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## The Rise of the Goddess is Always with a Little Bit of Help From My Sisters: An Analysis of the Need for a Documentary on Multicultural Greek Sororities

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THE RISE OF THE GODDESS IS ALWAYS WITH A LITTLE BIT OF HELP FROM MY  
SISTERS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NEED OF A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT  
MULTICULTURAL GREEK SORORITIES

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis  
Submitted In Partial fulfillment of  
University Honors Program Requirements  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

by  
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## **Abstract**

This research project answers two main questions: How do women of color become empowered in a white predominantly institution? What is the best way to acquire this information beyond the academy? As a woman of color and international student, answering these questions were important to me when I began my studies here at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. *The Rise of the Goddess* focuses on the experience of young women of color in multicultural organizations and argues for the documentary as a means for accessing this information.

*The Rise of the Goddess* demonstrates that multicultural sororities empower women of color in predominantly white institutions by various factors like the creation of community and understanding of womanhood through sorority membership. In addition, this Honors Thesis proves that the best way to represent the importance of these organizations is the production of a documentary that, unlike narrative film, allows for creative intimacy for storytelling between the filmmaker and the young women of color in higher education interviewed for the film.

## **Key terms:**

Multicultural Greek Organizations

Women of Color in Higher Education

Documentary

Representation of Greek organizations

Dedication



## **Dedications**

My dedication to this research goes to a considerable number of women in my life who have directed me on my path as I conducted my studies here at the University of Nebraska.

I dedicate this paper to my sorority sisters, for they have taught me to walk with class, and to be resilient, strong, and independent. Our all-out rough paths have made our love eternal. My best gratitude to my Alpha sister, asl known as my roommate. Thank you for showing me the definition of sisterhood and for helping me to learn simple things such as how to use a dishwasher. Additionally, my best gratitude to my Big Sister. You gave to me my first pair of professional pants (literally) even when you were not officially my sister and since then you have support me unconditionally. You have built me up step of the way.

I dedicate this paper to my thesis advisor Dr. Kwakiutl Dreher. Thank you for believing in me unconditionally, for all your guidance and constant support. The greatness of *The Rise of the Goddess* is due in large part to your constant input and pushing me to my limits.

**The Rise of the Goddess is Always with a Little Bit of Help From My Sisters:  
An Analysis of the Need for a Documentary on Multicultural Greek Sororities**

While watching Nadia Hallgren's *Becoming*, her documentary on Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama, the film became an inspiration for this project. One particular segment caught my interest. The former first lady visited a group of young women of color who aspired to higher education. In this segment, Ms. Obama said something best defines the intent of this project. She said, ". . . we focus too much on stats and not story... I think what makes you more than a stat is once you see yourself, you see yourself as more than a stat, and you start thinking about who you are." I considered the question Who am *I*? I came up with the simple facts: I am an international student with a strong ambition to work in the film industry. I am Latina from Colombia. I maintain my visa status in the United States. I am a member of an on-campus Latinx multicultural Greek sorority. Upon graduation May 2021, I will be an alumna of the University of Nebraska (UNL), a flagship predominantly white institution in the Midwest.

The former first lady's interaction with the young women in *Becoming* made me think of the value of sisterhood that my sorority membership gave to me during my attendance at the UNL. Who am I, here in *this* place? I realized I am more than a number. I am more than a *statistic* or a "stat", and my organization helped me to embrace these factors as I continue my journey in higher education.

The purpose of *The Rise of the Goddess* is twofold. To begin, the thesis explores the value of a multicultural sorority membership. Second, this thesis advocates for documentary filmmaking as a medium to survey the ways in which multicultural Greek sororities contribute to success of multicultural students in higher education. I find that these particular communities create a sense of belonging and inclusion within the larger structure of higher education, especially in

predominantly white institutions. Documentary filmmaking is the best genre to gather these stories.

My sorority<sup>1</sup> is a Latinx based society of young women. My experience as a member continues to impact my journey as a woman of color as I earn/ed my undergraduate degree at the UNL. It is in an inclusive and supportive environment based on the concept of sisterhood. Overall, membership allows for empowerment among women of color. In our interactions, we are more than a number. We are not stats. We are sisters. We are the goddesses who rise with a little help from each other.

Throughout this project, I use the term *multicultural* because my sorority is an organization under the umbrella of the Multicultural Greek Council (MGC) here at the University of Nebraska. The MGC's main objective is to "accommodate and serve the Historically African-American and Latino/Latina organizations on campus [and to] offer an alternative to traditional Greek chapters." (Student Affairs: Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life). The following Greek letter organizations are part of the MGC at the UNL: Delta Phi Lambda, a multicultural Asian organization; Delta Xi Nu, a multicultural based organization; Kappa Delta Chi, a historically Latina-based organization with multicultural membership; Lambda Phi Epsilon, a multicultural Asian organization; Lambda Theta Nu, a historically Latina-based organization with multicultural membership; Omega Delta Phi, a historically Multicultural-based organization with multicultural membership; Sigma Lambda Beta, a a historically Latino-based Fraternity with multicultural membership; and, Sigma Psi Zeta, a multicultural Asian interest organization.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to personal reasons I prefer to keep the name of my organization private, yet I hope my description shows its value as an MGC.

