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# Doing Diversity Well on College Campuses and Beyond

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# **Doing Diversity Well on College Campuses and Beyond**

**Basma Raza**

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**Engaged Learning**

### **Micro Case of Equity:**

A clearly qualified African American girl was denied acceptance into the sixteen all white sororities on the University of Alabama's campus in September of 2013. This outright rejection revealed the informal discriminatory practices used by the sororities during the formal recruitment process and led to an uproar. American people could not believe that 50 years after Gov. George Wallace stood in the doorway of the University, in his attempt to block two female African American students to desegregate the school had not made much progress since then. The university which continues to allow its sororities and fraternities to segregate into "all whites" and "all blacks" had university students speaking out against the incident. Many current members of the sororities also stood in solidarity against the discriminatory practices used to reject the African American women and believed that such a system which was viewed by the nation as formal discrimination should no longer exist.

Even though the candidate fit every criterion, the sixteen sororities on campus were looking for, such as a 4.3 GPA in high school, was salutatorian of her graduating class and comes from a family with deep roots in local and state public service and a direct link to The University of Alabama, she was still rejected by every sorority on campus (Crain, 2013). When the time came for members of Alpha Gamma Delta sorority to vote on the women who would be invited back the next day, they were told by the alumnae in the room that the decision had already been made. The alumnae used the letter of recommendation requirement as a reason for the removal of the candidate. The use of such a policy requirement which wasn't met by the candidate is one of the easiest manners in which many organizations informally discriminate against individuals.

Although this incident was perceived by the American public as a clear form of informal discrimination, those involved in the matter denied any such allegations. The alumnae of Alpha Gamma Delta insisted that the decision was solely based on the policies and procedures of the sorority headquarters. At the Tri Delta sorority alumnae involvement also became the reason for the rejection of the African American woman. As one of the members of the Tri Delta sorority argued, “The only thing that kept her back was the color of her skin in Tri Delt. She would have been a dog fight between all the sororities if she were white” (Crain, 2013). Such a bold example of discrimination shook American values at its core, and the chorus of disapproval by the American people proved that those values are no longer accepted by our culture.

As a response to the allegations, University of Alabama immediately responded saying, “UA is working with our local chapters and their national organizations to remove any barriers that prevent young women (both the prospective new members and the chapter members) from making the choices they want to make. The University administration, the members of our local chapters and the vast majority of our alumni fully believe that this is the right time to do the right thing, and we are committed to ensuring that all students have access to and can choose from multiple opportunities that match their personal interests and goals,” said Deborah Lane, the school’s Assistant Vice President for university relations (Eversley, 2013). After this controversy, the sororities at the University offered 11 invitations to African American women and three to women of other minority groups out of those only four African American women and two women of other minority accepted those pledge invitations (Eversley, 2013).

As this controversy focused the conversation on discrimination, other universities across the nation began reviewing their current systems in relation to sorority discrimination. One of these schools was Ohio State University which believes that they do not have any of the

discriminatory recruiting practices found at University of Alabama. Representatives of Sorority & Fraternity Life at OSU “are not worried this type of discrimination could occur at OSU because of the commitment and value it places upon diversity”, said assistant director of OSU Sorority & Fraternity Life Sharrell Hassell-Goodman (Robertson, 2013). “OSU’s student organizations have a non-discrimination policy, which includes sororities and fraternities, Hassell-Goodman said. The non-discrimination clause is a part of the constitution of every student organization,” she said (Robertson, 2013).

Other universities, such as Baylor are also striving to improve on the matters of diversity in their Greek systems. Ramona Curtis, director for civic engagement and educational development, said though “Baylor has made progress in becoming more diverse, there is still room to grow in interacting with one another. I think there are some historic issues that need to be discussed among the groups so that the unity that we’re striving for, for all Greeks, can be exemplified,” Curtis said (Burns, 2013). The problem however, is much bigger that is currently being recognized. A professor at the University of Connecticut believes that the problem with diversification and sororities extends far beyond the Deep South. He said, “The Greek letter system – all over the United States, not just in the deep South – has traditionally been based on exclusion.... We shouldn’t think organizations based on exclusion will all of a sudden become inclusive” (Kaiser, 2013). Not just in the South but universities all across the country such as University of Pennsylvania and University of Southern California are among the many that continue to battle with historically all white sororities compared to the ethnic makeup of the universities themselves (Jacobs, 2011).

In this paper, I will discuss the matter of doing diversity well in relation to workplace and on college campuses. This paper will review the history of diversity policies and how it became a

pertinent part of our culture. The next step will be to review diversity policies on college campuses and the way organizations on that campus apply and implement diversity policies. I argue that even though diversity policies are in effect to prevent any type of overt discrimination on behalf of organizations on the campus of a private southern university, the process of covert discrimination is widely practiced in the Greek system. Overt discrimination in this case can be described as an outright rejection based on race or religion and covert discrimination, as finding other means regardless of race and religion to exclude minorities from becoming a part of that organization. As a student who participated in the formal recruitment process at this university, I was able to propose the questions for this research.

