioning that con-

flicted with institutional expectations, civil law, and even policy directives issued by their own national headquarters. For example, alcohol use during pledgeship contradicted both institutional and fraternity policy; even in the instances where a campus permitted alcohol use, most fraternity members were not of legal drinking age and, therefore, were engaged in illegal activity when drinking.

The ultimate authority in determining whether behavior is acceptable or valued is the group itself, not the institution or external groups. Many of the values and practices that support the unlawful, occasionally hazardous use of alcohol, and protect the group from external influence, have historical roots. From the European tradition of the guilds, full membership is earned through an apprenticeship of sorts, pledgeship (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Egan, 1985; Kershner, 1989). Systematic member selection and induction experiences protect the group from internal threats (rebellion). Internal stability also is fostered because individual members tend not to question group practices in order to preserve their self-esteem; challenging their group's mission and practices would create dissonance and, perhaps, result in banishment from the group. The group's history and traditions (e.g., secret constitutions, symbols and ceremonies, a willingness to defend itself from internal and external threats by calling for the support of influential alumni) instill a fierce loyalty in their members and insulate the group from externally-imposed changes required by institutional policies and national headquarter directives (Arnold & Kuh, 1992; Kuh & Lyons, 1990).

Checking the Findings: Some Members Respond

To determine the veracity of our descriptions and interpretations, key respondents at each of the four houses read and commented on earlier summaries of our work (Arnold & Kuh, 1992). As mentioned earlier, this "debriefing" process was an important step in the cultural audit process as it required that experts—the fraternity members themselves—judge the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. The following observation is from an INS sophomore Pledge Educator (who was interviewed originally as a freshman right after pledgeship):

> It was all very accurate and well presented . . . I didn't see anything strange . . . It was a very accurate, colorful description of pledgeship . . . It's pretty wild. . . . You feel like it had to be somebody who went through [pledgeship] that wrote this because it's got everything in it and it was presented in a way that showed some respect to the program, which was good, because with a lot of fraternities and a lot of pledgeships people just think they're bad and they're no good, but I think it was presented in such a way that it shows—I mean we do have things that are considered hazing, technically, the things that maybe don't seem right to outsiders—but for an outsider to understand the whole process and be able to write about it, it showed it actually had a unique goal, and a goal that was actually achievable, and it was a good goal to obtain.

Another member, however, recommended caution in generalizing these findings to all groups:

> These fraternities present a dichotomous population. They're not all the same. And make that really clear.

We feel—and your judgment is going to be different because your perspective is different—that we do handle alcohol responsibly. We feel that [another group] doesn't, obviously. We think it's a different world, from where we're coming from. So when you make generalizations and put us in the same group, we don't think it's fair.

The latter member's admonition about the transferability of these results (i.e., do these findings obtain to other settings?) warrants attention. Readers must determine for themselves the degree to which our observations and interpretations fit institutional settings and fraternities with which they are familiar.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The cultural elements of organizations are perpetuated, reproduced, and made virtually unassailable to external modification because of the purposeful, thorough, and complete socialization of new members (Schein, 1990). Van Maanen (1978) called this kind of socialization experience "people processing"—a sequence of events provided for newcomers "that will make certain behavioral and attitudinal consequences more likely than others" (p. 20).

On occasion, rituals and traditions established to honor the original goals of an organization evolve over time into forms that serve purposes very different from those intended (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). The results of this study indicate that alcohol is a key element in a complicated system of rewards and sanctions used by fraternities to socialize newcomers. The primary purpose of pledgeship is to teach newcomers the group's values, customs, and fundamental facts about group life. Another purpose is to allow upperclassmen to exert control over newcomers, thereby preserving traditions and teaching newcomers how to view the group, the upperclassmen, and themselves (pledges). This control is important to insuring stability and continuity in the wake of losing its senior members to graduation (Crandall, 1978). And for some small number of newcomers, pledgeship offers an opportunity to decide if the fraternity life is a correct choice (Egan, 1985; Johnson, 1972).

By regulating alcohol use under various conditions (e.g., occasional hazing activities), the fraternities in this study produced in their pledges a "custodial orientation" (Schein, 1990, p. 116) characterized by conformity, cohesiveness, and loyalty to the group over the institution. Prohibiting alcohol during pledgeship served purposes in addition to the appearance of complying with mandates from national headquarters or the institution. The prospect of dry pledgeship made the forbidden fruit (alcohol) seem even sweeter on those occasions (e.g., Rookie Week, The Weekends, Pledge Party, Luau) when the actives—appearing magnanimous in the eyes of pledges—provided pledges with alcohol. So it is a sad irony that as institutions and national fraternity officers emphasize the importance of dry pledgeship, they inadvertently inflate the influence of alcohol in the socialization of newcomers.

