

A Comparative Analysis of the Attitudes of Students Towards Initiations

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A phenomenon common to most Greek-letter organizations is initiation. An initiation is essentially a breaking-in process or a rite of passage undergone by individuals before they can gain entry into an already existing organization or group. Initiations, although they usually connote physical punishment, is in a way a process of socialization, whereby the prospective members internalize the norms of the organization.

In order to gain a frame of reference for the study, four separate initiation ceremonies were observed by this writer. To legitimize her presence, she was cast as some sort of a junior nurse in charge of reviving the neophytes who fainted. This was necessary, because initiations are behind the scene ceremonies, off limits to non-members. The rites observed ranged from those with a minimal infliction of physical pain to those wherein "instruments" were used. These "instruments" consisted of boards of wood, pieces cut from garden hoses, lighted cigarettes, and neolite paddles (thick rubber strips pliant enough to cling to the body when hit). All throughout, the physical punishments were interspersed with slogans about the organization and platitudes regarding loyalty and brotherhood.

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The Study:

The study was designed to determine the attitudes of University of the Philippines students regarding fraternity initiations. The University of the Philippines has imposed strict penalties on any organization found to be holding initiations. These penalties range from a simple reprimand to suspension and expulsion of the organization and persons involved. However, in the midst of all these legal prohibitions, the practice still persists. One probable reason, perhaps, for the persistence of initiations is because the institutionalized norms do not find reinforcement from the informal norms of the student body. In relation to this problem, two main hypotheses were set up:

- H₀₁: Fraternity initiations serve no functional purpose.
- H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the attitudes of students who are fraternity members and the attitudes of those who are non-fraternity members regarding fraternity initiations.

These hypotheses were tested by means of a questionnaire which consisted of three parts: a Semantic Differential, a Likert type attitude scale and an open-ended request for any comments which the respondents feel are related to the topic of the research.

The Semantic Differential, developed by Osgood, Tannenbaum, and Suci, is a rating technique to secure a measure of the meaning of certain concepts. This technique works under the hypothesis that the meaning of an object includes not only the obvious denotative meaning which can readily be stated, but also the subtle connotative meanings which an individual finds more difficult to describe. To measure these connotative meanings, an indirect approach is used. Quantitative ratings of an object are secured with respect to a series of bipolar adjectives placed on a seven-point rating scale. The Semantic Differential was used in this study, as a contrast to the Likert-type attitude scale which is a more direct way of securing data about initiations. Thus, with these two techniques, the researcher is able to get a more or less total picture, both directly and indirectly of the subject matter.

The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 92 respondents. Of these, 49 were non-fraternity members and 43 were fraternity members.

The Findings:

The object of the Semantic Differential Test was to determine by means of a seven-point scale, the attitudes of the respondents regarding fraternity initiations. There were sixteen pairs in all, each pair scored from one to seven, then summed up to get the general attitude of the respondent. The highest possible score was 112 and the lowest was 16. High scores (with favorable attitudes towards initiations) were covered by the range of 82 to 112. Middle scorers (indifferent or neutral) were from 41 to 81, and low scorers (with unfavorable attitudes, were from 16 to 40. The results can be summed up by this table:

	HIGH	MIDDLE	LOW
Fraternity members	15	28	0
Non-fraternity members	5	38	6

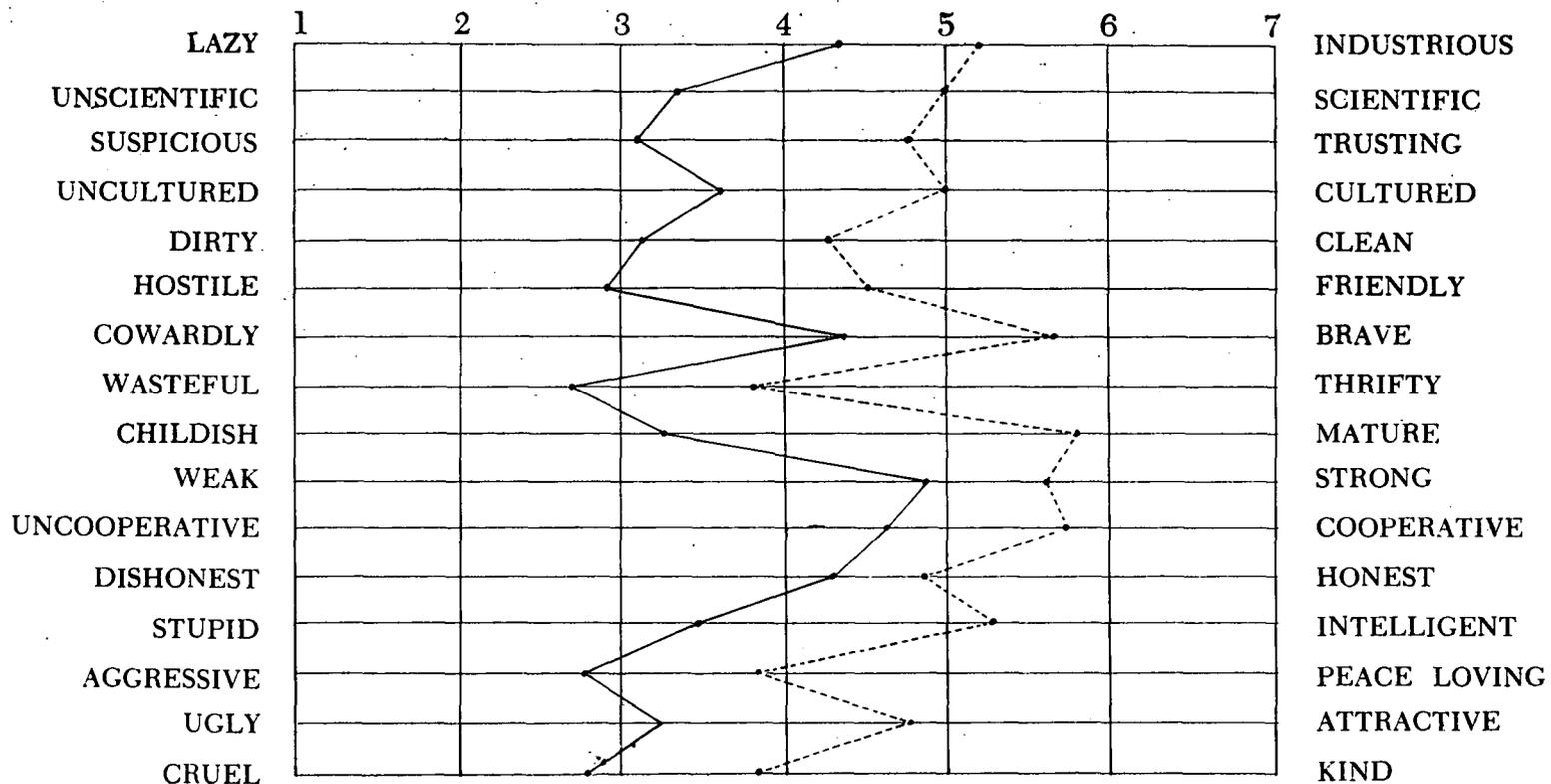
From this table it will be noted that among fraternity members, the range of responses was from the middle to the high scorers, whereas among non-fraternity members, the responses ran all the way. It is apparent that there is a difference between these two groups of students since fraternity members rated initiations more on the favorable side, while non-fraternity members were largely in the middle category, without very strong feelings for or against initiations. To see the results in more detail, item analysis was done to each dichotomy which resulted in this profile. (See graph on p. 90).

All throughout the graph there is no instance wherein fraternity and non-fraternity respondents were congruent in the degree of their answers. In general, the fraternity members were on the unfavorable side, having the highest scores in bravery, maturity, strength, and cooperation. Their lowest scores, which are very slightly unfavorable, are in kindness, thrift, and being peace-loving.

Among the non-fraternity members, the profile was slightly on the unfavorable side and in general followed the pattern of the fraternity members. The only significant discrepancy is found in the dichotomy of childish and mature. Whereas maturity was the highest among the fraternity members, it was nearer to the lower half among the non-fraternity members.

The next part of the questionnaire was the Likert-type attitude scale. This consisted of 16 statements which were to be rated by means of a five-point rating scale. The range of the scale was from strongly agree, agree, indifferent, disagree, to strongly disagree. The same principle as that in the Semantic Differential Test applied—high scorers had favorable attitudes and low scorers had unfavorable

SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL PROFILE



LEGEND:

Profile of respondents who are non-fraternity members: _____

Profile of respondents who are fraternity members: - - - - -

attitudes. The highest possible score was 80 and 16 was the lowest possible score. Scores from 16 to 36 were set as low scorers (with unfavorable attitudes), 37 to 59 were middle scorers (indifferent or neutral). The results, like the Semantic Differential Test, can be summed up by this table:

	HIGH	MIDDLE	LOW
Fraternity members	28	15	0
Non-fraternity members	4	34	11

From this table we again see a discrepancy between the respondents who were fraternity members and the non-fraternity members. The trend is clearer since, again, fraternity members had no rating among the low scorers. The majority were in the high scorers category. Among the non-fraternity members, however, the bulk can be located at the middle scorer category and in general are on the unfavorable end.