The young women in Michelle Obama's *Becoming* expressed that women of color have so much to move through on the journey to higher education. Statistics, percentages, and numbers are not enough to tell our stories. We need the personal stories to reflect the day-to-day experiences while enrolled in these institutions of higher learning. It is my purpose, then, to show the *necessity* for telling these personal stories via the documentary. In this paper I demonstrate the need for the creation of such a documentary I would entitle "The Rise of the Goddess is always with a Little Bit of Help from Our Sisters."

I use sparingly but throughout my first language, Spanish (with translations) intertwined with my second language, English, to nuance my discussion of the goddess and the significance of her myth in my culture. This "code switching" is reflective of my on linguistic interactions in the world, what Gloria Anzaldúa observes "[e]thnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language" (59). A *goddess*, for me, best describes the women of color I have interacted with in my sorority. In common myths, a goddess is a higher being. Usually, a goddess challenges the patriarchal rule imposed by a/the gods ready to meet the threat of punishment. Although every culture and/or religion is different in the way they relate to its goddesses, they all "encierran múltiples elementos en común; sin embargo el más importante de ellos es la evidencia del arquetipo de deidades femeninas empoderadas sexualmente, rebeldes y furiosas, que encarnan los aspectos oscuros y feroces de la naturaleza"<sup>2</sup> (Chiminigagua). This "deidades femeninas

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<sup>2</sup> Translation: "They contain multiple elements in common; however, the most important of these is the evidence of the archetype of sexually empowered, rebellious and furious female deities, embodying the dark and fierce aspects of nature"

empoderadas ... rebeldes y furiosas” or this *feminine deity of rebellious and furious femininity* attracted me toward the use of goddess.

The title of this project, specifically, is inspired by the mythical goddesses inside my own culture. The journey of each goddess in a colonized society is similar to multicultural sororities trying to be recognized in a predominantly white institution. She is mainly known in Colombian culture as *Chia*. The most intriguing part the Goddess Chia is that she is associated with the moon and its phases. Ashley Cowrie informs the reader that Chia is

worshiped in accordance with the three-monthly phases of the moon: as the waxing moon she is the young rebelling goddess Huitaca. While on the full moon she is venerated as the fertility goddess Chia, and on waning moons she was the wise old mother goddess, Yubecayguaya (Bachue). (Cowie).

She is described as, among other things, " 'a goddess of extreme beauty,' governing the 'fluid' aspects of reality including ... femininity ..." (Cowie). These fluid aspects are attributed to her second phase, Huitaca:

La manifestación de Bagué, la fuerza femenina primigenia, el todo y la nada de lo cual se crea el mundo, su función fue la de purificar y liberar las aguas del territorio muisca transmitiendo consigo la sabiduría de la sexualidad sagrada, el trance de la danza y la borrachera y los demás caminos que permitían al ser humano entrar en contacto con sus mundos internos y espirituales (Chiminigagua)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Translation: The manifestation of Bagué, the primal feminine force, the everything and nothing from which the world is created, its function was to purify and liberate the waters of the Muisca territory, transmitting with it the wisdom of sacred sexuality, the trance of dance. and

The “purificor y liberar los aguas” or the *purification and liberation of waters* come out of the culture of the indigenous group honoring this goddess, and it is also highly influenced by the intrusion of colonization, similar to the rise of multicultural Greek organizations on campuses of higher learning. Therefore, Huitaca, the second phase of this goddess, essentially goes against the patriarchal institution created by the God Bochica that replicated colonizing practices into the Indigenous thrive (Munévar). This made her a "digna representante de la rebeldía y la visión libertadora femenina" (Chiminigagua).<sup>4</sup>

Chia/Huitaca is the perfect metaphor for the journey of women of color in higher education and the support of a multi-cultural sorority. In this journey, these goddesses navigate different phases of initiation. I consider Chia as myself, the young woman who arrived at a predominantly white institution filled with hopes of being recognized as more than a number; Huitaca stands for rebel women who have had enough of the restrictive structural norms of her institution and find an organization that allows her to rebel herself; and, Bachue as the women who blossoms and graduate from this institution as a role model and more than a statistic to be an example to younger generations.

The *earthly* goddess who inspires *The Rise of the Goddess* is my Latina sister from the umbrella of Latina sororities: Dolores Clara Fernández Huerta. She is an immigrant and civil rights activist. In the 1960s, Huertas created the Agricultural Workers Association (AWA) and co-founded with labor leader and community organizer, César Chávez, the United Farm Workers

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drunkenness and the other ways that allowed the human being to come into contact with their internal and spiritual worlds

<sup>4</sup> Translation: worthy representative of rebellion and the feminine liberating vision.

