"BEING A MINORITY IN A MAJORITY SITUATION":

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF BLACK WOMEN IN

HISTORICALLY WHITE GREEK-LETTERED ORGANIZATIONS

by

BARBRE SKWIRA BERRIS

(Under the Direction of Laura A. Dean)

ABSTRACT

The current literature on Greek-lettered organizations mainly focuses on alcohol use, substance abuse, sexual misconduct, and hazing, whereas important but rarely discussed issues of race, constructs of segregated organizations, and cross-racial membership are consistently excluded from research. A review of the literature revealed only a few researchers who directly study cross-racial membership in Greek-lettered organization. The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations at three predominately White institutions within sixty miles of a southeastern metropolitan city. The study also explored the factors influencing the decision of the women to seek membership in the organizations and how they navigated their experience within their organization. Specifically, through this dissertation, the researcher sought to provide insight for higher education professionals addressing issues related to membership diversity within historically White Greek-lettered organizations. Phenomenological methodology was used as the research approach for this dissertation study. The study was grounded within Allport's

(1954/1979) intergroup contact hypothesis. Additionally, critical race theory was utilized

to provide an additional perspective for the discussion. Data analysis followed the

general qualitative study process outlined by Creswell (2008) with an incorporation of

Patton (2002) and Moustakas's (1994) methods. Through in-depth, semi structured

interviews with seven Black women members of historically White Greek lettered

organizations, four themes were identified during the data analysis process: 1) equal

group status, 2) friendship potential, 3) pursuit of common goals through intergroup

cooperation, and 4) support of authorities. The implications for practice and future

research related to the discussion of cross-racial membership in Greek-lettered

organizations were discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Greek Life, Black Women, Historically White Greek-lettered

Organizations, Panhellenic, Phenomenology, Intergroup Contact

Hypothesis, Critical Race Theory, Race

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the people who have loved, guided, supported, motivated, believed in, and challenged me:

My father, Francis Skwira
You are my hero and the wind beneath my wings.

My mother, Gerald Skwira
You are my shoulder to cry on and cheerleader.

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You are the reason I am an educator and now a Doctor.

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You are my strength; you challenge me to be a better person and complete me.

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You make me realize anything is possible.

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You are my everything.

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You know who you are and I thank you.

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"Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it into glory"
Willam Barclay

When I embarked on this journey, I knew it would be hard; however, I never

considered how hard. I never realized the highs, lows, good times, bad times, wins,

challenges, smiles, and tears I would encounter. I never thought that I could ever be

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The election of President Obama in 2008 demonstrated a significant milestone in the history of America's most sustained domestic problem, racism (Pettigrew, 2009). Individuals across the country believed this election was a demonstration of the progress the United States has made in civil rights (Gusa, 2010). The election, combined with people's belief that racism and segregation in America has seriously declined or vanished completely, confirmed to many people that the United States reached a "post-racial" or "color-blind" era, through an equitable society (Gusa, 2010; Hughey, 2010; Wingfield & Feagin, 2010). For social justice educators, this could not be further from the truth. Regardless of these significant changes in society, systemic, substantial, and racialized oppression has been sustained in multiple arenas, including on college campuses across the country (Feagin, 2006, Gusa, 2010; Hughey, 2010). The denial of present day racism and oppression and misperception of a "post-racial" society ignores the continual reality of racial hostility and discrimination in various realms of our country, including one area specific to this study, higher education (Gusa, 2010).

Today's undergraduate college population of approximately 20 million students [at four year institutions] in the United States is representative of individuals from different countries, ages, sexual orientations, gender identities, and racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). However, while institutions of higher education have experienced a demographic

shift towards greater racial and ethnic diversity in their student population, Black students remain underrepresented in higher education at only 14.9% of this population compared to 60.3% for White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013; Thompson, Gorin, Obeidat, & Chen, 2006). Growing rates of Black students are enrolling in college, especially at predominately White institutions; yet, their college graduation rates are not experiencing the same increase and remain significantly lower than their White counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). In 2011, of the 1,602,480 bachelors degrees granted, 1,167,499 (72.9%), were earned by White students while only 164,844 (10.3%) were earned by Black students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

The difference in graduation rates can be attributed to number of obstacles and challenges Black undergraduate students at predominately White institutions across the country face on campuses (Grier-Reed, 2010; McClure, 2006; Woldoff, Wiggins, & Washington, 2011). To be successful, they must learn to adapt to a campus environment "largely run by Whites [faculty, staff, and administration] for Whites [students]" (Sedlacek, 1987, p. 539) that can be racist, discriminatory, and exclusionary towards their needs (Woldoff et al., 2011). For them, the environments of these institutions are often alienating and socially isolating (McClure, 2006). They find the campus climate racially unsupportive and unconcerned with their needs and desires (Woldoff et al., 2011). Black students experiences are typically more negative (Grier-Reed, 2010); they often feel a disconnection with their White faculty (Guiffrida, 2005), have mistrust of their institution (Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, & Stanley, 2007), and face greater attrition rates than their White counterparts (Woldoff et al., 2011).

A critical factor in the retention and success of Black students at predominately White institutions is linked with their experience with the campus social environment (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Astin, 1985; Grier-Reed, 2010; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Watkins et al., 2007). Unfortunately, the social environment for Black students is not always welcoming, integrated, or void of racial hostility and discrimination. In an examination of the Black male student experience, Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, and Stanley (2007) found participants face stress related to acceptance and finding adequate social support. As one Black male undergraduate shared, "the [predominately White institution educational] system was designed for what they call the majority to excel . . . it's not blatantly against [minorities] but it doesn't facilitate the advancement of minorities" (Wallace & Bell, 1999, p. 310).

Thompson (2000) found that Black students who mentioned issues of racism and prejudice are "frequently embedded in the culture of the university, whether it is in the school newspaper, in classes, or at social and Greek affiliated functions" (p. 135). College student organizations, including Greek-lettered social organizations, rarely exhibit a demographic composition reflective of the college population and often remain segregated (Bullins, 2003; Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; Hughey, 2010; Park, 2012), thus, limiting or prohibiting the involvement of Black students in these activities. This racial discrimination and segregation has been reported as a major cause for the high attrition rate of Black students matriculating at predominantly White colleges and universities (Stovall, 2005). It is important for administrators and educators within higher education to understand these challenges and proactively work to promote the adjustment, success,

support, retention, and enhancement of the college experience (Grier-Reed, 2010; Newsome, 2009; Watkins et al., 2007).

Recently, college campuses have begun to strategize about how to better serve the needs of their diverse students to ensure a supportive social environment (Greer-Reid, 2009; Newsome, 2009). In relation to this dissertation, one important strategy has included initiatives to achieve diverse membership in historically racially divided Greek-lettered organizations on American college campuses (Hughey, 2009; Newsome, 2009; Park, 2012). Research says that historically White Greek-lettered organizations set the tone of campus life (Horowitz, 1987), so initiatives to promote diversifying these organizations are important to achieve a more inclusive campus environment (Hughey, 2009, Newsome, 2009; Park, 2012).

Researchers, administrators, and educators claim the Greek system is not reflective of the racial, ethnic, and diversity characteristics of today's general student population (Bynes, 2005). While the official exclusionary policies of Greek-lettered organizations no longer exist, these organizations remain racially divided due to a laissez-faire approach with an already entrenched pattern of segregation (Hughey, 2009). These organizations, especially those that are historically White, are often seen as racist, homophobic, elitist, non-accepting, and unwelcoming toward people who have apparent differences (Bynes, 2005; Newsome, 2009). Disparagement exists over the exclusionary, sexist, and discriminatory practices utilized to create Greek-lettered organizations. Over the last twenty years, researchers have claimed their existence contradicts any promotion of diversity, inclusion, and social justice (Kuh, Pascarella & Wechsler, 1996; Newsome, 2009). This criticism is further supported by documented research on historically White

Greek-lettered organizations about their ethnocentric, prejudiced, and exclusionary practices, encouragement of homogeneity, and discouragement of interactions across differences (Hughey, 2010; Laird, 2005; Muir, 1991; Newsome, 2009; Park, 2012; Schmitz & Forbes, 1994; Sidanius, van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2004; Torbenson & Parks, 2009).

Historically White Greek-lettered organizations have sought to remove this barrier by accepting students of color in an effort to embrace other cultures and diminish racial acts and intolerance (Hughey, 2007; Whaley, 2009). The removal of this barrier creates "cross-racial membership," defined as when a student seeks membership in an organization predominantly composed of members different than their own race (Hughey, 2007). This results in a blurring of the White/Black Greek dichotomy and the deep-rooted boundaries in previous racially homogeneous Greek organizations (Hughey, 2007). By embracing cross-racial membership, these groups have been characterized as taking a "transformative step toward equity and unity" (Hughey, 2010, p. 653).

There are many factors that influence the decision of students of color who seek to join a predominately White Greek-lettered organization (Newsome, 2009; Thompson, 2000). It is important to understand why some students decide to traverse the color line, while others accept it. Either choice can impact a student's experience and identity in college (Hughey, 2007). The current literature on Greek-lettered organizations mainly focuses on alcohol use, substance abuse, sexual misconduct, and hazing, whereas important but rarely discussed issues of race, constructs of segregated organizations, and cross-racial membership have had very little attention (Hughey 2010; Newsome, 2009). A review of this literature reveals only a few researchers who directly study cross-racial

membership in Greek-lettered organization (Hughey, 2006/2007/2009/2010; McClure, 2006; Newsome, 2009; Park, 2008, 2012; Sargent, 2012; Seetharaman, 2007; Thompson, 2000; Tillar, 1974).

In 1955, Greek life scholar Alfred Lee suggested that the future of the Greek system was dependent upon its diversification (Lee, 1955). For him, "the crucial problem facing men's and women's fraternities is not scholarship or hazing or wild parties but self-segregation and segregation on the basis of race, ethnic origin, and religion" (Lee, 1955, p. 8). He believed that, although institutions cannot legislate bias and prejudice out of people, it was the responsibility of the student population to disrupt the patterns of campus segregation and homogeneity to increase racial diversity on campus (Lee, 1955). 60 years later, Lee's thoughts remain valid. Therefore, as American higher education institutions continue to experience racial and ethnic diversification within their student bodies, the issue of diversity within Greek organizations will continue to be prevalent; thus, the research by Greek life scholars on the subject of race and cross-racial membership must be continued (Chang, 1996; Hughey, 2010; McClure, 2006; Newsome, 2009; Seetharaman, 2007; Thompson, 2000).

Most recently, Newsome (2009) investigated cross-racial membership in her study on the Black male experience in historically White Greek-lettered fraternities. The purpose of this study is to further the work of Newsome (2009) to describe the experiences of Black women in predominately White Greek-letter organizations. This study will also identify and explore other factors influencing decisions for women to seek membership into these organizations and barriers they face.

Statement of the Problem

Historically White and Black Greek-lettered organizations still exist on campus. This separation continues to define the campus social environment (Sargent, 2012). Despite this division, there are students who decide to traverse the color line and historically defined racial boundaries by joining Greek-lettered organizations comprised of a majority of individuals with dissimilar racial identities to their own (Hughey, 2010; Newsome; 2009; Sargent, 2012). What motivates these individuals to make that decision, what challenges will they face as a result, and how do they describe their experiences in the organization?

With extremely limited research in this area, I determined further inquiry into this topic was important as Greek-lettered organizations can provide a unique social context to examine racial dynamics. Due to the background of historically White Greek-lettered organizations as racist, homophobic, elitist, non-accepting and unwelcoming toward people who are visually different (Bynes, 2005; Newsome, 2009), the participation and research of students of color in such organizations could provide beneficial information on race relations within higher education (Newsome, 2009). In the recommendations section of her research, Newsome identified the need to continue her investigation of the experiences of Black men in White fraternities with a study on the experience of women. This study was conducted to be the continuation of that research.