To prove the consistency and validity of both tests (Semantic Differential and Likert), the results were subjected to the Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation. For both fraternity members (.809) and non-fraternity members (.842), the correlation was significant at a .05 level of correlation.

Generalizations:

Two hypotheses were set up at the start of the study: (1) that initiations serve no functional purpose; and (2) that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of students who are fraternity members and those who are non-fraternity members regarding initiations. With regard to the second hypothesis, both the Semantic Differential test (6.77) and the Likert attitude scale (5.42) showed significant differences at a .001 level of significance using Fisher's T method. Thus, the second null hypothesis can be safely rejected.

The attitudes of the two groups, although significantly different, were not as different as expected. The fraternity members had very favorable attitudes regarding initiations, whereas the non-fraternity members were neutral and indifferent. These attitudes may perhaps be due to the fact that both groups find that initiations have functions as well as dysfunctions.

Among both the fraternity and non-fraternity members, certain items in the Likert-type attitude scale received favorable or unfavorable ratings, differing only in degree. For instance, items like "cohesiveness in a fraternity is increased by initiations" and "initiations serve to increase discipline in a fraternity" and "loyalty to the fraternity is increased by initiations" brought favorable responses from non-fraternity members and more favorable responses from fraternity members. At the same time, however, the statement that "initiations are cruel" elicited responses of agreement from both groups. The same thing went for the item "initiations allow individuals to bring out their sadistic tendencies." In general, therefore, the respondents agreed that the cruelty of initiations gave rise to some consequences which were beneficial to the organization.

The attitudes and opinions of the respondents are more clearly seen in their comments. The most representative were picked out from both the fraternity and non-fraternity members. According to one fraternity member,

"Initiation is an approach to an individual's way of life. It is a means by which an individual finds a core of challenge to a probable life to come. He is introduced to all the hardships and humiliations that have a similar tinge to a true-to-life approach to ordinary or extraordinary living. Character is shaped and molded to the extent of per-

sonal or solemn sacrifice for a cause and an honorable one!"

From this comment, which is a mere representative of several others, it would seem that the respondents view initiations as a training ground for greater hardships that may beset an individual in his later life.

A more immediate function of initiations would be in relation to the fraternity.

"Initiations are necessary to test the stability of the person under stress, for future utilization of the fraternity."

"Initiations bring out the basic power of withstanding pain of an individual. It could also be the individual's proof of manhood insofar as the capability of taking torture is concerned. But the main reason for initiations is to test the loyalty and the sincere desire of an individual to become part of a distinguished brotherhood of men."

"Initiation is considered a part of the tradition of any fraternity so that it must be done. It determines the degree of the neophyte's determination to enter the fraternity. Once initiated, it creates a certain degree of cohesiveness among the brods."

"Initiations cannot be dispensed with because this is part of the tradition of the fraternity and the spirit that binds the members as it is their common experience."

"Physical initiations should not be abolished! Dissolution of the system will definitely defeat the very essence of the word 'fraternity.'"

"Initiations supplement in the incorporating of policies and prin-

ciples into somebody who seeks entrance."

From the comments, successively quoted, we can gain an insight into the views of fraternity men regarding initiations. First of all, the word fraternity is synonymous in a way to the word initiation. In fact, according to one, it is the "very essence of the word 'fraternity.'" To join a fraternity, therefore, presupposes undergoing some sort of initiation. Secondly, initiations serve as an introduction to the policies of the fraternity. That is, initiations would be a process of socialization for the neophytes. Thirdly, initiations are viewed as part of the heritage, the tradition of the fraternity. It is a ceremony which has been handed down with each incoming batch of neophytes, and therefore, has become an indispensable part of the fraternity. Fourthly, initiations serve as a gauge of the neophyte's desire to enter the fraternity. To undergo certain hardships would constitute a test of the determination of the neophyte to become part of the organization. Fifthly, it tests the stability of the neophyte. Lastly, it serves to bring about a certain degree of cohesiveness and loyalty in the fraternity because of the common experience they all share.