Union in the United States. On September 30, 2005, Kappa Delta Chi, a Latina sorority, initiated Huerta as an Honorary Sister by the Alpha Alpha Chapter at Wichita State University. Peter Bratt's 2017 documentary *Dolores* chronicles the life of Huerta and her activism for the miserable conditions faced by the farm workers. She came up with the slogan ¡*Si Se Puede! Yes We Can!* Little by little, Huerta, this legendary Latina, this goddess lifted us up as she carved out a space for marginalized voices to be heard. She remarks on the film,

the documentary really tells the story of the empowerment of individuals, especially the empowerment of women, and I believe this is something that everybody in our society ... they need to know that, whoever they are that they have power. Oftentimes women do not see themselves in that light. That they have the power to make things better for themselves for their families and for the community and for the world. And I think that is a message that in spite of obstacles that are out there that we have the power to make things better for everyone but we gotta make that commitment ... the sacrifices to make it happen. (Variety Studio)

It is my desire to create in the spirit of Dolores Huerta. I want to demonstrate, specifically, that there are “collegiate women trying to improve [their] lives” (Hughey and Hunter 529), and that they have the “power to make things better” by telling their stories. ¡*Si Se Puede!*

My group of sisters makes me feel like a goddess in the sense that they value my story just as Ms. Obama does in *Becoming*; just as Ms. Huerta values the stories of migrant farm workers. Most Greek sororities ask interested members what sisterhood means to them. Every response is unique; every story is unique. Each one lifts me so that I can be my best self in the midst of a culture and a people unlike my own. As Huitaca would do, they rebel against entitlement in order to advance her sisters and the communities who support them.

There is one other film that inspires my project. *Beyond This Place: Why Black Fraternities and Sororities Still Matter* (not yet released), Jarrad Henderson's feature length documentary that "examines the rich culture of African American Fraternities and Sororities, while at the same time, as Henderson puts it "posing a very complex question: 'what is the role of these organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?'" In *Beyond This Place*, Henderson assembles archival footage and a stellar cast of African American men and women who are members of the Divine Nine (defined and discussed later in the thesis).

### **Why the Documentary?**

The documentary is an influential medium. It is the best platform, I believe, to bring to light the influence multicultural sororities have on women of color in higher learning. A persuasive tool that can capture authentic expression and realistic portrayals of life, the highlight of the documentary is that it creates immediacy between the storyteller and the listener. The filmmaker *is* the listener. With a camera, a boom microphone, and lighting equipment, the environment is set up to embrace the story. It is she who sets into place the necessary background to frame the story for the ultimate listener: the audience.

In *Documentary Resistance: Social Change and Participatory Media*, Angela J Aguayo explains, "People—often of humble means—demanding recognition and dignity for themselves and their communities have used the documentary to find pathways into a better life" (1). This search for a pathway is aided by documentary filmmaking. It is also the medium through which people feel that they can create the most. Aguayo says, "The story of documentary is a story of people unwilling to give up on the dream of an inclusive democracy, harnessing the use of moving images, the form of film, and the mode of documentary to represent their demands for a better world" (2). We can see in an example of various documentaries how they are used as a platform

from going to the micro community (in this project: *sorority members*) to the macro (national sorority communities).

These aspects of creative immediacy fascinate me the most about documentary filmmaking. This genre has been used mostly to document social change, with a focus on systems that do not allow the micro group to access the necessary resources to fully thrive. Or, in another way, documentaries can expose how the micro group navigates, if not, negotiates, around and within these systems and thrive/d. We can see these negotiations in documentaries such as *Chisholm '72: Unbought & Unbossed* (2004) *Free Angela & All Political Prisoners* (2013); *The Hand That Feeds* (2014); *A Ballerina's Tale: The Incredible Rise of Misty Copeland* (2015); *Latino: The Changing Face of Washington* (PBS, 2016); *Dolores* (2017); *Making It: Latino Students' Pathways to College* (2019); *Becoming* (2020); *John Lewis: Good Trouble* (2020); *MLK/FBI* (2020), *Miss Americana* (2020); and *Rita Moreno: Just a Girl Who Decided to Go For It* (June 2021). This list is by no means exhaustive, and each documentary takes a specific personal story and carries out a larger conversation. I would say that the documentary would be the most beneficial for developing the stories of multicultural women inside Greek organizations on predominantly white campuses as it creates a personal relationship between the viewer and the women telling their story.

Additionally, documentary filmmaking gives space for multicultural organizations to evaluate the way they collaborate and the way they have drifted apart due to unforeseen challenges and changes. Documentaries of this nature create “documentary commons”, and my project seeks to “create[ ] spaces for diverse people to share in modes of deliberation and the work of establishing the infrastructure needed to sustain relational connection, as well as making possible the production of new discourses that generate political arenas of intervention” (Aguayo 7). The

documentary, with its elements of creative immediacy, then, could explore the personal story while bringing to light the systematic forces that affect multicultural students on predominantly white institutions campuses.

There is the questioning of documentary as not being the mainstream film style but is considered more of an intellectual medium than that of mass-marketed film genre. Aguayo maintains, however, that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thanks to advancements in technology, the documentary has been one of the most significant vehicles to explore the way people interact politically in world. She writes, “These intersecting documentary media cultures have produced a growing participatory common that uses collective social practices of creating, remixing, and sharing documentary recordings as a means of engaging politics” (3).

### ***Mi Pequeña Historia* or My Little Story**

In her section “When is My Business Your Business?” Anne Herrington explores the controversy in academia in authors including the personal narrative in their writing. She argues, “our background, identities, and interests shape in some ways the scholarly projects we pursue and the arguments and findings we create” (Herrington, 47-48). The personal narrative, then, is essential to include in scholarly work.