Purpose of the Study

Utilizing a phenomenological methodology approach grounded in the intergroup contact hypothesis and critical race theory, the purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations at three

predominantly White institutions. These college campuses were located within sixty miles of a southeastern metropolitan city. Through a thorough examination of the participant's responses to the research questions, I identified and explored the factors influencing these women's decision to seek membership in the organizations and how they navigated their experience. Specifically, I sought to provide insight for higher education professionals addressing issues related to membership diversity within historically White Greek-lettered organizations.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQs) guided this study:

RQ1: What pre-collegiate background factors influenced the decision of Black women to seek membership in historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

RQ2: What collegiate factors or anticipated benefits influenced the decision of Black women to seek membership in historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

RQ3: How do Black women describe their experience within their historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

RQ4: How do Black women navigate their experience in historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

Overview of Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand the membership experiences of Black women who choose to affiliate with historically White Greek-lettered organizations and their reasons for joining. In the early 1990's, Attinasi and Nora (1992) cited that research on social Greek-lettered organizations is often only quantitative in nature. Over twenty

years later, a review of the literature on this topic demonstrates there continues to be a lack of a first-person, narrative exploration of the experience of students in Greek-lettered organizations. As a result, a qualitative research method is necessary because it can provide us first-hand data through each participant's perspective. Because this study is based on the actual experiences of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations, the use of a phenomenological approach was determined best suited for this study to document this first-person perspective.

Design

Phenomenology was selected as the research tradition for this qualitative study. Through reflective in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994), phenomenology allows researchers to explore how participants with a background within a certain phenomenon make sense of their experience (Patton, 2002). By asking participants to describe this experience, phenomenology seeks to hear the voices of each participant and then describe that experience in those individual's words (Creswell, 2007; DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004, Moustakas, 1994).

For this study, I created an environment to allow participants to retrospectively reflect through the interview process on their experience as a member of a historically White Greek-lettered organization (van Manen, 1990). Each interview was focused on understanding the lived experience from their perspective, which is a central element of the phenomenological approach (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004). To remain consistent with phenomenology, I could not assume to know what experiences mean to their participants. Instead, I gained access into the world of the participants to develop an understanding of the meaning the women give to their experiences within their organization.

Description of the Sites

This study occurred at three private universities in the southeastern United States. These three universities were selected due to the diversity of their student populations and student willingness to participate in the study. By including three different institutions, the study was designed to increase the generalizability of the research findings.

Participant Selection

For this study, the following criteria were used to select participants: (1) the participant must be at least 18 years old; (2) be enrolled as an undergraduate student at one of the three site institutions; (3) identify as a Black woman; and (4) be an initiated member of a sorority affiliated with the National Panhellenic Conference, the governing body of the 26 historically White women's Greek-lettered organizations. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study. Participant recruitment was completed through a collaborative relationship between myself and the Offices of Fraternity and Sorority Life at each institution. There were seven students interviewed for this study, two from institution one, Alpha University, four from institution two, Beta University, and one from institution three, Gamma University.

Inquiry

A review of the literature informed the study. This study included two avenues for data collection. The primary method for data collection was two individual semi-structured interviews with each participant. These interviews followed a modified version of the phenomenological interview structure created by Dolbeare and Schuman (1982, as cited in Seidman, 2006), with the recommended series of three interviews being

combined into two. I also collected demographic information in the form of a participant information form to assist with contextualizing and analyzing study results (Seidman, 2006). Through the data collection, I focused on investigating the experience as the participants lived it (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). For the study, data analysis followed the general qualitative study process outlined by Creswell (2009) with an integration of components of Patton (2002) and Moustakas's (1994) procedures.

Boundaries of the Study

This study focused on the experiences of seven Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations at three private universities near a metropolitan city in the southeastern United States. The sample, institution type and location provided limitations to the study. Each participant self-selected to be involved in the study. Other Black women at the institutions in these organizations who chose not to participate and could have had different experiences, were not represented. As a result, the findings are based on the experiences of these specific women, so the findings are not representative of all Black females participating in historically White Greek-lettered organizations at these institutions or nationwide. Additionally, the results of this study may have been different if public universities or universities from other regions of the country were included.

Operational Definitions

The following operational definitions provide further clarification of terms used in this study. Unless otherwise noted to remain consistent to previous studies, the definitions are reflective of the definitions utilized in the Newsome (2009) and Sargent (2012) studies:

Bid

An invitation of membership given to a prospective member by a fraternity or sorority.

Black Greek-lettered Organization (BGLO)

Social Greek organizations created by Black students upon denial of membership into existing social Greek organizations during the early 20th century (Whaley, 2009).

Chapter

A distinction to classify a specific sorority or fraternity on a college campus; represents the local chartered group of a national organization which is designated by Greek letters.

Color line

A line of social demarcation that some people maintain between White people and people of color (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2011).

Cross-racial (intergroup, in/out group, interracial)

Relating to, involving, or representing the interactions between different races.

Fraternity

Social and service organizations that exist on college campuses whose membership consists of college men. Membership has to be approved by current members and the national organization. Some sororities also use this term in their name and refer to themselves as women's fraternities.

Greeks

Slang term used when referring to undergraduate students who are members of Greek-letter fraternities and sororities.

Greek-Lettered Organization

A term used when referring to social and service fraternities and sororities on college campuses.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)

Any historically Black college or university established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was the education of Black Americans (U.S. Congress, 1965, in Sargent, 2012).

Initiation

A ceremony in which an individual becomes a full member of a fraternity or sorority.

Legacy

A person whose parent, brother/sister, or grandparent was a member of a fraternity or sorority (National Panhellenic Conference, 2013).

National Panhellenic Conference (NPC)

The umbrella organization and governing association for 26 historically White female Greek-lettered organizations (National Panhellenic Conference, 2013).

National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)

International governing association that represents nine historically Black Greek-lettered organizations; also used to identify the campus level governing body for these organizations (National Pan-Hellenic Council, 2013).

Predominantly White Institution (PWI)

Colleges and universities in which the majority of the student population is composed of White students and has been throughout the history of the institution (Wallace, 1993, in Sargent, 2012).

Recruitment (Rush)

A designated time period in which fraternities and sororities offer individuals an opportunity to seek membership in their organizations and that consists of a formalized mutual selection process.

Sorority

Social and service organizations that exist on college campuses whose membership consists of college women. Membership has to be approved by current members and the national organization.

White Greek-lettered Organizations

Social Greek organizations which have traditionally limited membership to individuals of Caucasian descent (Sargent, 2012).

Conclusion

This chapter presented information regarding the focus of this qualitative phenomenological dissertation. Relevant background information related to the phenomenon studied was discussed. The following chapters examine previous literature as it relates to (a) Black students at predominately White institutions, (b) the history of social Greek-lettered organizations, (c) diversity within Greek-lettered organizations, (d) interracial interaction and friendships, and (e) cross-racial membership within Greek-lettered organizations. Furthermore, gaps in the current literature will be highlighted and discussed. The methodology utilized for this study will be outlined and explained. The final chapters include the findings and discussion of the study, including connections to previous research, implications for practice, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of relevant literature related to the role of race and cross-racial membership in historically White Greek-lettered organizations. To ground the study, best guide the research process, and provide a holistic background and understanding of the subject area, I reviewed relevant literature. From the review of sources, I narrowed the literature down to four significant focus areas that applied to the construct of this study. First, this chapter begins with an overview of research related to the participants, Black students on predominantly White campuses. From this overview, the chapter explores the history of and diversity within Greek-lettered organizations, including factors contributing to the homogeneity of historically White Greek-lettered organizations and the impact of such homogeneity within the organizations. The chapter continues with a discussion of interracial interaction and friendships, including an analysis of the intergroup contact hypothesis and background factors influencing collegiate interracial interactions. The chapter concludes with an examination of cross-racial membership within Greek-lettered organizations, including the reasons students of color seek cross-racial membership and the effects of the cross-racial membership. Throughout the review of literature, the terms intergroup, in/out group, cross-racial, and interracial are used interchangeably depending on the literature to document the interactions between White/Caucasian and Black/African American individuals.

Black Students on Predominantly White Campuses

The presence of racial and ethnic minority students within institutions of higher education has dramatically increased within the past 30 years (Hoover, 2013). Today's college population at four-year institutions consists of approximately 18 million students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013), representative of individuals from different countries, ages, sexual orientations, gender identities, and racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Based on the *Knocking at the Door* report released by the College Board (2012), by the year 2020, minority students will account for 45 percent of the nation's public high-school graduates, a seven percent increase from 38 percent in 2009. In turn, the number of students of color enrolling in colleges and universities will continue to increase (Hoover, 2013). This increase, reflecting the rapidly changing makeup of the United States population, will impact growing demands for greater access to postsecondary education for students of color across the country (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2009).

However, while institutions of higher education have experienced a demographic shift toward greater racial and ethnic diversity in their student enrollment and population over the last several decades, certain racial/ethnic minority groups remain underrepresented in higher education (Thompson, Gorin, Obeidat, & Chen, 2006). Specifically, Black/African American and Hispanic students are proportionally underrepresented and have a lower five-year graduation/completion rate than White and Asian students (Thompson, et al., 2006). Furthermore, research has documented that the process of adapting to the college milieu, especially a predominately White institution,

provides distinct challenges to Black students (Chavous, 2000; Cole & Jacob Arriola, 2007; Grier-Reed, 2010; McClure, 2006; Woldoff, Wiggins, & Washington, 2011).

Existing literature suggests the environment of a collegiate campus serves as a significant influence on the experience and outcomes of a student (Museus, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). More specifically, a critical factor in the retention and success of Black students at predominately White institutions is linked to an individual's experience of the campus social environment (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Astin, 1985; Grier-Reed, 2010; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, & Stanley, 2007). Yet unfortunately, the social environment for Black students is not always welcoming or void of racial hostility and discrimination, partially due to a reduced social support network (McDonald & Vrana, 2007). Evidence documents that the cultures of predominately White institutions can be problematic for these students because of the messages of unimportance, devaluation, and exclusion conveyed to such students (Museus, 2008). They also must balance developing a stance toward other Black students, Black culture, and social organizations while establishing a level of comfort in their interactions with White students (Cole & Jacob Arriola, 2007). These challenges are typically handled by Black students in different ways, "varying in the degree to which they identify with other Blacks and take part in Black social and cultural life and in the extent to which they feel at ease and even fluent in the majority culture" (Cole & Jacob Arriola, 2007, p. 380).

For Black students who experience these barriers, institutional subcultures can be a critical and important factor in success at the institution and their ability to find membership on the campus (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus, 2008). Kuh and Love (2000)

outlined factors delineating the role of campus cultures in college student persistence. They believed that persistence is inversely related to the distance between a student's cultures of origin, including the culture of a student's precollege experiences, and cultures of immersion, or the culture of the campus (Kuh & Love, 2000). They also believe that students not from the dominant culture of their campus had a choice upon arriving at their institution, to acclimate to the dominant culture or to seek membership in a subculture (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus, 2008).

One type of subculture employed by many students of color involves the formation of counterspaces. Counterspaces are defined as "sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained" (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 70), with other same-race peers who share similar life experiences and racial affinity (Thompson, et al., 2006). Counterspaces promote bonding between students with similar racial and cultural backgrounds and experiences (Thompson, et al., 2006); provide sanctuaries for Black students to make sense of their campus experience and find support, affirmation, and validation for the potential negative experiences they may face within a predominately White institution (Grier-Reed, 2010; Solorzano et al., 2000); and allow students to express concerns and frustrations with each other about their experiences with racism and discrimination. These spaces can also serve to offset the racist and other oppressive ideologies and practices of the institution community in environments where Black students are the demographic minority (Thompson, et al., 2006).

Besides counterspaces, Black students may seek to become involved in the dominant culture by joining campus organizations (Museus, 2008), including student

government association, athletics, and Greek-lettered organizations. Of particular interest to this study is the research documenting predictors of Black students' organizational involvement in the dominant culture at predominately White institutions (Chavous, 2000). Chavous (2000) found three connections between students' backgrounds and their organizational involvement. First, students who came from neighborhoods with fewer Black individuals or more interracial contact reported being involved in more non-ethnic or cultural activities. Second, students with a lesser sense of fit or perceptions of incompatibility due to their race and/or ethnic background within the institution participated in more racial or ethnic dominated organizations. Third, the strength of a student's ethnic identification, or racial centrality, is directly related to their organizational involvement. Identification of race as central to an individual's identity correlated with a greater participation in Black organizations, while students who defined race as a less central part of their identity participated in fewer Black organizations (Chavous, 2000).