### **Effectively Living out Anti-Discrimination Policies:**

In the last part of the past century policies regarding diversity initiatives focused on legal protections (Kirby & Richard, 2000). These legal policies were implemented so that organizations could cover their employees, but also primarily protect themselves from legal lawsuits on grounds of workplace discrimination or even a hostile work environment. At the university level these policies were also emphasized and every school and their organization began inserting an anti-discrimination clause in their Constitution and By-Laws. In the beginning of this current century however, these policies have moved beyond a minimum requirement and now have become a fundamental part of the organizations and universities strategy for success in a diverse marketplace.

Kirby and Krone (2002) argue that anti-discrimination policies were present, expected and even demanded by management, but they were not actually lived out, in other words diversity policy were there just to be on display. In order to better embrace diversity in the work

environment, organizations went so far, that they began diversity training workshops to better equip the executives on how to manage a diverse staff. Yet, even such far fetch measures by organizations were proven by three sociologists to have little or no effect; they were taking part in diversity policies but once again not doing them well (Cullen, 2007). As the marketplace becomes more diverse (Ward, 1995 & Thomas Jr., 2001) and as society itself is becoming more diverse (Johnson, 2010) organization's are expected to be more minority friendly – in turn doing diversity better. With more and more women, minorities, and immigrants coming into the workforce, the dynamics of the work environment were about to change drastically (Terpstra, 1997 & Bagilhole, 2006).

The diversity policies which were implemented in the workplace where an important first step toward a more diverse workforce and as the years have gone by they are now a crucial part of any organization. These policies demonstrate that even though they might have started for legal purposes are now fully integrated into an organization. The problem isn't whether these policies are a part of an organization which they clearly are, the problems is how these policies are implemented and carried out by those in the organization. With an ever changing work force, the organizations now have to learn how to properly carry out these policies without having any detrimental effects on their minority members. These policies, at this stage should not only leave those in majority who already have white privilege feeling good, but the minority members in these organizations should not feel resentment or anger against their white privileged counterparts. In the workplace, it is important to have these policies be carried out in such a way, that there are no instances of just formal discrimination but also any chances of informal discrimination can also be eliminated.

### **Anti-Discrimination policies on Campus:**

As Orfield (2001) recently summarized in regard to K-12 public education, there is strong evidence of “instructional techniques that increase both the academic and human relations benefits of interracial schooling.” Higher education institutions also need to not just emphasize the need for diversity policies but provide an environment where these policies can be properly implemented and carried out. Diversity is a must for college campuses not just for minority students to be attracted but also so the majority can feel good about themselves.

Diversity is not just a policy or legal requirement it is expected by majority and minority alike. People today do not want to belong to an organization that discriminates (Cunningham, 2007; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999). But I believe that people do not want to be a part of an organization that they believe actively discriminates. I believe that this is especially true of young people as they choose a University.

Students can only become a contributing member of a university once they identify with the university itself. The students need to feel as if they are an integral part of the organization and are fully accepted by other members, students, professors and staff alike. Once they have identified themselves, they are able to participate and contribute to the organization in various different factors, through student organizations, independent research projects and much more. A successful university environment, which ends in graduation, demonstrates how far the student has come as part of that organization. Even after graduation, students who have been an active member of the organization in the four years of their college life continue the participation and identification with their university.

However, a minority student who has never fully embraced him or herself as a part of the university will lack in all of the above scenarios. The lack of identification and belonging to the

university leads to the low-levels of participation not just during their four years, but especially after graduation. Those students as alumni have no real reasons to engage in further university affairs since they have already acquired the needed degree. According to Tinto's (1975) research, peer group and faculty interactions played a major role in college experience for a minority student. He theorized that more meaningful the contacts with faculty and their peers lead to a greater level of social integration for a minority student. Furthermore, even though academically whites and minority performed at the same level, the social alienation felt by the minority students resulted in the feeling of not belonging to the university (Loo & Rolison, 1986).

As demonstrated by the example of the Alabama University case, diversity on college campuses is an age old problem which needs to be addressed efficiently. It is easy for universities to add a clause to address diversity and have other organizations on campus do the same but that is not the solution to this problem. Adding a clause which states that this organization does not discriminate based on sex, race, religion is just a way to protect them not the minorities. These statements only address matters of formal discrimination but as we all know it is much harder in today's society to carry out formal discrimination than it was in the past. As an easier method the sororities on Alabama University's campus used the excuse of their alumnae making the decision based on policy procedures to discriminate against the women in an informal manner. This informal discrimination protects the majority because for them they have provided everyone an equal opportunity but a hint of appearing somewhat different than the rest, results in the immediate loss of that equal opportunity for those in the minority.

### **Equity over Equality:**

Equality works to the advantage of those in the privileged position because it ensures everyone is provided the same starting point. However, in this case we are in much dire need of equity. Unlike equality, equity doesn't mean treating everyone equally instead it focuses on the advantages that in the majority might have and tries to provide some way to offset those advantages for the minority. The belief in equal access is enough for majority members even if the evidence of equity is absent. Since they belong in the majority they do not see that policies are not being implemented, they have a feel good scenario just knowing the policies exist. Only those belonging to the minority can actually tell the difference between a real diversity policy and one in place for legal/societal purposes. Standpoint theory lends itself to the case in point efficiently, because it focuses on the perspective of women and other individuals belonging to minority ethnic and religious groups (West & Turner, 2010). Hallstein (2000) argues that "women's vantage point or structural position also provides women a bifurcated or double vision of both their own knowledge and the dominant culture's conception of what it means to be female (and an awareness of dominants' worldview in general)." Double vision then becomes essential in understanding a minority woman's stance as a minority individual but also the view of those in the privileged or majority position in society.