*Mi pequeña historia* adds value to my project. It is part of a script on which a documentary can be launched and can serve as a prototype for the community of women I am part of here at the University of Nebraska. I was clear about one thing when I enrolled: I would avoid at all costs being a statistic.

### ***Mi Pequeña Historia: Natalie Herrera Lopez, member since 2018***

I was born and raised in Bogota, Colombia. I can say that I was privileged enough to have a bilingual education. This privilege is thanks to my parents who wanted to prepare me for a future

beyond Colombia. They decided to enroll me into an IB league school in Bogota at the start of the elementary education. An “IB league school” is an umbrella program that focuses on international education to prepare students for an international experience. In the beginning, it was hard because most of my classmates were ahead of me in their English language skills. I didn’t even know how to say the word *sun* in English. I remember the afternoons my *Tia* or Aunt (an English teacher) would spend with me to make sure I would polish my language skills. We named everything in the room in English until I caught up to my classmates. Soon I began learning on my own. My seventh-grade class had a good teacher who assigned great books, and this teacher helped me to develop my critical writing in English. I’m not saying I’m perfect at it, yet it was a milestone for me. Over time, I learned the English language and how to express me in it.

My mom and a dad always fed my crazy dreams and my independent spirit. My mom is a mathematician. My father is an independent man who came to Bogota to explore life and his destiny. Through his planning and hard work, he owns a construction company. I was raised to always stay close to family, but that norm in my culture never stayed with me completely. I wanted something more out there in the world. My parents immediately recognized that staying close to home was never the plan so they pushed me towards my own version of my future. I believed in the American dream: if you work hard and pay close attention to your studies, you can do anything in the United States.

I’m the first person in my family to come to study in the United States. I found the courage to leave by myself with not one relative here to meet me. Even though I put on a brave face as I prepared to leave, it was one of the hardest steps of my life yet one the most freeing ones. I questioned my decision to enroll here at the University of Nebraska. It is so far away from home. From family. From my homeland. I made this decision because I enthusiastically wanted to study

here. For me education is a safe space for me to explore my independence. I embraced my love for academia, and that love intensified in my college years. At the UNL, I created my own path. Yet leaving behind my homeland, my culture, and my heritage brought unexpected feelings and experiences.

To my surprise, my journey toward independence helped me to appreciate my Colombian culture and evaluate myself as a young Latina woman. I was fortunate, as well, to immediately find a group of fellow Colombians. I also was lucky enough to find a group of Latina women who explored with me what it means to be a woman of color in the United States, generally and at the UNL specifically. These women are in my sorority. It is interesting because I did not join my organization especially for the ethnic aspect, as some of the members had done. I joined because my organization is a combination of something unique. It is a symbol of my aspiration to be an exemplary young woman of color. The young women, the goddesses, are the main factors for me to figure out how to be more than just a statistic. When I met and saw them around campus wearing their colors with their Greek letters all I could think about was “I want to be them, and I want to carry my body the way they do.” It took me a while, to be honest, to get there. Anyone who wishes to join a sorority has to be prepared to go through a process of inspection called *the rush*, carried out by young members who are strangers even though some of us share a common ethnicity and culture. When I was chosen to join, I realized I was going to be able to find that unique voice in me, even though I was representing a group I so admired.

The way my sorority helped me to define my sense of community was not the same way I created community through my Colombian friends. With them, was the literal expression of bringing my home of Bogota into midwestern United States. This sisterhood allowed me to expand my idea of community and fill in those emotional gaps I was experiencing here. That is why when

I met them, I loved the way they carried themselves around campus. They were upholding the legacy of all the women who came before them, specifically the founders. My sorority makes me feel part of the community at the University in general. I felt, in particular, that I was contributing something special to the overall development of this institution with my involvement in this community.

My organization was founded by fantastic Latinas on the 80's in California. Its primary mission is to help Latina women not only achieve higher education but thrive in their experience on the college campus. In addition, its purpose is to uplift Latina women as educated women and representatives of their community, but also the impulse and impact of education in the Latinx community overall. Our national philosophy is “Legacy for Coming Generations”.

The chapter was chartered at the UNL around the middle of the 2000s, being one of the first Latina sororities on campus and the only Latina-based sorority on campus only until a few years ago. We believe in academics, service, and sisterhood. The reputation of our chapter is that of resiliency. This display of confidence comes from the founders of our chapter, still pretty much incredibly involved in the chapter. They are exceptional role models for every new member to come.

Even though other Latina sororities have been chartered in the nation and at the UNL, we certainly are the members who are demanding in regard to our success as academics. We monitor our performance in/outside of the classroom to make sure to keep high grade point averages, a part of academics we treasure. Lastly, I am proud to say that I make part of a historical landmark as being one of the two first international students to be part of my chapter's history. I hope I can be an example to coming generations of international students who are looking for that bridge

between an old self and inspirations for a new version of that self in this new land. Membership means that members are welcome to share their individual stories.