History of Collegiate Greek-Lettered Organizations

Greek-lettered organizations were founded in the late 1770s during an era of racial injustice. Men and women of African descent were slaves, used as free labor and sexual commodities by White slave owners (Whaley, 2009). In 1776, the first college Greek-lettered organization, Phi Beta Kappa, formed in the United States with a purpose to create an organization on the basis of exclusivity for White, Protestant men (Torbenson, 2009). Centered on the academic achievements of its members, Phi Beta Kappa created the foundation that was emulated by future Greek-lettered organizations (Binder, 2003; Brown, Parks & Phillips, 2005; Rudolph, 1962). This foundation included

Greek letters to represent their name; a set of values and principles; a motto; a secret ritual, sign, password and handshake; an initiation ritual; and exclusionary practices for membership (Brown et al., 2005; Gregory, 2003; Newsome, 2009; Torbenson, 2009).

During the 1820s and 1830s, undergraduate males sought to further the values of Phi Beta Kappa to include a tertiary byproduct, brotherhood and friendship, and redefine the student social experience at American colleges (Rudolph, 1962; Torbenson, 2009). This resulted in the birth of the social fraternal movement through the creation of Greek-lettered organizations called fraternities (Brown et al., 2005; Gregory, 2003; Newsome, 2009), beginning in 1824 with the creation of the Chi Phi Fraternity. Built on a similar foundation and principles as Phi Beta Kappa, social fraternities were also founded on the qualities of justice, truth, loyalty, honor, love, and service (Brown et al., 2005; Gregory, 2003; Newsome, 2009). Their initial goals generally included maintaining high standards of scholarship, perpetuating brotherhood, striving for excellence as an individual, developing leadership qualities, and for some organizations, participating in service activities at school and in the community (Torbenson, 2009). Fraternal organizations often appealed to wealthy White males to provide them with a sense of exclusiveness (Gregory, 2003).

During the turn of the nineteenth century, to demonstrate their commitment to segregation, fraternal organizations started to include specific exclusionary policies in their constitutions and membership practices (Hughey, 2007; Sidanius, van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2004; Torbenson, 2009). Due to their forced exclusion from fraternities, as women, students of color, and other individuals representing various ethnic and religious backgrounds began to gain access to formerly all-White institutions, new types of Greek

organizations were formed to provide social opportunities for these individuals (Binder, 2003; Brown et al., 2005; Newsome, 2009). For White women, this created the Greek sorority movement. Initially, early women's organizations were established as fraternities, a term meaning brotherhood. In 1874, without an exact Greek word for sisterhood, Dr. Frank Smalley a Latin professor at Syracuse University and an advisor to Gamma Phi Beta created a word to represent female Greek organizations, "sorority"; as a result, many present day organizations still use the word "fraternity" in their name to recognize their early foundations (Owen, 1991; Newsome, 2009).

Determining the first established sorority is a continual debate (Newsome, 2009). By date, Alpha Delta Pi, established in 1851 at Wesleyan Female College, is the oldest. However, because it was initially established as an Adelphian Literary Society and not as a Greek-lettered organization, Pi Beta Phi founded in 1867 under the name I.C. Sorosis at Monmouth College claims to be the first modern national fraternal organization for women. Yet, as the first organization to be founded as a Greek-lettered organization and use Greek letters for their name, Kappa Alpha Theta founded in 1870 at DePauw University regards itself as the first women's fraternity (Owen, 1991; Singer & Hughey, 2003; Newsome, 2009, Torbenson, 2009). Today, these three organizations along with 23 other sororities constitute the National Panhellenic Council. Founded in 1902, the National Panhellenic Council is the governing umbrella for all 26 historically White Greek-lettered organizations (National Panhellenic Council, 2013).

As had been true for the women, as Black students remained excluded from Greek-lettered organizations, they understood that to be a part of a Greek-lettered organization they would have to form their own organizations; thus, the founding of

national collegiate historically Black Greek-lettered organizations began in 1906 with

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated at Cornell University. Sigma Pi Phi, formed in

1904, is considered the first Black Greek-lettered organization; however, because it was

founded for college and professionally educated African Americans and not for students

in college, Alpha Phi Alpha is often referenced as the first (Kimbrough, 2003). Two

years later in 1908, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated at Howard University

became the first Black sorority (Brown et al., 2005; Kimbrough, 2003; Newsome, 2009).

These organizations were formed to fight the racism, discrimination, and

numerous social injustices faced by Black individuals. They sought to mimic many of

the components of historically White Greek-lettered organizations while integrating their

own racial identity and cultural heritage, as well as an awareness of social and political

issues they faced (Kimbrough, 2003). Historically Black Greek-lettered organizations

provided Black students with "an outlet that fostered brotherhood and sisterhood during

the pursuit of social change, justice, and equality for Black students and the Black

community" (Newsome, 2009, p. 29). Currently there are nine historically Black Greek

organizations, referred to as the "Divine Nine," who belong to the Black collegiate

umbrella organization, The National Pan-Hellenic Council (Whaley, 2009). Out of these

nine organizations, there are five fraternities: Alpha Phi Alpha, Iota Phi Theta, Kappa

Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, and Phi Beta Sigma and four sororities: Alpha Kappa Alpha,

Delta Sigma Theta, Sigma Gamma Rho, and Zeta Phi Beta (Brown et al., 2005;

Kimbrough, 2003; Newsome, 2009; Whaley, 2009).

To ensure White and Black Greek-lettered organizations remained segregated,

documentation shows that by 1928, more than half of the national historically White

Greek-lettered organizations had specific written rules and regulations to exclude

individuals seeking membership on the basis of race and religious affiliation (Brown et

al., 2005; Kimbrough, 2003; Sidanius et al., 2004). These discriminatory practices

included Blackballing, a concept where an organization controlled the actions of an

individual and their friendship choices by alienating the individual and potentially

removing them from membership within the organization if their actions drifted from the

norm of exclusion (Lee, 1955). Additionally alumni and national organizations often

used threats to ensure chapters adhered to discriminatory practices, such as withdrawing

recognition and/or financial support if minority members were provided invitations

membership into the organization (Lee, 1955).

By the mid-1950s, formal racial and religious exclusionary policies were

challenged with the White Greek-lettered organizations due to the Civil Rights

movement, and by the end of the 1970s, as a result of several lawsuits, all such

exclusionary entrance requirements were officially eliminated (Hughey, 2010; Sidanius et

al., 2004; Torbenson, 2009). Nevertheless, research shows that regardless of the removal

of such policies, ethnocentrism, generalized prejudice, and the symbolic boundary of the

Black versus White color line still remain within these organizations. One scholar,

Alfred Lee, foreshadowed this divide in his belief that "the abolition of restrictive clauses

is merely a first step; it ignores other means for maintaining restrictive practices. It may

remove an obstacle; it does not promote integration" (Lee, 1955, p. 14).

However, over sixty years after the landmark Supreme Court decision of Brown

v. Board of Education in 1954, which outlawed the separate but equal doctrine in public

education segregation, Greek-lettered organizations remain predominately racially

segregated despite the removal of formal exclusion polices (Hughey, 2010; Torbenson, 2009; Whaley, 2009).   Today, there are over 350 nationally recognized Greek-lettered organizations on college campuses across America, each with its own ethnic, cultural, service, and socially oriented customs (Torbenson, 2009). They differ based on their membership requirements, personal and academic interests, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, and socioeconomic status (Newsome, 2009). However, they share in the promotion of brotherhood and sisterhood, scholarship, leadership opportunities, and community service involvement, which allow Greek-lettered organizations to serve as a family and home away from home for many students during their collegiate experience (Binder, 2003, Brown et al., 2005; Gregory, 2003; Newsome, 2009).

Diversity within Greek-lettered Organizations

The exclusionary policies and discrimination practices of historically White Greek-lettered organizations required Black students to create their own separate organizations (Binder, 2003; Brown et al., 2005; Bynes, 2005; Kimbrough, 2003; Newsome, 2009). This, combined with the racial isolation and social barriers Black students faced at predominately White institutions, instilled a need for an outlet with similar individuals who shared not only common goals and ideals but also skin color (Brown et al., 2005; Kimbrough, 2003; Newsome, 2009). As student interest in White fraternal organizations grew, so did the growth of historically Black Greek-lettered organizations, thus creating the separate but equal dichotomy of Black versus White fraternal organizations (Brown et al., 2005; Bynes, 2005; Kimbrough, 2003; Newsome, 2009). However, Tucker (1983) argued that a dichotomy could not be separate but still

equal and believed it was not in the best interest of the fraternal movement, higher education institutions, or the larger society.

To blur the Black/White dichotomy of the organizations, historically White Greek-lettered organizations attempted to integrate. In addition to lawsuits mentioned above, desegregation of historically White Greek-lettered organizations can be attributed to two scenarios. First, some chapters were forced to change their practices by their national organizations or the institution administration. Second, after some chapters were prevented by their national organizations from voluntarily desegregating, these chapters were forced to abide by the decision of the national organization until it was reversed or disaffiliate from their national organizations and constitutions (Hughey, 2009). In spite of this, invitations for membership began to extend across the color line from historically White Greek-lettered organizations to students of color on various campuses (Hughey, 2010; Newsome, 2009; Tillar, 1974). However, due to potential ostracism and criticism from their Black peers, many Black students declined membership invitations in favor of historically Black Greek-lettered organizations (Tillar, 1974).

As a result, even with the removal of formal policies regarding membership and laws prohibiting *de jure* (imposed by law) membership bias and exclusion based upon race within United States higher education institutions and their corresponding Greek-lettered organizations, racial separation prevails *de facto* (imposed by fact although not required by law) (Hughey, 2010). Greek-lettered organizations continue to practice informal segregation (the observed pattern of segregation between groups in spite of the absence of legally enforced intergroup boundaries [Dixon & Durrheim, 2003]) through custom, tradition, preference, member bias, and a lack of ethnic and racial diversity

(Hughey, 2007; Maisel, 1990; Whipple, Baier & Grady, 1991). At institutions across the county, the racial makeup of the majority of participants in Greek life remains the race that created Greek organizations in 1776, White students, and the Greek system remains racially separated along a White/Black dichotomy (Brown et al., 2005; Bynes, 2005; Hughey, 2006; Kimbrough, 2003; Newsome, 2009; Park, 2008; Torbenson, 2009; Whaley, 2009). Furthermore, historically White Greek-lettered organizations continue to discriminate informally, especially in the southern part of the United States where the largest population of Greek participants is located (Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; Hughey, 2007; Park, 2008).

This continued informal segregation and discrimination has led to a tremendous amount of criticism against Greek-lettered organizations (Kuh, Pascarella & Wechsler, 1996, Maisel, 1990; Malaney, 1990; Newsome, 2009). Researchers, administrators, and educators claim the Greek system is not reflective of the racial, ethnic, and diversity characteristics of today's very diverse general student population (Bynes, 2005). Disparagement exists over the exclusionary, sexist, and discriminatory practices utilized to create Greek-lettered organizations, as it is believed their existence contradicts promotion of diversity, inclusion, and social justice by colleges and universities for their students (Kuh et al., 1996; Newsome, 2009). This criticism is supported due to the past and present practices of exclusion of members based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and religion within Greek-lettered organizations. Additionally, the belief that historically White Greek-lettered organizations are racist, homophobic, elitist, non-accepting, and unwelcoming toward people who are visually different further perpetuates this image (Bynes, 2005; Newsome, 2009).

Studies have found opponents of the fraternal movement associate Greek membership with the promotion of superficial interpersonal relationships, racial insensitivity and intolerance, social exclusion, social status distinction, and attitudes of social elitism (Baier & Whipple, 1990; Kuh & Lyons, 1990; Newsome, 2009; Winston & Hughes, 1997). Greek membership also increases the likelihood of individuals only socializing with others of the same background and decreases the chance of meeting and interacting with individuals of diverse races, religions, and ethnicities (Malaney, 1990; Newsome, 2009). Often, historically White Greek-lettered organizations "perform acts that re-secure the oppressive social relations of late capitalism through their reproduction and valorization of racism, sexism, homophobia, and class domination as acceptable modes of social behavior" (Hughey, 2006, p. 11). Furthermore, documented cases exist of the encouragement of members to possess attitudes of social elitism and to protect the identity of their organization by avoiding social contact with people from different backgrounds (Bair & Whipple, 1990; Marlowe & Auvenshirne, 1982; Newsome, 2009). Continued incidents involving hate crimes, acts of intolerance, discrimination, and racism towards students of color by historically White Greek-lettered organizations only further contribute to these claims and the negative perception of Greek life (Bynes, 2005). As a result, higher education educators and administrators often question the value of the Greek experience for students and the collegiate institution and demand reform (Brown et al., 2005; Newsome, 2009).