Perhaps where doing diversity well is at its most crucial is in regards to the young population because the younger the population gets the more diverse it becomes. Universities – also implement policies to attract a diverse group of students. The students are citizens in training for the future generation coming into the workforce; if they are better equipped with diversity earlier on in their lives it becomes easier for them in the future. Not just universities but organizations within universities have policies in place to attract minorities which furthers the claim of how important embracing diversity has become in our society. Organizations such as

sororities and fraternities want to attract a diverse lot of students to join their group but even at that level diversity policies are implemented but not lived out. As George Simmel argues, “the person that can be the most objective is the stranger because he is both confronting it as a member and outside it” (Simmel, 1950). Simmel and double vision both point to the scenario that those belonging to the outside group as a stranger or minority are best able to comprehend the discrepancies in the system. Simmel argues for the stranger and double vision theorizes that women are the most objective because they understand their own place in society and that of the majority’s views.

In this paper I actively take the role of the stranger as argued by Simmel while examining my own personal experiences via the case study discovered how diversity policies are implemented in certain organizations on a private university’s campus. This private university for instance, promotes a healthy diverse environment for its students. It welcomes students from all across the U.S. and 90 foreign countries. It has also dedicated an entire office for the purpose of diversity, referred to as the Office of Institutional Access and Equity. The sole purpose of this organization is to “to promote access, opportunity and diversity among the student and employee populations; to maintain policies, procedures and programs that prohibit discrimination and retaliation against employees, students and applicants. The university received an Exemplary Voluntary Efforts Award from the U.S. Department of Labor for its equal opportunity programs and became the first university in Texas to receive such an award.

As a student belonging to a minority group who went through the recruitment process of a sorority at this predominantly white university, I was exposed to certain instances where covert discrimination in the recruitment process became apparent on the part of the organizations. The Alabama case provided us with an example of overt discrimination by the sororities due to their

rejection of girls based on their skin color, which was in a way formal rejection based on someone's race. At this private university, however, girls are not rejected for reasons of their skin color but based on the practices of covert or informal discrimination. Covert discrimination processes are used in many instances where formal discrimination will not be well received by the community at large. These practices can simply be defined as finding other means to reject those that appear different from you in any manner so as to remove the blame from yourself and your organization.

None of the predominantly white sororities on this campus will come out and say we rejected you, because you were Muslim, or because you covered your head, or any other reason that might have been. But they blame it on their national policies and procedures, or the fact that you would not have fit into their sisterhood because they couldn't find an instant connection between you and their organization. These covert discrimination policies exist in organizations whether it is work related or in a university environment by sororities. These practices have allowed discrimination to be carried out on a daily basis which is hidden from everyone else except from the minority members who become their victim. Once again, the majority walks away reinforcing their beliefs in the system which they believe to be just while, continuously taking part in these covert or informal discrimination practices. Thus, the need to eradicate this covert discrimination at all levels of an organization is important in order to have lived out diversity policies.

It is important that we explore this topic and the consequences it implores for the members of the minority and the feel good scenarios which come out for the majority. Even though minorities leave these situations feeling resentment and anger the members of the majority are overjoyed because they feel they have done their part by having these policies in

place and they never have to consider whether the policies are effective or not. These current policies are reinforcing four major problems, white people believe they gave you a fair shot by following these inherently flawed policies and due to their white privilege do not see the error of their ways, the minority members do not reflect on these incidents enough for them to realize the problem which leads white people to further emphasize that discrimination no longer exists. In order to create a better work environment or a diverse environment for universities we need to have these policies not just be implemented but also lived out as the reality.

### **Method**

This project initially began as an ethnographic study with an examination of belief systems in our society on a much larger scale. As I was writing down the crucial incidents which I wanted to study further in my research, I discussed them with Dr. Lynch as he served as my mentor for the project. During one of those discussions, I told him of my recent experience participating in the formal recruitment process and joining a Greek organization. He wanted me to elaborate how it went and he told me to go home and write down everything that had happened as detailed as possible. It was not until I had written my detailed account of what had happened in those four days that I began to pull out certain themes which led me to propose the questions for my research. I was completely unaware of the covert discrimination practices and presented my case study with my first perception of the process as a naïve minority student who came out of this process feeling as if I was not the right candidate for those organizations.

I was a participant in the recruitment process which takes place over the course of one week and by the end of that week, you are presented with a bid from one or more of those organizations. It is your decision to decide which sorority you might want to become a part of

and in some cases like mine, the choice is entirely up to the sororities themselves. If you only have the one acceptance letter, then your only choice is to either accept it or reject it all together excluding yourself from becoming a member of any such organization. You can either try again the next year, or participate in what is known as the continuous bidding process, where if a sorority is interested in you joining their organization they might extend a bid to you anytime during the course of the year.