### ***Mi Pequeña Historia* or the Personal as Script**

*Mi Pequeña Historia*, then, is a script—a piece of dialogue for a documentary that places front and center my Latinx sorority. To give context and to bring to light the lack of cinematic representation of Latinx sororities, my documentary will summarize a smattering of fictional Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLO) depicted in mass marketed films. For example, *School Daze* (1988) focuses exclusively on African American fraternities. *Step Sisters* (2018), sets to comedy the story of an African American student who is a member of a BGLO/sorority teaching a white sorority how to step dance. There are films portraying the culture of secret white societies such as *The Skulls* (franchise) and the *Harry Potter* film franchise. In addition, there is a wealth of films depicting white fraternities such as *National Lampoon's Animal House* (1978); *Revenge of The Nerds* (1984); *American Pie Presents: Beta House* (1999); *Road Trip* (2000); *Van Wilder* (2002); and *Old School* (2003), to name a few. Kirby Dick's documentary *The Hunting Ground* (2015) exposes campus sexual assault as well as critiques fraternity culture that contributes to rape culture on U. S. colleges and universities.

### **Narration: Current Trends and (non)Representation of MGCs in mass-marketed media.**

The exploration of the importance of MGCs on campus and their affect on multicultural students is needed. To be able to inform multicultural students of the existence of these sanctuaries, there needs to be the creation of a way for them to access the information. Documentary filmmaking has been one of the most commercial and influential arts from its creation and I would argue this is the best way to approach the age range of the audience that needs to be informed about these organizations. Overall, films on Greek letter organizations are a great advertising tool to

target young men and women in search of groups to join as they consider/enter college. The majority of fiction films on Greek life are either based on white traditional organizations or BGLOs.

Most films featuring white fraternities dramatize them as the fun organization wherein a member can party, have access to young wo/men and alcohol, among other things. Most of them are comedies. The approach leaned into these representations is to see white fraternities as a fun place to enjoy college and, for a teenager, these aspects could be seen as the perfect outlet for the reinforcement of white masculinity. There are few films produced about BGLOs but there are no films, documentary or mass-marketed, on Latinx Organizations.

Three mainstream films, for example, are based on black fraternities: *School Daze* (1988), *Stomp the Yard* (2007), and *Burning Sands* (2017). *School Daze* portrays the conflict between black fraternities and sororities at an HBCU during a homecoming weekend. *Stomp the Yard* brings to light the legacy of stepping. This practice, *stepping*, "is a percussive, highly-energetic art form first developed through the song and dance rituals performed by African-American fraternities and sororities. In stepping, the body becomes an instrument, using footsteps, claps and spoken word to produce complex poly-rhythms" (Step Afrika). *Burning Sands* is a film that dramatizes in the consequences of hazing or the infliction of humiliation and, more hurtful, abuse and endangerment of potential members. It illustrates how toxic masculinity can be fostered through this practice. Most of the films of white fraternities, as well, feature hazing in these organizations. Two films *Goat* (2016) and *The Skulls* (2008) focus on the hazing inside white fraternities and/or on-campus secret societies.

On the other hand, for the purpose of representing BGLO/sororities, one popular film featuring nonwhite sororities is *Step Sisters* (2018), a film, that right from its press release received

a very negative response from some members of the NPHC community as the Los Angeles *Times* review presented, one of the members of NPHC commented on twitter after the release of its trailer: “‘We can’t have anything at all,’ said one user. ‘None of us black sororities and fraternities are going to watch this foolishness. It’s African... Can we just have it please? Good Lord!! #sofrustrating.’” (Anderson) and other media outlets as well as the multicultural Greek community. For example, Jamie Broadnax of blackgirlnerds.com writes in her review:

The plot of a Black sorority sister [Jamilah] once President of her own sorority taking the time out of her business schedule to teach a white sorority how to learn how to step ... is already a cringe-worthy premise. ... There are moments when Jamilah is referred to as ‘the help’ which is an accurate description of her role to these women.

Leaving out the problematic approach of the cultural appropriation of stepping, the portrayal of the black sorority as a whole is questionable. *Step Sisters* represents the BGLO/sorority as a hostile environment where the women inside do not support one another and only are out for themselves. Only until the end do we see a resolution of sisterhood between the white sorority stepping and the sorority the black young woman belongs to. Either way, the film sends a message not to join a BGLO/sorority due to the lack of sisterhood. The only part of the film that questions BGLO/sorority membership is when it is revealed that the black woman joined white sorority because the black sorority did not consider her black enough to represent their organization and even the black community.

We can see this tendency as well in some Latina sororities and how a young woman decided to go join an Asian sorority because the Latinas did not see her as Latina enough. The film, however, rapidly closes this discussion and focuses on the cultural appropriation of the white

sorority. At the end you could argue *Step Sisters* is a film about the reproduction of the trope of “the help” and how it advances young white women in Greek sorority culture.

### **The Rise of the Goddess**

My documentary would showcase the value of Latinx Greek organizations. The script would chart my arrival here and explore my strategies for navigating in this predominantly white culture. For example, it was difficult for me to determine the hierarchy of professors (i.e., assistant/associate/full), the syllabus, and keeping up my schedule of assignments. Plus, it was difficult being in the midst of so many white students. Although I had the companionship of international students to help me, if it were not for having my MGC sorority and a Cuban-American professor as my instructor, I would have been on my own trying to get my education within this environment. I felt completely alienated even though I voluntarily came here. Anzaldúa would say my feelings of alienation “makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity ... a synergy of two cultures with various degrees” (63) of my South Americanness trying to operate within the culture of Angloness.