However, studies have found that many other college student organizations also do not exhibit a comparable demographic composition to their institution (Bullins, 2003; Chang & DeAngelo, 2002). Consequently individuals question why Greek life receives a

majority of the scrutiny concerning the racial makeup of their organizations, as some individuals believe it is not the responsibility of the organizations to ensure equal representation. As others believe it is unacceptable for fraternities and sororities to remain racially segregated, a debate remains on whether it is necessary for Greek-lettered organizations to mirror the institution's demographics (Lee, 1955; Newsome, 2009). Regardless of the debate, "moral conscience requires individuals to ensure racism is not the deciding factor regarding membership" (Newsome, 2009, p. 39).

Difference between White and Black Greek-lettered Organizations

To understand the discourse of diversity and cross-racial membership in Greek-lettered organizations, it is important to outline the distinguishing characteristics between historically White Greek-lettered organizations and Black Greek-lettered organizations (Hughey, 2007). Studies have found that despite utilizing Greek letters for their names and both organizations being social groups, there are differences outside of skin color between the two groups regarding the purpose, visible culture, membership commitment, collegiate experience, and intake/ recruitment processes (Berkowitz & Padavic, 1999; Kimbrough, 2003; McClure, 2006; Stains, 1994; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001; Whipple et al., 1991; Whipple, Crichlow, & Click, 2008).

Research documents that historically White and Black Greek-lettered organizations were created for different purposes based on the different constituencies in each group (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). Due to their exclusion from historically White Greek-lettered organizations, Black students understood that to be a part of a Greek-lettered organization they would have to form their own organizations (Kimbrough, 2003). These organizations were formed to meet the unique needs of Black students and

to fight the racism, discrimination, and numerous social injustices they faced. They provided an outlet and sense of belonging for Black students facing difficulty adjusting to life on a predominately White campus (McKenzie, 1990). They also sought to mimic many of the components of historically White Greek-lettered organizations while integrating their own racial identity and cultural heritage, as well as an awareness of social and political issues they faced. Lastly, unlike the focus of historically White Greek-lettered organizations to provide purpose for its members only, the experience offered by historically Black Greek-lettered organizations provides value for not only their members, but also the Black community at large (Kimbrough, 2003).

Another difference between historically White and Black Greek-lettered organizations is in the visible culture, defined as the artifacts presented to others to showcase the organization (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). While there are no specific traditions that make historically White Greek-lettered organizations significantly different from historically Black Greek-lettered organizations, the Black organizations have additional artifacts that stem from African roots (Whipple, Crichlow, & Click, 2008). The customs and traditions include new member lines, line jackets, audible calls, hand signals, stepping, strolling, calls, and the pledge process (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001; Whipple et al., 2008).

A third distinguishing characteristic involves differing viewpoints on the membership commitment within their organizations. Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) confirmed McKee (1987) and Whipple, Baier, and Grady's (1991) findings that Black members viewed their membership to be a lifelong commitment, whereas White members believed membership was only a part of college. In turn, even though both

organizations profess the concept of lifelong membership, alumni of collegiate historically Black Greek-lettered organizations remain more active post-graduation than their White alumni counterparts (McKee, 1987; Thorsen, 1997; Whipple, et al., 1991).

In regards to their collegiate experiences, the differences between the two organizations continue. Whipple et al. (1991) found White Greek students demonstrate less value and importance on academics than Black Greek students and suggest that Black Greek students are likely to be superior academically with their desire for high achievement. Stains (1994) found historically Black Greek-lettered organizations devote as many as five times the amount of service hours to their communities than their White counterparts, which contributes to the perception that historically Black Greek-lettered organizations are more service-oriented. McKenzie (1990) concluded Black students prefer to demonstrate their leadership through service activities within the local community rather than within their college campus. Lastly, the social objectives of both organizations vary, as historically Black Greek-lettered organizations often provide a social setting for members and non-members (an important outlet for members of the Black community at predominately White institutions), while historically White Greek-lettered organizations typically limit their activities to their members and other members of the Greek community (McClure, 2006; McKee, 1987; Whipple et al., 1991).

The most notable difference between the two types of organizations involve the membership intake and recruitment process. Whipple et al. (1991) found students interested in becoming a member of a historically Black Greek-lettered organization are less likely to join during their freshman year, with almost 90% of the participants joining during their sophomore or junior year, compared to the 81% of White students who

joined their organization during their freshman year. Once interested, students wishing to seek membership into a historically White or Black Greek-lettered organization experience differ vastly.

Historically White Greek-lettered organizations utilize a more publicized route than their counterparts. Recruitment is a highly advertised, formalized process lasting for between one and two weeks. Interested individuals visit each organization to learn about the history and purpose and to gain an understanding of what membership within the group would be like. At the conclusion of recruitment, decisions for membership are based on a mutual selection process where both interested individuals and current members have input on whether someone receives a bid, or invitation, to join the organization (Association for Fraternity and Sorority Advisors, 2013).

Recruitment for historically Black Greek-lettered organizations is a more extended process called intake. During intake, a process that can last anywhere from a month to a year, individuals directly contact certain organizations in which they are interested to learn about the group's membership requirements. The process for gaining membership into the organization is often confidential and consists of, but is not limited to, informational meetings, an application process, and an interview. Once selected, individuals complete an educational process. Upon successful completion of this, an individual is officially offered membership into the organization (Association of Fraternity and Sorority Advisors, 2013). Unlike historically White Greek-lettered organizations where a member pledges an organization and then completes education, members of historically Black Greek-lettered organizations are educated and then presented to campus as members (Association of Fraternity and Sorority Advisors, 2013).

Factors Contributing to the Homogeneity of White Greek-lettered Organizations

Research on predominately White institutions across the country has found that students of color are unlikely to become involved in student organizations or engage in activities with White students (Hughey, 2007; Stearns, Buchanan, & Bonneau, 2009; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). Findings document that even though more students of color are participating in historically White organizations at predominately White institutions, ethnic and cultural student organizations are their primary form of involvement (Stearns et al., 2009; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). This finding is currently demonstrated within the Greek system, as historically White and Black Greek-lettered organizations remain heavily segregated (Hughey, 2007; Park, 2008; Torbenson, 2009; Whaley, 2009). While official Greek racial discrimination technically ceases to exist with the elimination of exclusionary policies, many forces remain that act to maintain discrimination, including status quo racial homogeneity, which inhibits individuals from crossing the color line and joining an organization with members of a different race (Hughey, 2007).

To explain the homogeneity of the Greek system and why Greek organizations are segregated, Schmitz and Forbes (1994) and Park (2008) found White Greek women placed the responsibility for segregation within historically White Greek-lettered organizations on students of color, especially Black students, thus, putting the burden of rationalizing membership on the other, or the outsider (Hughey, 2009). Students in both studies believed that the fault of a divided system largely lies with the women of color who choose not to rush (Park, 2008; Schmitz & Forbes, 1994). Additionally, the studies showed the White Greek women believed that students of color have equal access to all sororities, that segregation did not exist, and that the Panhellenic Council supported

integration (Park, 2008; Schmitz & Forbes, 1994). An Asian American senior female

student participating in the Park (2008) study provided a student's perspective for placing

blame on students of color:

> *I think a lot of the time the Greek system gets judged on diversity that's unfair.*
>
> *The fact is that the Greek system does choose its members, but members also*
>
> *decide to be Greek. I wish that people would look at the demographics of who*
>
> *rushes. Because if you looked at the demographics of who actually goes through*
>
> *the process of rush, the demographics of the house would make more sense. If*
>
> *Asian people don't rush, then chapters can't take Asian people because they*
>
> *never go through the process. And I think that's something—that's probably my*
>
> *biggest pet peeve about people judging the system about discrimination because*
>
> *people always go "oh well, I don't think they'll take me." "Well, did you go*
>
> *through rush?" "Well, no." Well if you didn't go through rush you didn't give*
>
> *any house the chance to accept you or reject you, you know? If it is that way, it's*
>
> *because minorities have made it that way. (p. 116)*

In her findings, Park (2008) challenged this student's reasoning. While she

agreed that if Asian American women do not participate in the recruitment they could not

be chosen, she asserted that the student discounted the fears women of color may have to

participate, including being rejected from the process due to race. Even after the quoted

student recognized that some women did not participate due to feeling self-conscious

about their race, she disregarded this as a legitimate excuse. For her, if the process had

worked for her, she did not understand why it could not work for her peers. She

"discounted race-related reasons that students gave her for not rushing and maintained

that students of color ought to overcome insecurities and rush" (Park, 2008, p. 116).

Blaming the women of color and individual choice rather than the Greek system is a

simple defense for historically White Greek-lettered organizations to remain

homogeneous (Park, 2008).

Besides the displacement of blame on others, White Greek women attributed

comfort, happenstance, and convenience to the segregated nature of Greek life (Park,

2008; Schmitz & Forbes, 1994). Sorority members believed comfort was the primary

reason for selecting a specific sorority, as individuals want to interact with others who

have interests and attributes in common (Schmitz & Forbes, 1994). This defense tactic of

comfort allows racial segregation to appear as a natural, nonracial occurrence and the

way things are done without placing blame on the White students (Hughey, 2009). A

White Greek member elaborated on the feelings of comfort and the resulting color divide,

"*There is the perception that there are Black sororities and White sororities. No one*

wants to cross over. I just do not think that [Black students] are comfortable in that

situation. They do not fit in" (Schmitz & Forbes, 1994, p. 106). Park (2008) furthered

the notion that comfort was attributed to the homogeneity of the organizations, rather

than race, as shown in one student's explanation, "*I feel like it's very open. It doesn't*

really matter what ethnic background you are. I think a lot of it just has to do with how

comfortable you are" (p. 115). As a result, due to the perceptions of mutual comfort in

the Greek system and sorority women finding the most comfort with individuals of their

own race, comfort becomes a strategy and rationale for continued segregation (Park,

2008; Schmitz & Forbes, 1994)

Park's (2008) study also found individual choice and fit as another perceived explanation for why sororities were not more diverse. Similar to the above student's placement of blame on students of color not feeling comfortable enough to join a historically White Greek-lettered organization, another student "acknowledged that there are sororities that may seem more welcoming to different races, but explained such patterns as issues of 'fit' that were more of a matter of personality and not race" (Park, 2008, p. 116). To this student and others interviewed, the membership process was race-neutral and determinate on the fit between the sorority and the person. This demonstrates yet another example of the diminishing of the factor of race with the explanation of individual choice and personal reasons for pursuing and accepting membership in a historically White Greek-lettered organization.

In addition to comfort, individual choice, and fit, Park's (2008) study explored the concept of homophily, how people seek to affiliate with those who share similar backgrounds, within Greek organizations. This concept describes why notions such as comfort and fit become more viable explanations to replace discrimination as to why women of color do not rush a historically White Greek-lettered organization at the same rates as their White counterparts. Humans seek a sense of belonging, which can be found by fostering a community and creating groups with strong bonds where participants share similar traits. This homophily is demonstrated in Malaney's (1990) findings that Greek members socialize with people of the same background and possess a smaller opportunity of meeting and interacting with individuals of different and diverse races, religions, and ethnicities. In turn, often groups do not intentionally attempt to stop the natural flow of self-segregation (Park, 2008). Park (2008) concluded, "race can be a quick proxy for

similarity and familiarity; but in a politically correct world, it is not socially acceptable to suggest that sororities consider race to recruit or exclude," yet her study concludes that Greek-lettered organizations are still in a state where race and racial identity continue to matter (p. 116).

Besides explanations of race-neutrality to showcase Greek participation as an individual choice, the participants of Schmitz and Forbes' (1994) and Park's (2008) studies attributed larger societal or institutional perspectives to rationalize the racial homogeneity present in Greek-lettered organizations. For this rationalization, the participants acknowledged race was an issue within the composition of historically White Greek-lettered sororities, but believed changing the racial composition was beyond the control of the organization and within the higher education institution. In the Park (2008) study, participants attributed the lack of sorority diversity to the lack of their institution's diversity. Through this mindset, the participants were able to "absolve the larger sorority of responsibility for diversifying because of social dynamics beyond the scope of the sorority's control" (Park, 2008, p. 118). However, conversely, Chang and DeAngelo (2002) found that regardless of the demographic makeup of the overall student body of an institution, White students are often overrepresented within Greek-lettered organizations. Furthermore, Greek life remains racially homogeneous at highly diverse institutions across the country (Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; Hughey, 2007; Park, 2008). As a result, White students often shift blame away from themselves to the excluded individuals, the institution, and greater societal demographics for creating a situation that is beyond the power of their historically White Greek-lettered organizations to change (Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; Hughey, 2007; Park, 2008; Schmitz & Forbes, 1994).