There are eight Panhellenic organizations on this university's campus and with the exception of two; all seem to have a majority of White women in their organizations. Majority of the women going through this process are all first year students and with an exception of a few who are upper classmen. The sororities have a quota for up to forty or so first year students and a limit of five upper class men per sorority. I entered this process as an upper classmen because I was a transfer student and a third year student at this university.

The second story I wrote in my case study was after I had read a few articles, which discusses the same story from a different perspective. This perspective reflects the view of a well-informed individual, not a naïve girl who found fault within herself in order to better understand this experience but as someone who realized that the problem which lies here is much bigger than what I could comprehend. When the Alabama sorority case was brought up in the September of 2003, my research and case study had another story to reflect on and integrate into this project. I have presented my story in those two distinct perspectives and as a Communication Studies student; I used my knowledge of standpoint theory to evaluate those interactions. I have broken down my case study into paragraphs and underneath each paragraph I give a vantage point reflection and also an analysis after each day of recruitment.

## Case Study

### Day 1:

On the first day of Recruitment to join a Panhellenic organization on campus I had mixed feelings. First, I didn't know whether I would be able to fit in a sorority being a Muslim who covers her head, who is married and has a baby, second whether I even wanted to be a part of it. As we gathered around in Hughes Trigg in our assigned groups, the girls that already knew each other started talking amongst themselves. One girl asked another, "I wanna be an Alpha Chi, I am a legacy my mom will be so mad if I don't get in, she is coming down for bid day you know," the other girl responded, "I totally understand how you feel there is so much pressure; I couldn't even sleep last night." Hearing this conversation I thought to myself for majority of this people this process is a really big deal while it doesn't even make a big difference in my life, this is just something I want to do for experience and to make some friends.

*As a naïve student, I couldn't understand the importance of belonging to a sorority for these girls. My mother wasn't in a sorority since she didn't go to college in this country and the fact that these mothers cared to the point that they were stressing upon their daughters to join the same organization they had been a part of was completely foreign to me. The sororities to my understanding help you finding a comfortable place in a new setting and help you in making friends but the need to join a sorority which can distress you enough that you lose sleep over it, sounded a bit ridiculous.*

*But, when I viewed this from my secondary perspective, I realized that for people whose family members have been a part of the same sororities for generations, this is very important for them. For me, I didn't need a place to call my home since I have my husband and son as my family with me right here in Dallas. These girls shared a complete different view, there sororities served as their home away from home, the family system which exists in each sorority, the impacts of being a legacy and feeling pride in joining the same organization which your mother, grandmother and others in your family had been a part of.*

As a transfer student it is much harder to find your place at SMU and I thought maybe joining a sorority would help my cause. We were told to line up and as the first house of the day we went to the Delta Gamma House. I spoke to two-three girls in that house but didn't quite feel

welcomed. It felt as if I was having the conversation for the sake of it. Questions ranged from where you are from, where do you live on or off campus, what year I am, how was the transition from NY to Dallas. I mean those were the same questions everybody else would ask but the conversation didn't seem to flow. One of the girls I talked to had been in one of my classes my first semester at SMU, and we had even gone to DC together. She had spent the semester abroad and talked about her experiences. Even though I had this past connection with her, we hadn't talked much in DC so it didn't really work out.

*Even though I wasn't really sure if it was a good idea to take part in the recruitment process, I went in with an open mind. I thought it would be a great way to make friends and this would just be a great experience for me as a college student. Although, I am not your average college student I wanted to have those same experience as any other student would have going to a southern university. Before my exposure to the recruitment process, I was completely unaware of Greek organizations on campus and paid no attention to which sorority the girls I knew belonged to. But in order for you to take part in recruitment you attend workshops which explain the process and the history of the sororities. When I had gone to DC with one of the girls from Delta Gamma, I had no idea she was in this sorority since we had not spend much time together. After my time there I just didn't feel that this house was a good fit for me, since I didn't really feel comfortable there.*

*What I wasn't realizing at that time was all of these conversations were scripted and planned to the very last detail. The girl you talk to, the second girl that comes and interrupts your conversation and begins talking with you, the questions they ask, everything is pre-planned and decided in advance. After having these fake conversations, I wondered how these sororities could really know if you are the right fit or not when none of this is real and it is just a script.*

Even after my unpleasant experience at the Delta Gamma House, I told myself to not give up on this so easily and give the next house a try. Our next stop was the Tri Delta House and I was really excited, I mean those girls had a reputation of being the smart sorority on campus and with my GPA I thought I would be the perfect fit. As we walked to the house others girls talked about how it went and waved hello to their other friends. Being a 3<sup>rd</sup> year student, I didn't know many of these freshmen girls so I walked alone. It was amazing to see these girls who would soon be joining one of these sororities didn't bother to talk to me for a second, while on the other

hand the girls already a member of a sorority were so nice and friendly, like they only cared about you and no one else.