However, even with all these functions, the fraternity members themselves admit that initiations have their own dysfunctions.

"Initiations bring out the best and the worst in man. While it may be cruel and does show inhumanity of many towards others, at times it also shows how others can show sympathy and inculcate understanding of the principles involved."

"Excellent as regards psychological knowledge of human nature.

It brings out what are usually not brought out; e.g., the beast in man as well as the angel in him."

From these comments we see that even fraternity members admit that initiations give vent to sadistic tendencies. However, even admitting this does not make them less in favor of initiations. In fact, they counteract this by saying that it also brings out the best in him. This can be substantiated by the observations of the writer in the sense that the initiations continually ask the neophyte whether they can still take it and more often than not, tears are shed, not by the neophytes, but by the initiators. During the final lap of the initiation ceremonies, when the neophytes are finally accepted, everyone breaks out in tears each one calling the other brother and perhaps forgetting what they had just been through.

Among the non-fraternity members, the comments were varied and went from one extreme to another. On one side fraternity initiations were deemed necessary.

"Without this a fraternity cannot be organized because this is a means by which discipline is increased."

"Initiations are a medium to test the loyalty and morale of the applicant. It should be enforced in a fraternity so that it could maintain its solidarity."

"Initiations are considered part of the activities of an organization. It is deemed important by the members because initiations reveal the interest of an applicant and his willingness to be a part of the organization."

Comparing these comments with those of the fraternity members, it seems as

though the functions of initiations, as viewed by the fraternity members, are more or less similar to those of the non-fraternity members. The only difference is that not a single non-fraternity member mentioned the function of socialization whereas about half of the fraternity members did. This is perhaps, due to the fact that non-fraternity members have the misconception that initiations are limited to physical punishments. Also, most of the comments of non-fraternity members had an additional statement which amounted to saying that initiations, although they are functional, are not the only ways of achieving this.

Among the fraternity members, there was absolutely no mention of extremely dysfunctional consequences, except for cruelty and sadism. The non-fraternity members saw the same results of cruelty and sadism, but in addition said that initiations result in "spoiling" their studies. Still others blamed society and said that "initiations are logical outcomes of the present state of values, morals, and ethics of our rotten and decadent society."

In general, the non-fraternity members regarded initiations as being both functional and dysfunctional, adding that although they attain certain useful ends, there are other means by which these goals can be reached. This statement could probably summarize the attitudes of the non-fraternity members.

"In the present set-up of the University and society, initiations are of importance. In the absence of an ideology that is directed toward the benefit of the human being, initiations serve the purpose of unity and brotherhood of an association. Initiations, however, are not the only means to unity, but they deserve an understanding."

Conclusions:

The two hypotheses which were set up at the start of the study have been rejected. Thus, we can conclude that initiations do serve some functional purpose. Both the fraternity and non-fraternity members agree to this, only that their attitude differ significantly in degree. It is apparent that initiations are not viewed as an extreme form of deviant behavior by the University of the Philippines population.

From the previous statements, it would seem that if we look at initiations from two frames of reference, from the nor-

mative order and from the legal norms, there will arise a non-congruence of the two. It would perhaps be safe to surmise that the practice of initiation persists because the formal norms are not strongly reinforced by the informal norms. For the university to completely abolish initiation ceremonies, therefore, it has to have the backing of the University of the Philippines population especially the student population.

Further research is needed however, in order to verify the findings of this explanatory study, especially in the light of such a recent event as the Tabtab case.

Foster Mothers: Their Responses on the Parent Attitude Research Instrument [PARI] in Relation to their Role Performance*

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Within a closely knit family system like that of the Philippines relatives are at hand to take over the maternal role during the absence or disability of a mother. In spite of this, the Welfareville institutions and private child caring institutions are overcrowded. Children of families that are isolated, physically or psychologically, from relatives find themselves vulnerable to the loss of the substitute mothering that the greater family can provide. Such is the case of the children in these institutions.

On the other hand, however, while we see more children going into institutions and more institutions being established, the adverse effects of institutional life for most children, especially infants and those below school age, have been reported by Bowlby¹ as revealed in studies by a number of pediatricians, psychologists and psychiatrists of other countries. Ill effects on mental and emotional development and physical health and on social functioning in later life have been discerned. The other side of the picture presented evidences of reversal of such ill effects following children's return to

* This study is an abstract of a Master of Arts thesis submitted to the Graduate School, Department of Social Work, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City.

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¹ John Bowlby, *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1962), pp. 15-51.