Impact of Racial Homogeneity on White Greek-lettered Organizations

Research has demonstrated that the racial homogeneity of Greek organizations has a negative impact on the mindset of its members regarding diversity. Researchers have attributed this impact to the homogeneous makeup of the organizations and the lack of opportunities for White students to interact with people of diverse backgrounds. Each study's findings demonstrate that practices and structures of fraternities and sororities perpetuate an environment that encourages homogeneity and discourages interaction with others outside of one's race, particularly in historically White Greek-lettered organizations (Laird, 2005; Muir, 1991; Park, 2012; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996; Sidanius, Levin, van Laar, & Sears, 2009; Sidanius, et al., 2004; Stearns et al., 2009).

Muir (1991) found, when compared to non-Greeks, fraternity and sorority members on a southern college campus were more opposed to equal rights, held negative stereotypes of Blacks, were overall more racist, and exhibited attitudes that promoted exclusionary values. Muir's findings were confirmed and furthered by Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Terenzini (1996) in their findings that among first year college students, belonging to a White historically organization had a significant negative impact on their acceptance of diversity. Similarly Sidanius, van Laar, Levin, and Sinclair's (2004) and Sidanius, Levin, van Laar, and Sear's (2009) studies showed that membership in historically White Greek-lettered organizations lead their members to oppose an ethnically diverse campus and interracial dating and/or marriage and to demonstrate high levels of symbolic racism and the belief that ethnic organizations promote separatism. Additionally, Sidanius et al. (2004) found that these organizations

foster "somewhat xenophobic, authoritarian, and prejudiced attitudes and values among White students" (p. 107). Laird's (2005) study of college students' experiences with diversity found that involvement in fraternity/sorority activities had a negative effect on a student's openness to diversity and inhibited levels of a student's development during college.

Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau (2009) found that White students who join Greek organizations have a lower proportion of interracial friendships than those who are not affiliated with Greek organizations. Park (2012) confirmed this in her study, demonstrating that students in historically White Greek-lettered organizations are less likely to maintain friendships with people of other races. These findings coincide with the reasoning provided by one White woman in Schmitz and Forbes's (1994) study, "*I can guarantee you that my sorority would never take another colored girl*," to exemplify why women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations allow segregation and exclusion of students of color to occur (p. 106).

Accusations of Discrimination within White Greek-lettered Organizations

Historically White Greek-lettered organizations are often accused of discriminating against students of color. These accusations typically result from the demonstration of racist acts, including racially insensitive theme parties, dressing in "Black face" for social events, making negative racial comments and statements, and barring students of color from membership (Hughey, 2010; Park, 2008; Sidanius et al., 2004; Whaley, 2009). While the effects and consequences of these racist acts are currently not reflected in evidence-based research regarding Greek life, their prevalence

has become more apparent and documented, especially recently, through the news and social media.

Within the last year (while this dissertation was being completed), media headlines included: "*Fraternities: 'A Form of American Apartheid'*" (Sutter, 2015), "*Separate but Unequal in College Greek Life*" (Chang, 2014), "*Racial Segregation Still Rampant in Campus Greek Life*" (Ruggiero, 2014), "*Passive to Powerful: What We can Learn from a Racist Chant*" (Dilbeck, 2015), "*Oklahoma Frat's Racist Chant Highlights the Exclusionary Roots of Greek Life*" (McCoy, 2015), "*Fraternities: Racist and Sexist or Merely Exclusive*" (Knickerbocker, 2015), and "*The Long, Fraught Racial History of American Fraternities*" (Rosenberg, 2015)" Furthermore, according to *USA Today* (March 15, 2015), within a two-year span from 2013-2015, 13 fraternity and sorority chapters across the country were reprimanded for racist-tinged events (and these do not include the undocumented events that did not reach the mainstream media). These events include chapter suspensions and closures from emails containing racially and sexually suggestive language about Black, Indian, and Asian women, hosting racially insensitive theme parties, vandalizing a student residence hall dedicated to campus diversity, and Greek members tying a noose with a version of the Georgia Confederate flag around a statue of the school's first Black student.

These racist acts represent the negative viewpoint some hold of the Greek system as "a sort of apartheid, enabling children from predominately White, upper-middle-class enclaves to safely attend a messily diverse university...without having to mix with those who are different" (Right, 1999, para. 42). Furthermore, such acts perpetuate a system segregated by race, money, and power that many members do not find surprising or

alarming and are often unwilling to challenge (Sutter, 2015). However, even with previous documentation of racial incidents, ultimately in March of 2015, a nine second YouTube video provided a glimpse into the reality of the culture of Greek life and finally sparked a nationwide media debate about race within the collegiate Greek system. The video, which documented members of a fraternity in Oklahoma chanting an explicit, racist song about their desire to never offer membership to Black students led to the immediate removal of the fraternity from the institution. While this video was hard for many to watch, it exemplified the persistent racism that not only exists within Greek life, but also within the United States (Sutter, 2015). It also provided the opportunity to

Question a system that is inherently built around the concept of exclusion. Sometimes students are excluded from Greek life, in theory, because they're seen as uncool or don't "fit in" with a particular chapter. But we'd be kidding ourselves if we didn't realize that, often, a person's race -- or sexual orientation, for that matter -- factors into this you're-in, you're-out process. (Sutter, 2015, para. 7)

Yet individuals, especially those who are members of or have friends and family members in Greek-lettered organizations, still choose to either be in denial about or see these egregious cases of racism, sexism, and discrimination in the Greek system as somehow isolated. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

Egregious acts of explicit racism are hard to ignore. As a result when these incidents are brought to light, particularly with nationwide attention, colleges, universities, and the national offices of Greek-lettered organizations are quick to condemn the act and "fix" the situation by suspending or closing the chapter at fault. However, this action does little to address the systemic causes of this form of racism

(Hughey, 2015). Hughey, a scholar on race and Greek Life, elaborated (in Paulson, 2015), "Universities and colleges have become very savvy about what's politically correct. They're quick to demonize overt racism like this, but they're pretty silent about the everyday aspects of racial inequalities that are just as much racism in intent and effect" (para.14). This leads to "an incredibly unequal self-perpetuating system [where] you allow for a great deal of power to accumulate, and it gets reproduced along race, gender, and class lines. It's a manifestation of our larger problem as a nation, with our inability to talk realistically about race" (para. 19).

Interracial Interaction and Friendships

The impact of intergroup interaction on college students has been a focus of research among higher education practitioners and social psychologists for many decades (Bowman & Denson, 2011). Of particular interest to this study is the examination of this interaction across Black/White racial lines. In 1954, Gordon Allport proposed the intergroup contact hypothesis, which consisted of four ideal conditions under which contact between individuals of different backgrounds would lead to reducing prejudice across-racial lines and improved intergroup attitudes (Allport, 1979). This hypothesis, which was utilized as the foundational framework to investigate this study, set the foundation for numerous subsequent studies completed to understand the complex dynamics of intergroup contact (Bowman & Denson, 2011; Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011). Due to the notion that this hypothesis has been often referred to as fundamental to the process of desegregation, I believed it was important to ground this study within this framework. However, research has also found intergroup contact can lead to increased prejudice and conflict among

individuals, thus the relationship of intergroup contact to racial integration is somewhat paradoxical and must be continued to be explored (Dixon & Durrheim, 2005; Koen & Durrheim, 2010).

Intergroup Contact Hypothesis

As one of the first and most widely recognized hypotheses about cross-racial interaction, Allport's intergroup contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954/1979) analyzes the benefits and dynamics of interaction between races. His belief, and the basic premise of the hypothesis, was negative stereotypes about other groups arise through lack of personal contact and interaction between groups (Allport, 1954/1979; Fischer, 2012). To develop his hypothesis, Allport studied southern Black and White individuals who were in close contact to each other to question why prejudice existed (Bridges & Tomkowiak, 2010; Pettigrew, 1998). This study found unequal status, competition, and lack of knowledge about a "category" of people caused the prejudice to exist. From this, he determined that if these conditions could be managed, attitudes would be improved and with improved attitudes, prejudice would be reduced (Bridges & Tomkowiak, 2010; Pettigrew, 1998).

As a result, his hypothesis states that if conditions are controlled, cross-cultural contact may or may not lead to understanding and reducing prejudice across-racial lines; essentially, the hypothesis is based on attitude change (Allport, 1954/1979, Pettigrew, 1998). To explain his hypothesis, Allport adopted a "positive factors" approach. Allport believed when four positive factors of the contact situation are present: (1) equal status of the groups in the situation, (2) pursuit of common goals, (3) intergroup cooperation, and (4) the support of authorities, law or custom, reduced negative stereotypes and prejudice

will result (Allport 1954/1979; Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa, 2006; Koen & Durrheim, 2010; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005; Pettigrew, et al., 2011). He found that based on the presence of these conditions, interactions can lead to positive outcomes for the individuals involved; however, without the presence of these conditions, the contact can cause increased racial prejudice (Allport, 1954/1979). This is exemplified in situations in which intergroup contact lacks institutional support and individuals evade intergroup contact to avoid social alienation (Koen & Durrheim, 2010). Yet, recent meta-analytic testing by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) found these four conditions do facilitate the reduction of prejudice; however, they found they are not always essential for reducing the prejudice.

In 1997, Pettigrew added a fifth factor, friendship potential (Odell, Korgen, & Wang, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998). This addition was based on the hypothesis that as students spend time in collegiate institutions, they are placed in situations where friendships with individuals from other races can be formed (Pettigrew, 1998). Friendship is both a precursor to optimal contact and an outcome of contact; as a result, for this factor to be influential, the extended contact hypothesis proposes an individual does not necessary need to be directly involved in a cross-racial friendship to reduce prejudice (Koen & Durrheim, 2010). Rather, "the knowledge of an ingroup member who is involved in a friendship with an outgroup member is argued to be sufficient for the improvement of intergroup relations" (Koen & Durrheim, 2010, p. 452). Similar to the first four conditions, the factor of cross-group friendship promotes the ideal conditions for positive contact effects, including cooperation and common goals as well as repeated equal-status contact over an extended period and across varied settings. To further

support the addition of this factor, Khmelkov & Hallinan (2009) found intergroup, or cross-racial, friendship to be instrumental in reducing intergroup prejudices and segregation. "Friendship also facilitates self-disclosure; and self-disclosure is an important mediator of intergroup contact's positive effects" (Pettigrew, et al., 2011, p. 275-6).

During his development of the intergroup contact hypothesis, Allport (1954/1979) challenged the idea that successful grade school racial integration would result simply from White and Black students sharing the same environment. He believed involuntary associations alone would not change the stereotypical thinking and beliefs of individuals. In general, the hypothesis implies that for levels of social distance among races to decline as a result of cross-racial interactions, both the environmental conditions that improve the quality of contact and the interpersonal contact for the individuals involved in the interaction are equally important (Chang et al., 2006). It also predicts that when the conditions that foster equal status interaction are present, with specific support for intergroup mixing from positive authority figures, positive intergroup relations are more likely to form (Stearns et al., 2009).

To provide support for the contact hypothesis, Fischer (2008) believed the college setting is an ideal testing ground due to the presence of conditions that are theoretically conducive to the formation of interracial relationships. Higher education academic communities are among the most embracing of diversity in the United States; as a result, college campuses often meet the "support by authority" condition of Allport's hypothesis (Fischer, 2008). This, combined with the findings that campuses are typically more racially and ethnically diverse than the previous environments of the incoming student

population, that students arrive on campus as relative status equals in their role as undergraduate students, and that each student shares a common goal of successfully obtaining a degree, the college environment supports the additional conditions necessary for Allport's hypothesis to be tested (Fischer, 2008).