*Now, I was very excited to go to the Tri Delta house, as any overachiever I thought I was perfect for an organization which was known for its intelligence. The highest GPA of any sorority on campus was the fact which attracted me the most to this sorority. I completely brushed off the bad thoughts from my experience at the Delta Gamma house and walked over happily to stand in line yet again.*

*It still surprises me that I didn't recognize the holes in this system right away. I mean, if these girls are actually nice to me in reality then why do I need to join their sorority to be there friends. Second, the fact that the future members of those same said sororities didn't really bother to talk to the girl who stood out like a sore should have also been an indication of their "genuine" interest in me.*

When we got to the house once again we stood in line and after hearing their chant went inside the house. The Tri Delta President spoke about their new house being built and how they had the highest GPA on campus among all the other sororities. I got the chance to speak to three or four girls, and even though the questions remained the same, I was having fun talking to these girls. The conversation felt too easy, like they had practiced exactly what to ask, one after another. It felt like a well rehearsed play, one person would ask a few questions, the next person would walk by say hello to their fellow sister, I would introduce myself and we would continue on as nothing changed. As it came up in conversation I told them I had a baby and was married and even though they looked surprised the conversation continued. When I came out of there I thought to myself, man that went well, I am definitely going to be invited back tomorrow.

*Walking out of the Tri Delta house, I felt like an excited school girl. I mean to me it went perfectly. Even though I hated the small talk, from one house to another, the conversation at Tri Delt couldn't have been better. I felt completely in my element and at ease. I could see myself being a sister to these girls and calling this sorority my home. I mean, who wouldn't want to belong to such a sisterhood which inherently focused on intellect, it was a dream come true for me.*

*However, all dreams must come to end and that is exactly what happened the next day when I was dropped from every sorority except for two. I still couldn't understand why a sorority like Tri Delta wouldn't want me as a member. I had the grades and an impressive resume, what*

*could I have been lacking. Did I say something offensive, or wasn't there main focus academics? But as it turned out, it didn't really matter how smart you were and what kind of accomplishments you might have had on your resume, the problem was I was neither white nor was I a minority girl who tried to appeal to them as a white girl.*

*Here I was contemplating how I would choose one sorority when they are all so great and I would have to choose one. I was naive enough to believe that I would be the one making the decision when it was the sororities that decided who was accepted and who was rejected. Yet another lie told to make you believe in the process.*

Then we stopped at the Pi Beta Phi House, as I remembered from Panhellenic Preview, Pi Beta Phi and Kappa Alpha Theta were two sororities that I felt I completely didn't fit into but remained open minded. I went ahead and once again had the same conversation, when we discussed about me living in the house at one point or another, I laughed and told them that wouldn't be possible with my husband and my baby. The girl laughed as well and told me that maybe they could figure out some way to do it if I really wanted to live in the house and I told her that my son wouldn't let anyone else in that house sleep because he already keeps me up most of the night. Now, I felt like someone was taking a genuine interest me, here she was encouraging me to live in the house. I mean these people really cared. Even though everybody was really nice, I just didn't feel quite at home.

*The girls at Pi Phi were once again so genuinely kind or so I thought. They were sweet and made the effort to appeal to me as best as they could. Even though, I already knew in my mind that I wouldn't fit in as their sister, they definitely wanted me. Why else would they offer me to live in the house or even consider the fact that with a baby some sort of situation could be worked out. The fact that they were so understanding of my situation should have warned me that this wasn't real, but I wasn't willing to believe that.*

*It was only after rejection, I realized that everything had been a lie. There lies didn't make me feel better about the fact that they never cared to begin with or I had no chance whatsoever to join their perfect little sisterhood but it made me angry. Why did they bother to put on such a charade of lies instead of telling me that I wouldn't fit in for other reasons? The sudden rejection with no explanation what so ever was much worse than if they had outright rejected me for being a minority, a Muslim, a mother, or any other reason that they deemed fit.*

*What surprised me here the most was after getting rejected from them the first day, I laughed at the thought of this conversation. Here this girl was persistently trying to convince that they could find a way from me to live in the sorority house with my son when the whole time in her head she*

*was thinking there was no way you would belong to our organization for you to ever have that chance. The level of dedication to convince me of her interest in me is just appalling.*

Next we went to the Kappa Alpha Theta house, we talked about school, my family and how I manage both school and family. I told them that besides classes I also had an internship lined up for me in the spring. Everything seemed to be going really well, I couldn't help but think why I had been so afraid of this process, all the girls were really nice and sweet and I shouldn't have waited this long to join a sorority. One of the girls during the course of the conversation asked me what was my favorite restaurant in Dallas and I couldn't think of anything at that moment so I told her that I didn't eat out much, which was partially true because to pursue a healthy diet my family and I had decided to eat all organic foods and to avoid fast food and frozen foods. She told me a great place to eat, called the Porch. That was the only moment I felt like the conversation wasn't well planned out.