Recommendations

Four recommendations are offered:

Recommendation # 1: *Inducing cultural change in fraternities requires familiarity with cultural perspectives.*

To successfully modify fraternity socialization processes, a solid conceptual understanding is needed of how and why these processes are so effective. This will require some reading, discussion, and practice in observing and identifying the properties of organizational culture (e.g., artifacts, strategic perspectives and values, assumptions) briefly described earlier. National fraternities are encouraged to provide workshops and other professional development opportunities so that office staff and field secretaries can become acquainted with cultural perspectives. Student affairs professionals, too, must become "cultural practitioners" and learn about cultural perspectives and culture change strategies (Kuh, 1993b).

Some believe that the complicated, deeply rooted, mostly tacit, and mutual-shaping qualities of culture are impossible to intentionally modify (e.g., Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Others are more hopeful (Kilmann, Saxton, Serpa & Associates, 1985; Schein, 1985). One's view about such matters notwithstanding, systematic efforts to change a fraternity's culture are unclear, untested technologies. One place to begin is with a cultural audit of the fraternity to understand the role of alcohol in teaching newcomers the norms and values of the organization. Approaches to conducting cultural audits are described by Fetterman (1990), Kuh (1993b), Kuh et al. (1991), Kuh and Whitt (1988), and Whitt (1993).

Recommendation #2: *Hold members of the local chapter responsible for bringing about cultural change.*

Educational programs related to drug and alcohol use delivered by outsiders (e.g., fraternity field secretaries, student affairs staff) have been relatively ineffective in reducing alcohol consumption among fraternity members, as well as among other college students (Engs, 1977; Gonzalez, 1989). Although educational efforts are important, this study provides evidence that the key to ameliorating excessive use of alcohol in fraternities is to change the conditions under which members are brought into the group. To change fraternity culture, a contract is needed between the institution and individual local chapters. For this reason, cultivating the commitment of chapter members, particularly formal and informal leaders, to change their practices is the only intervention that promises to be effective.

Some of the cultural properties (e.g., symbols, rituals) that fraternities use to inculcate attitudes and values could be used, perhaps, to modify the group's culture. For example, a group willing to dismantle its pledgeship program could hold a public ceremony to declare its commitment to cultural change. A featured event could be the burning of all written pledge education materials. Arnold and Kuh (1992) have discussed additional strategies for shaping fraternity culture.

Recommendation *3: Defer rush until the final month of the first year of college or the second year.*

"Young pledges . . . anxious to be accepted into the group and exposed to the older brothers' heavy-drinking patterns . . . are disadvantaged in their efforts to maintain responsible drinking behavior (Faulkner et al., 1989)" (Creedon, 1990, p. 466). Deferring rush for at least a semester will give 18 and 19 year-old students time to develop a sense of confidence and autonomy before being indoctrinated to the values of the fraternity (Jakobsen, 1986;

Letchworth, 1969) and will force fraternities to be more creative in appealing to potential members, rather than attracting new members with taboo libations (Ellis, 1989; Wilder & Hoyt, 1986). Over time, a deferred rush policy may foster a change in the environment of fraternity houses because the absence of large numbers of young students who have the predilection for impulse expression common to late adolescence (Sanford, 1962) should make house atmosphere more compatible with the needs of more mature upperclass members. Thus, more seniors may choose to live in the house instead of off campus, thereby reducing the probability of negative financial consequences with deferred rush (Wilder & Hoyt, 1986).

Recommendation #4. *The cultures of some groups may be impossible to modify; in such instances, eliminating the group may be the only recourse.*

Social fraternities began as outposts of rebellion, places apart from the institution where male students could do whatever they wished (Horowitz, 1987; Rudolph, 1962). Thus, it should not be surprising that the practices of many of these groups are antithetical to their institution's educational purposes. When this view accurately describes the ethos of a fraternal organization, implementing policies and practices developed by external organizations is an exercise in the illusion of control and authority. Because excessive use of alcohol during new member socialization may be so deeply embedded in the psyche of some groups, nothing short of cataclysmic conditions, such as closing the house, will force them to modify their behavior.

A FINAL NOTE

Fraternities are products not only of their cultures, but also of institutional and societal attitudes and values that permit them to exist in their present form. It is disappointing that colleges and universities continue to tolerate subcultures that inculcate in their members hedonistic and anti-intellectual attitudes and behavior (Horowitz, 1987). Fraternities are not the only examples of such groups, of course. Similar, though less well organized, actions are exhibited by athletes and other groups of undergraduates (Love, Jacobs, Boschini, Hardy & Kuh, 1993; Moffatt, 1989). The greatest disappointment is that fraternities, and those who support them, have not taken action to assess and address the cultural contexts of these groups to effect changes that will result in behavior by fraternity members that is more congruent with espoused fraternity goals.

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