These feelings of alienation and the effects of the experience in higher education are explained, as well, by Kathleen Manning and Patricia Coleman-Bright. They mention how “others who represent diverse perspectives may feel disenfranchised and alienated from an environment in which their way of operating, life-style, or cultural characteristics are not the norm reflected in institutional symbols, language, and behaviors” (369). Manning and Coleman-Boatwright maintain also, “Students of color often comment that there is no place on campus where they can feel psychologically or physically safe” (369). Specifically, there were not enough efforts from the office of Student Affairs to change this situation. The Cuban-American professor would be

interviewed and tell the story of part of his journey and his quest for mentorship of Latinx students such as myself.

Learning and studying in a predominantly white space can be a challenging environment for some students of color to find their voice and their opportunities. In my experience and talking with other international students, *Student Affairs* more often than not advise students that it is not all about earning a degree. Instead, students are advised to go for the extracurricular passions and relationships formed while being in these institutions.

### **Narration: White Greeks on Campus: Bits and Pieces of History—A Lens**

A brief history of Greek organizations on predominantly white institutions forms the background for this documentary. Their divisions on campus instituted the conservation of white culture. According to Matthew Hughey and Joanna S. Hunter, “By the late 1920s, interfraternity councils on many college campuses admitted only White Christian fraternities and sororities to their membership” (523). There was an intention to preserve the white culture on campuses by not allowing people of color to organize their own fraternities and sororities. People of color, however, did not stand by and wait for administrators to give them space. Little by little they created their own spaces.

Another part of the narration includes the interactions between multicultural Greek Letter organizations (MGC) and Black Greek Letter organizations (BGLO). Multicultural Greek organizations honor the creation of Black Greek organizations or those organizations that paved the way since they started the revolution for space on campus. Rho Psi is one such fraternity that used the blueprint of *The Divine Nine* to charter its chapter. Founded in 1916, Rho Psi was “the first Asian fraternity, [and was] founded at Cornell University ([Ithaca,] New York, USA)” (Hughey and Hunter 524).

As a response to these exclusions,

African Americans began founding their fraternities and sororities. From 1906 to 1922, eight of the nine Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) that makeup today's National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) were founded. These organizations were an integral part of what W.E.B. Du Bois and E. Franklin Frazier respectively called the 'talented tenth' and the 'black bourgeoisie'" (Hughey and Hunter 523-524).

From the beginning, these organizations were composed of members who later in history will be important figures for the black community and people of color on how to revolutionize and take your space on predominantly white institutions. For example, Aaron Douglas, in 1922, is the first African American to graduate from the University of Nebraska with a bachelor of fine arts degree. He was a member of the BGLO Kappa Alpha Psi, founded at Indiana University Bloomington in 1911. The Eta Chapter was founded on UNL's campus in 1916, making the fraternity the first historically African American fraternity at Nebraska. The first African American sorority to be founded at Nebraska is Delta Sigma Theta in 1922, Omicron chapter.

Founders were aware of the responsibility they carried as "BGLOs were formed in America at a time when racial segregation and white supremacy were a way of life" as this was during the Jim Crow Laws enforcing segregation ..." (Gillon, Beatty and Salinas 11). In such an era where white culture enforced Jim Crow laws and segregation, BGLO founders knew they had to create a space for students of color to feel safe and focus on their education as well to have each other as a sanctuary from fear, anger, and pain and to foster joy, brother/sisterhood, belonging, and pride in themselves and their race. Other racial/ethnic groups followed the steps of *The Divine Nine* of Black Greek Letter Organizations. *The Divine Nine* includes the following Black Greek letter

organizations that are part of the National Panhellenic Council (NPHC): Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

The visibility of the impact of these organizations was largely due to the change in the socio/political environment of United States:

1950s and 1960s Civil Rights movement slowly effected legislative changes in immigration policy, educational rights, and marriage freedoms, the invisible normativity of whiteness was challenged by claims that all races, ethnicities, religions, and cultures had a stake in the development of the USA. Such ethnic pluralism slowly morphed into the ideology of multiculturalism. (Hughey and Hunter 521).

The social and political arising out of the need for a space for people of color allowed more racial/ethnic groups to create their organizations, to give space to their communities to the conversation inside the walls of higher education. Such was the success that “By the end of the 1970s, exclusionary entrance requirements had all but disappeared from GLOs” (Hughey and Hunter 524). There was already another path created. *The Divine Nine* decided that instead of trying to fit into institutions based on white culture, they would create the sanctuaries for their race/ethnicity on their own terms.

**Narration: The Value of the Presence of MGCs on the predominantly white campus.**

Greek organizations can be a guiding light for new students of color, first-generation students and international students, among other multicultural subgroups. The way these organizations do this is by "engaging in a variety of racial identity tactics that simultaneously

constrain and enable the perception of their racial identities." (Hughey and Hunter 529). In order to create a perception of these racial (and other ethnicities as well) identities their "performances of 'multiculturalism' were ... expressions of ethnic pride as an oppositional identity to Anglo-conformity and color-blindness ..." (Hughey and Hunter 529). Their representation showed the pride in their organization. Various practices such as stepping, strolling, and wearing proudly their colors and Greek letters are, by extension, a performance of pride.