*Another place where I felt completely out of my element, all these girls looked so similar. There was no way I could ever be a good fit for their house and I think they were aware of this as well. The conversation remained much the same as before, structured and planned out, all the same questions that I had been asked before and nearing lunch time, I just didn't even care to put in the effort.*

*Even though I still like to think that they probably rejected me because I didn't try hard enough, I now know that's not true. Maybe that might have been the reason, but there is also a possibility that I was rejected for the very same reasons like I had been from other houses. In a sea of perfectly tan girls with the perfect hair, there was no room for a mother who still had some weight left to lose from her pregnancy, covered her hair, and would stand out in any crowd.*

*The rejection by a sorority like Kappa Alpha Theta didn't dishearten too much. Now that's not to say that these girls weren't nice it is solely on the bases that I didn't feel like comfortable. I didn't think I could see myself being a part of this house, just because my personality didn't seem like the right fit for these girls. Even though I was dropped by them the same day I never really thought much about it.*

For lunch, I decided to come home and told my husband how the day was going. He wanted to know what kinds of questions they asked, did I tell them about my internship at the

George Bush Presidential Center, did I mention I was on Senate and on the Debate team, and I told him nothing to worry about everything had gone perfectly well.

When we got back after lunch, our first stop was the Chi Omega House, feeling refreshed after our lunch, I went in with a great smile. I spoke to four girls in the house and we talked about various things. While discussing swimming I even told her the documentary I had watched over winter break about how mermaids were real. We had a good laugh at that one and the girl I talked to after her was surprised when she heard what we had talked about. I couldn't understand her shock I mean it's not like I had declared I was a terrorist or something, so why did it matter if we had talked about mermaids being real.

*The glitches in the system should have warned me of what I had gotten myself into, but I carried on. At this point I was convinced that I would be looking at a full schedule tomorrow and I hadn't even visited all the houses. I thought by introducing a new topic, I had shown potential of being a unique individual.*

*What I realized now is that by me introducing a new topic in the conversation, I had broken the scripted conversation which I was meant to have. The girl speaking to me was to follow a certain path and ask certain questions, she wasn't supposed to indulge in the random, which is what I had done. And I think, just the fact that I had broken their pattern could be reason enough for rejection.*

Then it was the Alpha Chi Omega House, where I knew a couple of people so I went in completely at ease. I was even more comfortable when I got to speak to one of my friends. We had a good conversation about the class we had taken in the fall semester together, how much work it was, and how we were glad to be done with it. I asked her what classes she was taking this semester. We talked about my internship and she seemed excited that I was working for the George Bush Presidential Center right around the time they were going to be opening the library and museum.

*If I had a 100% chance anywhere it was Alpha Chi. I mean most of the girls that I knew from my classes and had been friends with were all Alpha Chis and we got along perfectly. If we were*

*already friends it should be no problem getting an invitation into their sisterhood. To make things even better, the first girl I talked to had been my friend, who I had taken a class with the previous semester and gone to D.C. with, I was ecstatic. It was such an easy conversation to have and then she introduced me to her other sister and according to me, I was a shoe in.*

*The most surprising part for me was being rejected by Alpha Chi. I had no doubt in my mind that they would extend me a bid, I was practically already a member but once again that wasn't true. Even though I thought I had friends who would give me great references and invite me to join their sisterhood, I guess that wasn't the case here. My so called acquaintances did not believe that I could fit into their sisterhood. Although we had been friends apparently I wasn't good enough as a member of their sisterhood.*

After leaving from there, I went into the Gamma Phi Beta house. I spoke to three girls and the conversation seemed to go on effortlessly. As one girl would switch with another we would just continue where we left off. It felt way too easy, once again I told them my major, about my family, the activities I am involved in on campus and as I was leaving she said, "I hope I get to see you tomorrow" and I told her I hope so too.

*I knew nothing about Gamma Phi as I walked into their house, but I was excited to talk to these girls. The girls that I spoke to were so sweet, it truly looked like a home, and each time a girl spoke about another sister it was only the nicest things. They were very active on campus in different organizations and were so easy to talk to. It felt natural telling them about the different things I was involved in on campus, what my plans were after SMU and even about my family.*

*Even though I thought I would definitely be an Alpha Chi because of my connections there, I am glad I got to be a part of a sisterhood like Gamma Phi. One of the two sororities on campus which actually embraced me as myself, rather than the color of my skin, my weight, my religion or any other part of my background, there were genuinely interested. Now when I look back at it, I am glad that I was rejected by all the other sororities because I wouldn't want to change myself in order to belong to a sorority. Neither could I continue to convince the girls in the sorority that I was as white as they were.*

*As I look back at my entire experience in my recruitment process, I am glad I accepted the bid for Gamma Phi and Gamma Phi invited me to join to begin with. In my opinion, this is one of the houses on campuses that doesn't drop you on your first day for appearing different instead they accept you for who you are. I can proudly say that I am a member of a sorority which accepted me as a person, not my outward appearance. They didn't care that I was married, or had a child, or that I wore a hijab and was Muslim, instead I was just another college student who became their member.*

Our last house of the day was the Kappa Kappa Gamma house. The first thing that I noticed as I walked in was how much bigger it was than the rest of the houses. Their dining room

was probably double the size of the other houses. I don't know what it was either because both I and the other girl I was speaking to was really tired but I felt as if she had no interest in what I was saying. I felt as if she was asking questions because she had to and she did not care for a second as to what I was saying. Then another girl came and started talking and as I spoke to both of them I had made up my mind that there is no way I can belong to this sorority.