Odell, Korgen, and Wang (2005) found that interaction among races in a collegiate setting must be carefully guided to ensure a united diverse student population, rather than one where students may be diverse in representation but are diversely divided in practice. They also found that a combination of extracurricular and curricular programming, encouraging cross-racial interaction and friendship, is an effective way to reduce racial prejudice as they promote a sense of common efforts, goals, and collaboration (Odell et al., 2005). Saenz, Ngai, and Hurtado (2006) stressed the importance of quality interactions between students. Their findings concluded it was the responsibility of universities to provide students with opportunities to engage in meaningful and positive interactions (Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2006). Even with this information, a consensus has not been reached on what actions institutions or student organizations must take to achieve a "non-racist" culture and/or climate in the realm of higher education. This can be attributed to the different environments of colleges and universities across the county and the unique circumstances each faces, which makes using standard, ready-made strategies difficult (Chang et al., 2006).

Additional studies have documented problems in testing the contact hypothesis, particularly the issue of self-selection bias (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). According to Pettigrew (1998) and Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), the problem caused by selection bias is the idea that an individual who may be the most prejudiced may simply

avoid intergroup contact altogether, while those who are more interested in intergroup contact with other individuals may have specifically sought out such situations. In turn, the impact of intergroup contact could be improperly documented, or even exaggerated, in studies that do not contain appropriate controls for selection bias (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). To document the potential discrepancy, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) compared studies in their meta-analysis of the intergroup contact hypothesis of participants with and without a choice in their interracial contact. In the studies where participants choose a diverse environment, they found a larger mean effects size for contact; however, they noted the importance of the factor of contact in the studies where participants had no choice in contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Their study, in considering self-selection bias in their designs, concluded that contact generally outweighs any impact of selection (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Background Factors Influencing Collegiate Interracial Interactions

Research on how racial diversity on a college campus affects the educational development of undergraduate students has been vital in demonstrating the positive effects of cross-racial interaction. Yet, many of these studies are limited by their inability to pinpoint the conditions that influence and promote students' experiences with diversity and interracial interactions (Saenz et al., 2007; Schofield, Hausmann, Ye, & Woods, 2010). In recent years additional research has been completed to provide a more detailed analysis of the individual and situational factors that promote and facilitate positive cross-racial interactions for undergraduate students (Bowman & Denson, 2012; Fischer, 2008; Quilliam & Campbell, 2003; Saenz et al., 2007; Schofield, et al., 2010; Steans et al., 2009).

Due to racial geographic segregation within neighborhoods and social segregation between and within elementary and secondary schools, many students entering post-secondary education have grown up in neighborhoods and attended schools that are predominately homogeneous in terms of the racial and ethnic backgrounds of their peers. For these students, college is often the first opportunity for new students to interact closely in academic, residential, or social settings with others who are racially and ethnically different. To many, the collegiate environment is often the most diverse environment they have ever experienced (Bowman & Denson, 2012; Fischer, 2008; Steans et al., 2009). The collegiate environment provides critical and unique opportunities to engage in substantive interactions and form meaningful interpersonal friendships with racially/ethnically diverse peers; as a result, it is important to understand how and with whom students make friends in college (Bowman & Denson, 2012; Steans et al., 2009).

Homophily and Propinquity. Research on friendship formation has found homophily, defined as the tendency to form friendships with similar others, and propinquity, the tendency to form friendships with others who share the same social situation, are consistently associated with intergroup interaction and relevant to understanding friendship in diverse settings (Fischer, 2008; Quillian & Campbell, 2003; Stearns et al., 2009). Findings have consistently documented students in elementary and secondary schools tend to make racially homophilous friendship choices as they are more likely to be friends with individuals of their own race than with individuals of other racial groups (Fischer, 2008). This fact is supported by the finding that racial/ethnic homophily is more pronounced than any other homophily demographic category (Bowman, 2012;

McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Thus, homophily and propinquity help explain why many friendships groups tend to be more racially and ethnically homogeneous than the larger population from which friends can be selected (Stearns et al., 2009).

The extent to which individuals come into actual contact and interact with one another is essential in assessing the relative importance of homophily and propinquity in racially diverse settings. The contact may be in the contexts of choice, as individuals decide whom they want to interact with, or in the contexts of placement, where organizational structure, features, and policies impact interactions (Fischer, 2008). Propinquity is impacted and determined by individual choice and placement, which may be impacted by an individual's propensity toward homophily (Fischer, 2008).

When placed in a more heterogeneous and racially integrated setting, homophily and propinquity can both positively and negatively promote cross-racial interaction and a more diverse friendship network (Fischer, 2008; Stearns et al., 2009). In some situations, the tendency of individuals to form racially homogeneous friendships may increase as individuals seek to affiliate with those similar to them, in turn promoting continued racial segregation of friendship relations. On the other hand, propinquity in a diverse setting could predict and promote an increased number of cross-race friendships (Bowman, 2012; Quillian & Campbell, 2003, Stearns et al., 2009).

Pre-College Considerations. Research has demonstrated that precollege environments and opportunities for students to engage in precollege interactions with diverse individuals are highly correlated to the frequency and quality of interracial interactions and friendships in college (Bowman & Denson, 2012; Hurtado, Engberg,

Ponjuan, & Landreman, 2002; Saenz, 2005; Saenz et al., 2007; Stearns et al., 2009). The extent and quality of the precollege interracial engagement, especially during high school, can also directly affect a student's attributional complexity (i.e., how one thinks about another's behavior and can move past generalizations and stereotypes [Fletcher, Danilovics, Fernandez, Peterson & Reeder, 1986]) and intergroup anxiety (i.e., the comfort level one feels with diverse individuals [Stephan & Stephan, 1985]) upon college entry (Saenz et al., 2007). More specifically, students are a byproduct of the environment in which they were raised (Saenz et al., 2007; Stearns et al., 2009).

As a result, a student raised in more diverse environments is often used to and more comfortable in environments with diverse peers and may exhibit lower feelings of intergroup anxiety. These students will often report a higher frequency of diverse informal interactions (i.e., friendships) prior to college and are more likely to interact with students of other racial/ethnic backgrounds. They also have more frequent positive interactions and engage with diverse peers during college, as compared to their peers with fewer opportunities for precollege interactions. These students may feel uncomfortable when placed in homogeneous settings or when they interact with racially homogeneous peers (Bowman & Denson, 2012).

On the contrary, students from segregated pre-college environments possess less frequent and weaker quality interracial interactions (Saenz et al., 2007). They are also more likely to possess higher levels of prejudice (Levin et al., 2003; Schofield, et al., 2010). Students from homogeneous neighborhoods and schools may feel anxious about engaging in interracial interactions and may seek to avoid them by seeking relationships with primarily or exclusively ingroup/homogeneous members (Levin et al., 2003). This

intergroup anxiety is likely to inhibit the formation of intergroup friendships as a person who does not feel comfortable with diverse individuals would be less likely to develop a friendship with an outgroup member (Levin et al., 2003; Schofield, et al., 2010). Their interracial interactions may also be more cautious, tense, and superficial or less interpersonally engaging than the interactions of their peers (Bowman & Denson, 2012). High intergroup anxiety has also been found to correlate with fewer positive interactions with members of other races during college and less desire to have or remain with a roommate of a different group (Saenz et al., 2007; Schofield, et al., 2010).

Conversely, Saenz, Ngai, and Hurtado (2007) found precollege segregated environments do not guarantee a student will not possess frequent and quality interracial interactions during college. In their study, students who were primed to interact with homogeneous peers and sought opportunities for regular interaction with diverse peers could break away from their precollege cycle of segregation during college (Saenz et al., 2007). They also found Black students who reported being raised in homogeneous, predominately White precollege racial environments were likely to have enhanced positive interactions with their diverse peers (Saenz et al., 2007).

This research on the relationship between precollege exposure and impact on interracial interactions appear to refute the findings reported by Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002). Gurin et al. (2002) asserted new diversity experiences lead to a sense of disequilibrium and, eventually, student growth; they concluded that students' interracial interactions are more significant when the student has less exposure to precollege diversity. They found if a student's background includes a substantial amount of interactions across race/ethnicity, the student has less to learn through new or continued

interactions with diverse peers (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). For these students, these interactions may not produce the same level of disequilibrium as the interactions of their peers with less precollege diversity exposure, resulting in less substantial learning and development (Gurin, et al., 2002).

To further examine disequilibrium through the means set by the Gurin et al. (2002) study, Bowman and Denson (2011) argued attention should also be given to the deep emotional connections interracial interactions may produce. This is important as the superficial encounters and connections most often studied are more likely to elicit disequilibrium (Bowman & Denson, 2011). Bowman and Denson (2011) found reasonable proof to assume that students with more precollege exposure to diverse people may be more willing and able to develop deep emotional connections through interracial interactions than students with less exposure to racial diversity.

Overall, interracial friendships during the high school years lead to a greater proclivity to form interracial friendships later in life, especially during college. Stearns, Buchanan, and Bonneau (2009) found the proportion of interracial friendship in a student's friendship network precollege had the largest impact on the proportion during their first year of college. This finding may be contributed to a student possessing a greater proclivity to form interracial friendships in high school and college, or having prior experience with heterogeneous friendships that made them more comfortable in seeking such friendships thereafter.

Regardless of the reasoning for seeking interracial friendships, Stearns, Buchanan, and Bonneau (2009) found Whites have the fewest interracial friendships of the four racial groups (Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians) studied, prior to entering college.

While Whites experience an increase in the proportion of interracial friendships in their networks during college, their proportion of interracial friendships in the first year of college remains lower than that of students in the other three racial groups. However, the proportion of interracial friendships decreases for Black students from high school to college, even though students of color are more likely than White students to engage in interracial interaction (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Stearns et al., 2009).

      College Considerations. The majority of students enter college unaccompanied by a large existing friendship base (Stearns et al., 2009). However, even though these students may not bring their friends with them to college, they typically bring the habits of their friendship patterns and friendship formation that they acquired during their pre-college experiences. As a result, it is more likely for students with racially homophilous friendship choices prior to college to continue these patterns in college (Quillian & Campbell, 2003; Stearns et al., 2009).

      To explain the decrease in the proportion of interracial friendships during the first year of college, Stearns, Buchanan, and Bonneau (2009) explored two concepts. The first, cocooning, initially coined by Tatum (1987), describes how Black students purposely seek out other Black students to form "supportive alliances" to assist with their acclimation to a predominately White collegiate campus. For the Black students in the study, college may be their first opportunity to develop a significant number of racially homogeneous friendships and to increase the size of their same-race network (Sterns et al., 2009). The cocooning concept is consistent with the findings of Quilliam and Campbell (2003) that same-race ties and solidarity increase when race is a significant characteristic and a group is outnumbered in a specific social setting. The second

concept blamed discrimination by students from other racial/ethnic groups towards Black students for increasing the probability for Black students to form more same-race friendships. While this concept was not specifically tested by the study, it is not mutually exclusive from the first concept and can be a cause for concern if not examined and rectified (Stearns et al., 2009).

Bowman and Denson (2012) demonstrated a correlation between college interracial interactions and college satisfaction. Their research showed the relationship between interaction and satisfaction is strongest among students who report greater precollege exposure to difference and heterogeneity. While college interracial interactions was positively related to satisfaction for all students, their study found more satisfaction from students accustomed to racial/ethnic diversity, as they were more driven to connect interpersonally with diverse college peers (Bowman & Denson, 2012).

Allport's (1954/1979) intergroup contact hypothesis states one of the necessary conditions for positive intergroup contact and reduction of prejudice to occur is the existence of institutional support. Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004) identified two optimal conditions for such interactions across-racial lines to occur: a more racially diverse student body and more opportunities for students to live and work on campus. Research has also found institutional support can be found through campus-facilitated diversity initiatives, including curricular and co-curricular activities, which provide students of different backgrounds the opportunity to expand their knowledge of themselves and others (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Saenz et al., 2007).

In addition to the positive benefits provided by the institutional support of these initiatives within the academic settings, research has also suggested that meaningful

intergroup contact occurs in informal settings, including the areas students work, study, socialize and live (especially within ingroup and outgroup roommate pairings [Stearns et al., 2009; van Laar et al., 2005]) (Saenz et al., 2007; Schofield et al., 2010). This informal interaction, often demonstrated through students' choices of peer groups, including fraternities and sororities, ethnic organizations, athletics, and student government, provides the setting for intimate relationships to form. Allport (1954/1979) believed such relationships are essential in allowing individuals to cross-racial/ethnic boundaries and to learn from each other in meaningful ways to reduce prejudice. Within these peer groups, greater opportunities exist for interracial conversation and dialogue to be positive and transformational (Saenz et al., 2007).