Specific to the MGC sorority, the women demonstrate pride in their sisterhood and, by extension, they display "ethnic pride by picking and choosing the ethnicity with which they identified, by participating in various displays of ethnicity, and by participating in activities designed to enlighten them about a culture different from the one with which they were most familiar." (Hughey and Hunter 538). We could argue there is an attraction to join an organization with a very specific ethnic or racial identity and their core values. Students look to represent themselves with a specific group so they are not lost in the umbrella of just being part of the diversity of the university, as they usually mention, since diversity usually does not cover the uniqueness of their stories and cultures. They want to show their ethnic/racial pride that needs to be shown through membership in these organizations. Yet this does not mean they do not collaborate and help each other.

The creation of councils such as National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), Multicultural Greek Council (MGC), National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO) and others makes collaboration and unity among organizations. Gillon and Salinas explain this unity as an important goal since, "multicultural F&S organizations merged in efforts to create a sense of validation and cultural relevance in light of the oppression and marginalization they experienced in higher education ... to have formed and created their fraternal organizations as a strategy of

reproducing validation" (14-15). In essence they create an alternative experience within the white culture structure of higher education to create the legacy of their organizations.

My research of MGC's uncover that the founding of MGC's, founding members used the Divine Nine paradigm and ideal: academic excellence and achievement across lines of occupations. "... the Divine Nine organizations ... consistently step up into the arena in order to make the best effort for their community," writes Lawrence C. Ross, Jr. He continues,

The fraternity or sorority is more than wearing of letters, or the singing of hymns. It is a collective realization that the unit is stronger than the individual, but that the achievements of the individual greatly enriches the unit. In this way, scholarship funds may be raised, mentorship programs implemented, and lives affected favorably. This is the overall purpose of the Divine Nine. (xii).

According to Gillon, et al, "The first three black sororities, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, and Zeta Phi Beta, were all established at Howard University as they searched for both racial and gendered uplift" (13). Sigma Gamma Rho, Inc., a sorority founded by seven black educators, was established in 1922 at Butler University in Illinois, a predominantly white institution, to "visualize a world in which all women and their families reach their full potential in all aspects of life ..." (sgrho1922.org).

On the whole, women of color understood the need to create a sisterhood as they made their journey in higher education.

Women's lives were heavily controlled by the university. Mail was interceded by a matron, women could not venture off-campus without a chaperone, and expulsions, which were common practice, were often in response to women engaging in activities deemed inappropriate by the university such as drinking, smoking, and

entertaining the opposite sex in an unapproved manner”. (Gillon, Beatty and Salinas 13)

This was an important factor in the way BGLO/sororities worked as a different mechanism to avoid these sexist practices yet there seems not to be much interest or investigation on their different way of creating a legacy. The only mention of their difference and uniqueness comes from the comparison on race which mentions how “White sorority women whose descriptions of their motivations were based on specific activities the sorority was known for, rather than on loftier principles” (Hughey and Hunter 529). This comparison could as well apply to the difference between white and BGLOs.

This brings me to the proposal and development of this project. There is a lack of scholarship on the contributions and the legacies of multicultural sororities. Some multicultural Greek organizations used *The Divine Nine* example to found their own sororities. The hard work that it put in to create women that stand out with every step they take. They are academic achievers, outspoken leaders who contribute to helping their community, and they are worthy of an exclusive investigation on how they have inspired the founding of multicultural Greeks and their councils. As Jarrad Henderson maintains, “these organizations have helped cultivate some of the greatest minds of our generation” (*Beyond This Place*). Just as is Dolores Huerta is one of the great minds in the Latinx community and a member of Kappa Delta Chi, we have an example of this academic excellence through Kamala Harris, the first woman of color to be elected Vice President of the United States. Vice President Harris is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. In her acceptance speech, she proudly stated, “Family is my beloved Alpha Kappa Alpha ... our Divine Nine ... and my HBCU brothers and sisters.”

**What is the best stage for the Goddess? The use of Documentary as a revolutionary approach to tell the story of multicultural/racial sororities.**

As we have seen from some research on the films about traditional white Greek fraternities/sororities, BGLOs in the NPHC, mass-marketed films ignore the stories of MGC fraternities and sororities. In *The Rise of the Goddess*, I argue for the documentary to bring visibility to my Latinx sorority as does Jarrad Henderson for the *The Divine Nine*. To these ends, I propose a platform that would give as many personal testaments as possible. I do not propose a commercial inviting woman to join every specific organization. My project would focus, instead, on the personal journeys of the women who have been part of these organizations. To talk about the numbers, statistics, or titles defeats the purpose. Being in a multicultural sorority is a complete journey of self-discovery that makes for the emergence of a new young woman—a Goddess, who with a little bit of help from her sisters counters the statistic. This project will celebrate their stories.

**Talking with the Goddess: The Paradigm for the Interview**

There is a culture of secrecy surrounding the practices within Greek sororities. The documentary filmmaker is challenged to foster a relationship with sorority members in order to have a transparent interview with women from these organizations. Members have to feel in a safe space to share their story. Secondly, a certain level of confidence must be established so that members do not feel as if they are betraying the secrecy of their organization.

The interview is to be divided into three sections: the interest in the organization, the involvement in the organization, and a concluding reflection on the impact of the organization on them as women of color in higher education.