*My experience at Kappa Kappa Gamma was the worst one that day. I do not know whether that was due to the fact that it was the last house of the day and I was exhausted and so were the girls, no matter what the reason, I felt like an alien. The other girls at least had made an effort to be nice and make me feel welcomed, but it looked as if these girls couldn't care less.*

*Maybe this wasn't because they were tired but mainly because they already knew there was no place for me in their sorority so there was no reason for them to even try. If they can't even try to have their fake scripted conversation with me than I didn't feel that I had to put an effort to appeal to them either. It was a meaningless conversation which left me feeling frustrated and angered with my situation yet again. I really wish that someone would just come out and say that there was no way I could ever join their sorority because I wasn't white or didn't come close to being white.*

As I left the house I was glad that was over, I just wanted to get home and see my son, but first we had to go to Hughes Trigg and make our preferences of which were our top choices. I chose Delta Gamma and Kappa Kappa Gamma as my least favorite choices and walked out feeling great. I was sure that I would be invited back to at least 4-5 houses tomorrow considering how great the conversation had gone. The next day I was really excited to open my schedule and see which houses had invited me back.

## **Day 2:**

When I opened my envelope I was shocked. There were only two houses on my schedule Delta Gamma one of my least favorite choice and Gamma Phi Beta one of my top choices. I couldn't understand the reason for this. I have a great GPA, I am involved on campus and I don't think my personality isn't unbearable either, but somehow I didn't fit the bill for these sororities. I kept thinking over and over again if I had actually said something I wasn't supposed to, what

their criteria was for making their decisions, and how I shouldn't have gone through this stupid process in the first place.

*It was not just shocking but also very disappointing. I remember choking back tears so the other girls don't see me cry. I couldn't believe what I was seeing and how it could have happened. What was wrong with me? How come I hadn't been good enough to be accepted? Didn't I have all the things they were looking for, GPA, resume, internships, outside involvement on campus? Had I said something to offend them? Just the realization of rejection made me feel like a failure. But again why did I even care so much I never wanted to join a sorority to begin with, I was just doing this for fun. And since I had begun participating in it, I didn't even realize that in that time it had somehow become important to me and now had left me feeling like a failure.*

*It was not until after my realization behind its façade that this was something much bigger. This had nothing to do with me not getting accepted or wanted by the sororities and neither it was about the sororities rejecting me. The problem here was the system which had become an integral part of our society. Since you could not outright discriminate without causing an uproar and legal action, these organizations had found other means. These same manipulative tactics would then be practiced by these individuals in the work space and continue on in other levels.*

I sat around all day in the Panhellenic house feeling like a failure while all the other girls around me came by and went to the houses of their choices. They would talk about how they had a full schedule? Some would say I wish I didn't have all these houses to go to I already know where I want to be? These girls had other options and they didn't even care and here I was sitting around after being dumped by all houses except for two. Both my parties weren't till after lunch at the end of the day and all I could do was wait and hear these conversations over and over again. I would have loved to have a full schedule, I would have loved to go back to six houses and talked to these girls all over again.

*I kept replaying the conversations from the day before over and over in my head, what did I say that was wrong? Did I not look the part? Was there something wrong with the way I talked? I mean sitting around for hours thinking of all the things that are wrong with you it's not the ideal way to spend your day. I came home for lunch devastated; I saw my husband and burst into tears. He quickly hugged me and asked what was wrong and finally, after silence I blurted out all that had happened. I told him I got dropped by all the houses, I told him I couldn't understand why. He told me what I exactly needed to hear at that moment to lift my spirits, "if a sorority doesn't want you for who you are, then why would you want to be a part of that organization." I explained to him that I shouldn't have gone through with this in the first place, it was a bad idea, and this was ruining my self esteem. I am a very confident person but facing*

*the rejection that I felt that day I felt as if I wasn't good enough. I kept doubting myself, and kept trying to figure out all the things that were wrong with me.*

*Do you have to be white, blonde, and willing to party in order to join a sorority or you have to look just like them? Being Muslim and wearing a hijab doesn't necessarily scream sorority material, I guess. I didn't understand how all these houses could drop me what was the explanation. How could I not be the perfect candidate? Was it because I covered my hair and could easily be recognized as someone different but I was also their fellow student, I am a SMU student just like them. Was it the fact that I have a husband and a son I mean I didn't speak or hear about any other girl who was married or had a baby? After feeling the way I did, I was pretty content that I should drop out of this process altogether. There is no point; I mean it would be embarrassing if I don't get a bid from any of the houses that would really bring me down. I told my husband that I would see how it went at the Gamma Phi and if by the end of the day I felt good about it I would continue, otherwise I will drop out of the process.*

### **Reflection on Recruitment after Self Realization**

As I look back at the entire recruitment process, I regret I ever went through it. Mainly because I am not the person that likes to do things to please people or try to make them like me second I never knew about the continuous bidding process. Sororities have this process where they meet girls and if the girl and the sorority are both interested then they receive a bid. Sadly, for me no one told me this fact. The process of recruitment I feel is designed as a trade show people look at you and decide through your looks and certain answers whether you are a good fit. I personally don't believe that through a selected set of questions you can actually get to know the person and especially based on their outlook, you cannot decide on their personality.