A person's overall comfort within the campus environment is another determinant of positive contact with diverse peers (Levin, et al., 2003; Saenz et al., 2007). Pettigrew (1998) believed the context for intergroup contact must include the opportunity for individuals to become friends through a supportive environment for quality interactions to take place. Student perception of campus climates can have a significant impact on whether interracial interactions take place. Levin, van Laar, and Sidanius (2003) contributed negative perceptions of the campus climate to students of different racial/ethnic groups to maintaining ingroup friendships rather than expanding to outgroups. Similarly, Saenz, Ngai, and Hurtado (2007) found students who feel more connected and comfortable within the campus environment experience higher levels of interracial contact. This may be contributed to findings that certain students are more comfortable in social settings, which may increase their ability to interact with and bridge differences with other regardless of their racial/ethnic backgrounds (Saenz et al., 2007).

Conversely, Sterns, Buchanan, and Bonneau (2009) and Schofield, Hausmann, Ye, and Woods (2010) did not find a connection between racial climate and college intergroup friendships, thus questioning whether it is an important factor in the development of intergroup friendships.

The last influential determinant of positive contact is the structural diversity of the institution (Bowman, 2012; Saenz et al., 2007). According to scholars, "the successful implementation of the ideal conditions for cultivating positive race relations [on a campus] is inextricably linked to establishing a "nonracist" culture/climate, which includes altering the legacy of exclusion, the organizational structure, and the psychological and behavioral climate of the campus" (Chang et al., 2006, p. 433). Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004) found a racially and ethnically diverse student body, combined with opportunities for students to live and work on campus, contribute to the ideal conditions for an institution to improve interracial interaction. They found this diversity enhances opportunities for interracial interactions while generating additional contexts for interactions. Additionally, Saenz, Ngai, and Hurtado (2007) believe the diversity of the student body is also associated with increased positive interracial interactions among White students.

Cross-Racial Membership within Greek-lettered Organizations

Historically regarded as racially segregated, some historically White Greek-lettered organizations have sought to remove this barrier by accepting students of color in an effort to embrace diversity and inclusion of all individuals (Hughey, 2007; Whaley, 2009). The removal of this barrier creates "cross-racial membership" within the organization by blurring the White/Black Greek racial divides and the deep-rooted

exclusionary practices of racially homogeneous Greek organizations (Hughey, 2007). By accepting cross-racial membership, these groups are typically referred to as a "transformative step toward equity and unity" by challenging the status quo of race in Greek life (Hughey, 2010, p. 653).

Reasons Students of Color Seek Cross-Racial Membership

There are factors that influence the decision and ability of students of color who seek to cross-racially join a historically White Greek-lettered organization. In turn, it is important to understand why some students cross the racial color line, while others accept it, as either choice can impact a student's identity in college (Hughey, 2007). This topic is not commonly studied. A review of the literature reveals only a few researchers who directly study cross-racial membership in Greek-lettered organizations (Chang, 1996; Hughey, 2007, 2009, 2010; McClure, 2006; Newsome, 2009; Park, 2008, 2012; Sargant, 2012; Seetharaman, 2007; Thompson, 2000; Tillar, 1974).

Tillar (1974) completed the first documented study on cross-racial membership through the examination of the presence and extent of racial integration in both historically White and Black men's social fraternities at five institutions in the southeastern United States. His hypothesis investigated whether racial integration was characteristic of both organizations, with his belief being that it was for White organizations and was not for Black organizations on the specific campuses. The study concluded Black students were initially interested in seeking membership in historically White Greek-lettered organizations; however, continued interest through the recruitment process often waned, especially on campuses where historically Black Greek-lettered organizations existed. Additionally, there was no record of White individuals seeking

membership in the historically Black Greek-lettered organizations on any campus.

Tillar's (1974) findings demonstrate homophily, in that the Black and White students gravitated towards organizations where they could experience more contact with other students of their own race. Over 60 years later, the findings of Tillar remain true.

Chang's (1996) quantitative study of over 300,000 students on the dynamics of racial identity and race relations within the Greek system at 365 four-year colleges and universities from 1985-1989 found racial differences can be overcome and transcended through personal relationships within formal peer groups such as Greek-lettered organizations when the relationships are based on shared values and commitments. This is because students are more likely to interact and form relationships with others whom they believe share a similar set of beliefs, interests, values, goals, behaviors and attitudes (Chang, 1996). The connection through these similarities and level of integration and assimilation into White America between students of color with White Greek members positively affected the acceptance of students of color within a historically White Greek-lettered organization (Chang, 1996). The student of color's view of society was also a contributing factor within their decision and acceptance into the organization (Chang, 1996). These findings demonstrate again demonstrate homophily in that the students of color who cross-racially join a Greek-lettered organization feel a connection and resemblance to their White peers. The study also documented the impact Greek-lettered organizations on race and racial climate within colleges and universities, as they can either contribute to a positive racial climate through acceptance of others or act as a contributor of intolerance (Chang, 1996).

As one of the first direct studies on cross-racial membership in Greek-lettered organizations, specifically within White organizations, Thompson (2000) examined the factors that influenced students of color participation in historically White Greek-lettered organizations in the Southwest through the use of focus groups and individuals interviews. Rather than focusing specifically on either fraternities versus sororities, or members versus non-members, Thompson's sample included students of color from White, Black, and Hispanic Greek-lettered fraternities and sororities as well as White and minority students who registered for Greek recruitment but did not join (Thompson, 2000). Newsome (2009) expanded on Thompson's (2000) research by investigating the experience of eight Black males in historically White Greek-lettered organizations at a large university in the Southeast. More specifically, she sought to determine the pre-collegiate background factors or anticipated benefits that influenced the decision of Black males to seek membership in a historically White fraternity and the challenges and benefits Black males experienced once they became a member (Newsome, 2009).

Thompson (2000) and Newsome (2009) found students of color attributed feeling comfortable with the organization, its current members, and the diversity makeup of the organization as the major factors for making their decision to a historically White Greek-lettered organization. Additional influential factors included an interest in meeting new people, making new friends, the leadership and involvement opportunities offered (Newsome, 2009; Thompson, 2000), the social aspect of events and parties offered by the organization, community service and philanthropic efforts, the chance to make a difference within the organization, finding a brotherhood/sisterhood, and the networking opportunities (Newsome, 2009). The importance of support and encouragement provided

by current members of the organization as well as family and friends were found to be critical factors influencing interest within students of color (Newsome; 2009; Thompson, 2000).

The findings of Thompson (2000) and Newsome (2009) were confirmed in multiple studies by Hughey (2007, 2009, 2010) on the reasons students of color join historically White Greek-lettered organizations. Each of the studies found the desire to belong, make friends, and get involved in campus life as main reasons to cross the color line. In each of his studies on Black, White, Asian and Hispanic students, Hughey (2007, 2009) found additional support for Thompson and Newsome's findings that support from family and/or friends were essential for those seeking membership. Other reasons to affiliate included peer pressure to join from friends who were already in historically White Greek-lettered organizations and the anticipation of the payoffs to their "social capital networks" during college and after, through economic and employment opportunities (Hughey, 2009, p. 265).

To further the conversation on membership and racial diversity in historically White Greek-lettered organizations, Seetharaman (2007) identified an additional factor, the influence of one's background, on why few Black students join Greek-lettered organizations. While an informal study with four Black men and women members of historically White Greek-lettered organizations at a Midwestern institution, the article provides insight into the experiences of Black students in historically White Greek-lettered organizations. In the article, the students shared their desire to become a part of an organization reflective of their upbringing in a predominately White environment and neighborhood (Seetharaman, 2007). For one student of color who never connected to the

Black community due to her upbringing, being a part of a historically White Greek-lettered organization provided her with a connection to a friendship group similar to her previous experiences as one of the only Black students in a group (Seetharaman, 2007). Being one of few Black students in her sorority was initially not an issue for another student; yet, the lack of cultural connection between her own Nigerian heritage and her White sisters resulted in her choosing to leave her sorority (Seetharaman, 2007).

Newsome (2009) specifically sought to determine the pre-collegiate background factors that influence the decision of Black males to seek membership in a historically White fraternity to further understand the influence of one's background. The most common theme she discovered was in regard to the type of neighborhoods in which the participants resided precollege and their friendship groups. A majority of the participants grew up in predominately White neighborhood environments and attended predominately White schools. For the participants, being raised in this type of environment and having predominately White friends contributed to their decision to join a White fraternity, as being surrounded around White individuals and culture was their norm (Newsome, 2009). Since the participants had possessed predominately White friendship groups prior to college, they felt joining a White fraternity was not unusual and embraced the opportunity to join such an organization.

One participant noted, "*I know race matters, but it just didn't really seem like that much of a big deal to me. Race was never a problem for me. When I was a kid I had a lot of White friends, I had a lot of Black friends. I just had a lot of friends*" (Newsome, 2009, p. 104). For others, the influence of friends within the organization, their openness to diversity, their previous interactions with individuals who were different from them,

and their comfort with and "*willingness to associate with White people*" contributed to their desire to join (Newsome, 2009, p. 104). This was especially important to three men, who felt they had never fit in with other Black students throughout their lives as they were often ostracized, alienated, or ridiculed by Black students for associating with White students. For these students, their challenges and painful past made them feel like they could not successfully join a historically Black Greek-lettered organization or assimilate into Black culture, fueling their desire to seek cross-racial fraternity membership (Newsome, 2009). Each participant believed his background helped them assimilate into the White fraternity culture easier (Newsome, 2009).

Similar to previous research (Hughey, 2010; Newsome, 2009; Seetharaman, 2007; Thompson, 2000), Sargent (2012) contributed a participant's pre college background and familiarity with the current members of the organization as factors influencing the decision to traverse the color line in his study of four Black women at a Midwestern University. For one woman, being raised in a predominately White community impacted her personally and her choice of friendship groups to the point where she felt the most comfortable in an environment with more White peers (Sargent, 2012). Another individual felt different when interacting with members of historically Black Greek-lettered organizations due to her upbringing. She felt there was an apparent difference in the way she spoke, acted, and dressed that she attributed to being of a different background (Sargent, 2012). Thus, the conclusion can be made that "involvement in a community of others from an early age can lead to a high level of comfort and integration with that community that allows for these participants to feel comfortable in a similar environment in college" (Sargent, 2012, p. 42). Adding to previous research, Sargent

(2012) concluded Black women sought a sense of belonging, a desire for knowledge of the unknown, and a desire to challenge assumptions as motivating factors in joining a historically White Greek-lettered organization.

Newsome (2009) and Sargent (2012) found their participants sought to challenge the assumptions that Greek-lettered organizations needed to be racially divided as a reason to join. For one participant, her feelings of being "*happy to try and break that stereotype*, in reference to the idea that the color barriers meant she should join an African American Greek organization" motivated her to seek membership in a historically White Greek-lettered organization (Sargent, 2012, p. 33). Another individual felt it was his responsibility to integrate a White fraternity to help eliminate stereotypes about Black people (Newsome, 2009). He believed:

> *I think that we as a nation have to begin to embrace change because there's a lot of stuff that we don't talk about in the open and only behind closed doors with our friends. We do this because we think we may make people feel uncomfortable. There's a lot of underlying racism because it's below the threshold of our consciences and we don't even realize it. Therefore, I feel like that justifies my decision to join a White fraternity. I'm doing something that somebody may not have done or had the opportunity to do. I'm a pioneer. By joining a White fraternity, I'm changing people's beliefs on who I am and the meaning of what it means to be Black. (Newsome, 2009, p. 113)*

While the participants were willing to challenge the Black/White dichotomy, studies have found this challenge was easier when supported by others who had successfully crossed the color barrier before them (Sargent, 2012).

Hughey's (2007, 2009, 2010) research also described negative factors about historically White Greek-lettered organizations that students of color consider when deciding whether or not to join cross-racially. These factors include the belief that the goals and interests of the organizations do not relate to the issues and problems affecting students of color, the recognition of the racist history in which the organizations were founded, and the perception of being perceived as a "sell-out" to one's race. Furthermore, the negative stereotypes associated with the organizations, such as being perceived as excessive partygoers, not focused on academics, or not racially diverse or accepting of others, were additional factors considered by many students (Hughey, 2010).

Additionally, McClure (2006) noted that traditionally Black students on predominately White campuses often report high levels of social isolation, alienation, and a pressure to conform to the White ideal. Horowitz (1987) believed Greek members are the ultimate campus insiders who set the tone of campus life on college campus. As a result, if Greek organizations are truly the dominating influence, the pressure to conform to the White ideal [White Greek-lettered organizations] could serve as another factor in the decisions of students of color to join historically White Greek-lettered organizations.