This is an example of the interview structure and questions that could be followed for this type of documentary:

**Section A:**

This section reveals how women of color are affected by a predominantly white college environment upon their arrival. and how this particular culture can lead them to seek refuge and home in MGC organizations. Additionally, it gives the audience a sense of seeing themselves, and they can reflect on why they joined their own organization while in college.

**Questions:**

1. Tell me your name, age, major, ethnicity/race.
2. What organization(s) are you member?
3. Tell me about your journey from your home town to you entering a new home in higher education
  - a. What made you pursue higher education?
  - b. Did going to college change your relationship with relatives and friends in your hometown?
    - i. If yes, in what way?
  - c. How did it feel to be a woman of color in a predominantly white institution?
  - d. What were your expectations when you arrived here?

### **Bridge question between Section A and Section B**

Because Section A should be mostly about their first impact on higher education, there needs to be a bridge that connects this cultural shock into the recognition and journey with their MGC organizations. I think for this bridge it was important to highlight some of the aspects that could contribute to the attraction of these groups such as legacy and commitment and navigate why certain MGC organizations appeal to women of color.

#### **Question:**

1. Did the idea of being part of an MGC organization that created a legacy and lifetime commitment influence your decision to aspire to higher education? If yes or no, why?

#### **Section B:**

This section delves into the ways in which students interviewed navigated their relationship with their MGC organization. This section also is to demonstrate growth and change.

#### ***Questions:***

1. Discuss the ways in which your organizations mirror your idea of community.
  - Did becoming a member of your organization change your perspective of community? If so, in what way(s)? If not, why?
2. How did you feel after the organization chose you to be in this organization?
3. What word would you choose to describe the physical place that is created when you are with your sisters? (Ex: home, sanctuary, base, etc.) and why?

#### ***Link to school***

Next is to analyze the community aspect of MGC sororities. It is important to go back into the education aspect of the whole experience since it is where we start to explore the concept of being

more than a statistic. In this section, the women would be able to evaluate how these organizations how have allowed them to have the full experience of higher education benefits.

***Questions:***

4. In what ways do you think your organization filled in some of the areas your felt were lacking in your academic experience?
5. When you joined the MGC organization, did your notion of having an education change when you became a member?
  - If yes or no, why?

***Visibility***

After the reflection of the ways an MGC organization allowed them to have the full experience of higher education or at least a great part of it, they can continue to reflect on the way the MGC organizations give visibility to their stories, and how that visibility validated their communities and the higher education experience as a whole.

***Question:***

6. How did it feel the first time you wore your organization's letters and colors? And what level of visibility did it brought you as an individual?
  - To an event?
  - On-campus?
  - In the general student body?

***Individual identity***

In this section, it is important to come back to their identities as individuals and upon reflection on all the components that their organizations can impact their identity, be able to have introspection

on how much they have taken from their growth in higher education thanks to their MGC organization.

7. Did your concept of self-worth and the value of others change/enhance by the fact of being trusted by your sisters and be able to trust them to support you when the need arises?
  - Was this trust fulfilled?
    - If so, in what ways?
    - If not, in what ways did it fail?

### **SECTION C:**

In last, I would like to think of the experience of being in a MGC sorority as the change from being regular student to a young woman or color interacting in an exclusive group of young women of color. I think the best way to finishing the interview would have a reflection of the woman that arrived at the university to the woman they are now. This would allow the audience to see the value of an MGC organization.

1. Compare the young woman you were when you arrived on campus the first day to the young woman you are today who can wear the letters of an organization who chose you to join. What do you see?
2. Would you like to make any additional comments on your experience in higher education through the involvement of a sorority?

### **Conclusion**

Greek sororities can create a sanctuary for women of color who are affected by the white and patriarchal structures of higher education. Sometimes social problems are blamed on the lack of support from the academy. Even though their efforts are highly appreciated, the problem starts with the fact that we exclude these issues only from academic research. I remember finding one of

my favorite authors, and professors in the English department, by her narrating a personal essay on how as a first-generation student she was surprised by the separation of academia with the people, how she found such a great academic paper by one of her professors and when she proposed for it to be published in a more public approachable, “the kind that reaches ordinary women” (Castro 94). She was instantly rejected of this option. When I first read that essay as recently arrived international women of color, I felt completely identified with the chaotic burden of understanding academia and with the sadness of not having access to this before. This is the experience of a lot of women of color who take a good time to connect to this academic approach, even if someday they get to that social side of academia. By only investigating these white Greek organizations as well as BGLOs, we are losing the whole goal of discovering the advantages of MGCs that contribute to the success of multicultural women.

The documentary film can help inform people of social issues as well as make them socially conscious. It is perfect to tell the story of multi-cultural Greek sororities. Although we have passed the eras of segregation, we are still covered in the remains of the white culture structure. *Mi Pequeña Historia or My Little Story* reveals that I found my way in a predominantly white institution and culture by being chosen to join my Latinx sorority. As a member I am the goddess who rose up with a little help from her sisters. I am not a number. I am not a statistic I am aware, however, that not every woman of color has that same chance and, what is more, even joining an MGC would not be their way of approaching higher education. *The Rise of the Goddess* would assure them of our presence. *The Rise of the Goddess* would be there to help them make that choice.

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