They tell you throughout the process that it's a mutual selection that both you and the sorority decide which is a good fit for you, that is the biggest lie you will ever hear. At the end of the day the sorority decides whether they want you to be a part of their organization or not. Actually, most sororities have already decided through the fall semester which girls they actually want; at least that's what I have heard. And then through recruitment they just ensure whether they are right or not. I feel the entire process is set up so everyone that goes through it, they think they are being treated equally and that everyone has a chance. When in reality it's a charade put

up by these organizations so they appear fair to the girls. All they are looking for is the perfectly molded girl that fits their sorority and everyone else is given the boot the first day. They also want to appear open by setting a criteria saying they need girls with a high gpa, involved on other activities in campus, etc but once again those are just ideas they fill your head with so you don't think they outright rejected you.

The appearance of being different than the rest of the group destroys your chances of being a part of a certain organization. I mean you have to be naive to believe that being married and a mother won't affect your chances because you think you are a well rounded person. At the end of the day, looking different than the mold decides the outcome of the process for you. It's ironic that the future members of the sororities mainly distance themselves from someone like me yet the girls already in the sorority seem to be so nice and interested. I mean the sororities can't just outright come out and say they don't want you because you are different, because you are married, because you are a mother instead they have to appear as fair as possible.

### **Implications**

As a current member of a Panhellenic organization, this process opened my eye to the various ways in which an organization can still find ways to overcome the implementation of diversity policies which are an integral part of any organization. I went through this process considering myself an exemplary candidate for any of those eight Panhellenic organizations on campus but what I learned was quite different from what I expected.

As a woman, belonging to an ethnic minority group, I learned that even though these organizations present a specific criterion as to the future members of the organizations, those considerations are only in place as a diversity policy which is in place but never implemented to

its full extent. The main problem with this informal form of discrimination lies in the fact that it leaves the minority as in my case, with no tangible proof of discrimination. And without proof you are prevented from taking any action against the organizations. This results in anger, frustration and resentment by the minority because while their counterparts are delighted by providing the pretense of equal access, as a minority you are well aware there was no such thing to begin with.

The reason my case becomes important when viewed in the broader perspective is because this private university has a diverse campus just like many of the other universities in the state. And in order for these universities to further their growth and success in our diverse society requires us to not just provide the pretense of welcoming diversity as well as its proper implementation. The second reason is the fact that when I participated in the process of formal recruitment I had complete faith that these policies were in place to provide me a fair chance. However, it was the rejection which led me to realize that these policies which I whole heartedly believed in were in place for these organizations to protect themselves not me.

But as this recent outbreak shows there is still much to be done not just in the face of diversity but to ensure the proper changes are being carried out by the organizations in question. It comes as a shock to this country when a case of overt discrimination such as the one in Alabama presents itself, yet we continue to ignore many cases of covert discrimination just because it is not as apparent except only to those who become the victims of these discriminatory practices. The majority does not feel the consequences of their actions because they do not believe they have practiced discrimination in any shape and form but as Simmel and Standpoint theory point out, only those in the minority view the full extent of these consequences. If

diversity policies are lived out as they were intended to, there would be no need for Greek organizations which are only created for ethnic minorities.

As we look at the steps which can be the starting point for many of these necessary changes is to not just implement these policies, but to also view their results and look into the micro cases of discrimination which are carried out by these organizations. These organizations are following the law but they have discovered the loophole in the law. They manipulate that loophole so they can maintain the exclusivity of their organizations while protecting themselves against any legal action.

The second step is to implement trainings and workshops so not just the face of the policy is followed but are carried out in essence. The workshops will be the bases of discussion not divisions. These women are not being prepared for the real world instead they are learning how to manipulate the law to maintain their privilege in their exclusive organizations. They have no idea how these policies are supposed to be carried out; they do not understand the spirit of the policy which needs to be explained.

This research could be furthered with surveys of minority students who are a part of sororities. By asking those minority women how they came to be a part of the sorority they are a part of and why they were excluded from the other sororities on campus can be an ideal option for those looking to further study this matter.

## **Conclusion**

This experience showed me the importance of not just having diversity policies in place but promoting diversity in a manner in which minority and majority can both feel good about the results. In my case, I was left angered because I thought a policy that existed solely for me was completely incompetent. Instead of outright rejection, I blamed myself at first and now have no basis to say that this was formal discrimination, while my counterparts get to feel good about them for giving me a fair chance. These clubs which are exclusionary yet they pretend they are not.

There is still much to be done in the face of diversity as not just my case, the Alabama case, and the countless other cases of micro discrimination which go unnoticed. Because those individuals, like me at the beginning, just blame them, and move on thinking this was never meant for them. We live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and even though much progress has been made there is more work to be done, beginning with examining these cases and addressing these issues on every campus across the country and then moving up to organizations in the workplace. As we look to the future of not just our higher education systems but for the advancement of our country, diversity plays a major role and it is time we address these issues and ensure the minorities trust back into these policies. The perception of providing equal access in becoming a part of a sorority is evidently a façade and significant improvements are required to put an end to this growing use of covert discrimination policies by any organization which is aware of the consequences that overt discrimination can bring.

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