Effects of Cross-Racial Membership

Research has found that when historically White Greek-lettered organizations accept students of color into their organization, this decision often creates controversy within the Greek community, including praise from university officials for being diverse and subtle forms of stigmatization from other similar organizations (Hughey, 2010). Due to the racial exclusion and racism that can be associated with historically White Greek-lettered organizations, students who make the decision to seek cross-racial membership

face tension and backlash from fellow Black students and within their Black community. This may include isolation, disapproval, criticism, judgment, and ostracism from their own racial group who believe their membership is a sellout to their race (Hughey, 2010).

Hughey (2008) and Thompson (2000) found that when students of color are accepted into historically White Greek-lettered organizations, they may have difficulties being perceived or treated as full and equal members of their organizations. In incidents where there are few students of color in historically White Greek-lettered organizations, these students may be faced with being tokenized within their organization by both insiders and outsiders of the organization. This "tokenism contributes to the enhanced visibility of underrepresented groups, the exaggeration of group differences, and the alteration of images to fit existing stereotypes" (Hughey, 2009, p. 268). Yet some historically White Greek-lettered organizations advocate this tokenism to demonstrate that they are inclusive organizations, regardless of the small number of diverse members in their organization (Hughey, 2009).

Furthermore, students of color face additional challenges related to diversity. In regard to fraternity men, Newsome (2009) found these challenges include being the first Black person many of their fraternity brothers have known, losing a sense of Blackness, dealing with the social implications of being Black in a White fraternity, trying to be noticed for one's self versus one's skin color, and adjusting to cultural differences between chapter members. Each of these challenges, in addition to other challenges undocumented by current research, creates obstacles with which the members of color must "employ strategies of action" in order to be perceived as full, belonging members of

their organizations and assimilate into the historically White Greek-lettered organization culture (Hughey, 2010, p. 653).

Additionally, students of color in historically White Greek-lettered organizations are often confronted with racial insensitivity, including racial jokes and racial slurs. While typically made by only a few particular individuals in the organization or meant to be viewed as a joke by interjecting racially insensitive comments into casual and formal conversations and settings, the inappropriate comments are often offensive, hurtful, or insensitive to students of color (Newsome, 2009). In certain cases, such inappropriate interactions may lead to students of color becoming defensive or put in a position of having to educate White peers on the inappropriate nature of the comment, behavior, or language. Students of color eventually become fatigued by having to deal with the issue, including making their peers aware of how their actions effect people of color and being the spokesperson against the topic (Newsome, 2009).

Hughey (2009) also described the positives and negatives of cross-racial Greek membership. At their best, these memberships demonstrate individual and organizational examples of breaking racial boundaries and "promote intimacy, increased racial tolerance, integration, understanding, and social change" (Hughey, 2009, p. 240). At their worst, they represent "the exploitive tokenism of racialized others" that earns the organization recognition as being diverse in a manner that maintains historical social order (Hughey, 2009, p. 240). Rather than destroying racial boundaries, Greek organizations who accept cross-racial members are often accused of reestablishing these boundaries in different forms (Hughey, 2010).

Conclusion

The intention of this literature review was to provide documentation related to the role of race and cross-racial membership in historically White Greek-lettered organizations. To accomplish this, four focus areas of literature were examined: (1) an overview Black students on predominately White campuses; (2) the history of and diversity within Greek-lettered organizations; (3) interracial interaction and friendships; and (4) cross-racial membership within Greek-lettered organizations. Research holistically investigating this topic, particularly connecting interracial friendships, intergroup contact hypothesis, and cross-racial membership within Greek-lettered organizations, has not been conducted. The studies that touch on aspects that do exist are important, as they bring attention to the topic. They suggest that further studies, including the basis for this dissertation, should be completed to continue the conversation surrounding race within Greek-lettered communities.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations at predominately White institutions within a sixty mile radius of a metropolitan southeastern city. Phenomenological methodology was used as the research approach for this dissertation study. The study was grounded within Allport's (1954/1979) intergroup contact hypothesis. Additionally, critical race theory was utilized to provide an additional perspective for analysis. These approaches allow for the construction of meaning to come from stories of the study participants while accounting for the centrality of race and racism within society (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). It also allows for researcher/participant collaboration while giving voice to the participants' experience. The following research questions (RQs) guided this study:

RQ1: What pre-collegiate background factors influenced the decision of Black women to seek membership in historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

RQ2: What collegiate factors or anticipated benefits influenced the decision of Black women to seek membership in historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

RQ3: How do Black women describe their experience within their historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

RQ4: How do Black women navigate their experience in historically White

Greek-lettered organizations?

This chapter will provide an overview of the methodological framework for this study.

The chapter will be structured utilizing headings outlined in the framework format

identified by Moustakas (1994): Methods of Preparation, Methods of Collecting Data,

and Methods of Organizing and Analyzing the Data.

Qualitative Research and Phenomenology

This study examined seven Black women's reasons for joining historically White

Greek-lettered organizations and their personal experiences as members. A review of the

literature on this topic demonstrated a lack of a first-person, narrative exploration of this

student experience. To effectively complete an examination about a subpopulation of

collegiate undergraduate students, Stage (1992) asserted:

> The cultural and subcultural diversity of [undergraduate] students' calls for the
>
> use of methods that allow the researcher to be sensitive to diverse frames of
>
> reference, many of which may be quite different from the investigator's own. The
>
> researcher needs to ground his or her understanding of what happens to students
>
> in college in the students' own understanding of these events. (p. 25)

Over twenty years ago, Attinasi and Nora (1992) documented that fraternity and sorority

research was often only quantitative in nature. Research was often based solely on the

use of surveys and questionnaires, further supporting the lack of adequately portrayed,

detailed information directly from students about their college experience, especially as it

pertained to fraternity and sorority life (Attinasi & Nora, 1992). Today, this sentiment of

the need for additional qualitative research remains. As a result, a qualitative research

method that provides data through a participant's first hand exploration of a topic within Greek life was necessary.

Qualitative research seeks to understand people's experiences, perspectives and to build a holistic picture of human experience through interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents (Creswell, 1998; Hayes & Singh, 2012; Johnson & Christenson, 2012). Qualitative researchers are interested in how and why events occur (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The findings of this research are "generally presented in everyday language and often incorporate the participants' own words to describe a psychological event, experience, or phenomenon" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128). The use of a phenomenological approach was determined as the best suited methodology for this study.

Phenomenological Research Tradition

Phenomenology is the explanation of an individual's consciousness of his or her own experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). As both a philosophy and research tradition, phenomenology discovers and describes the way a participant experiences a specific phenomenon and the meaning they derive from their lived experiences (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004; Hayes & Singh, 2012, Johnson & Christenson, 2012; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Phenomenology is anchored in the "lifeworld" of the individual and how the participant who is associated with being-in-the-world interprets their meaning (Jones et al., 2014, p. 88). Through reflective in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994), phenomenology allows researchers to "explore how participants with direct knowledge of the phenomenon make sense of experiences, how they perceive it, describe it, feel about

it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 140). By asking "What is this or that kind of experience like?" (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004, p. 9), we seek to hear the voices of the participants and then describe that experience in their own words (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

To do this, researchers create comfortable environments to allow participants to reflect on a past experience or are currently experiencing (van Manen, 1990). A central element of the phenomenological approach is a focus on interpretive understanding, which is used to describe a lived experience from the perspective of the individual (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004). Phenomenological researchers do not assume to know what experiences mean to their participants. Instead, they seek to comprehend how their participants arrived at the meaning to provide a deeper insight into their perspectives (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003).

Moustakas (1994) identified seven principles in phenomenological research. These are: (a) a commitment to the use of qualitative methods; (b) a primary focus on the whole experience, rather than on its parts; (c) a search for meaning over a search for rules; (d) primary use of first- person accounts as main data sources; (e) insisting that accounts of experiences are a necessary part of any scientific understanding of any social phenomenon; (f) performing research that is guided by the personal interests and commitments of the researcher; and (g) the necessity of treating experiences and behavior as integrated parts of a single whole (p. 21). Additionally, Creswell (2009) suggested a researcher follow the following research guidelines: (a) the researcher needs to understand how people experience a phenomenon by understanding philosophical perspectives behind the approach; (b) the investigator develops questions that explore

how participants describe their lived experience; (c) sample participants should be carefully selected to ensure that they have experienced the phenomenon under investigation; (d) data analysis is divided into statements, clusters of meanings, and a general description of what was experienced and how it was experienced; and (e) the research report should end with the reader having gained a better understanding of the essence of the experience described by the participants (p. 54).

Allport's Intergroup Contact Hypothesis

For this dissertation, Allport's (1954/1979) intergroup contact hypothesis was utilized to provide the theoretical framework for the participants' experiences. The hypothesis provided a lens to analyze how the dynamics of interaction between the participants and individuals from different races influenced their experience within their historically White Greek-lettered organization. The basic premise of the hypothesis is that negative stereotypes about other racial groups arise through lack of personal contact and interaction between groups; thus, if certain conditions are met, cross-racial contact may lead to understanding and reducing prejudice between the in/out groups (Allport, 1954/1979; Fischer, 2012). Specifically, to reduce tension and hostility between different racial groups, contact must be made between the groups (Allport, 1954/1979). While simple contact between groups does not create or guarantee genuine, authentic relationships or understanding, the hypothesis specified four conditions that must be present for optimal intergroup contact: the creation of equal status among people from different groups within the situation, identification of common goals, emphasis on the promotion of intergroup cooperation to meet the goals, and support from individuals in

authority positions (a fifth condition, friendship potential, was added in 1998 by researcher Thomas Pettigrew) (Allport, 1954/1979; Pettigrew, 1998).

By utilizing this hypothesis in my data analysis, I focused on the direct experience of the participants to determine whether Allport's conditions were present and exemplified in their stories. Because Allport believed the presence or absence of these conditions would impact the outcome of interaction and racial prejudice (Allport, 1954/1979), I believed this hypothesis would provide a foundation to discuss the participant's experience, whether described as positive or negative. Furthermore, the successful implementation of the factors found in the intergroup contact hypothesis has been linked to cultivating positive race relations in the establishment of a non-racist culture and climate, "which includes altering the legacy of exclusion, the organizational structure, and the psychological and behavioral climate of the collegiate campus" (Chang et al., 2006, p. 433). Because individuals often learning the norms around which individuals and groups should or should not interact during their collegiate experience, research supports successful integration occurs only if the factors of the hypothesis were present (Allport, 1954/1979; Chavous, 2005). This finding is important to understanding how groups, including Greek-lettered organizations, have overcome their exclusionary culture to accept interracial/cross-racial membership and how individuals, such as the women in this study, have navigated their membership.

Critical Race Theory

To effectively understand the experiences of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations, race must be discussed. Due to its deeply embedded roots in social, cultural, and political structures, race is often difficult to recognize and address

(Ladson-Billings, 1999). For this dissertation, critical race theory was utilized to provide an additional perspective to the intergroup contact hypothesis to examine the role of race in Greek life.

Developed in the 1970s, critical race theory addresses issues of social justice and oppression in society by focusing on racism through the experiences of people of color by shifting the perspective of racism from an individual problem to a structural issue, perpetuated by institutions in our society (Kohli, 2012; Vallalpando, 2003). Solorzano and Yosso (2001) define the goal of critical race theory as the development of a strategy that accounts for the role of race and racism and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating other forms of subordination, such as gender, class, and sexual orientation. Critical race theory offers "insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogies that guide our efforts to identify, analyze, and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom" (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 63). A critical race perspective entails understanding and recognizing that racism is a normal and common component of society (Patton, McEwen, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) expanded the initial perspective to create the critical theory of education because they believed that race was under-theorized as a means of understanding inequities in education. Within education, critical race theory incorporates three tenets: (1) race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States, (2) U.S. society is based on property rights, and (3) the intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool through which inequities can be understood (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In addition to these tenets, there are

additional defining elements that form the basic assumptions, perspectives, research methods, and pedagogies of critical race theory: the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination; the permanence of racism; the challenge to dominant perspective/ideology; critique of liberalism; the commitment to social justice and praxis; Whiteness as property; interest conversion; the centrality/ valuing of experiential knowledge through counter-storytelling; and the inter/ transdisciplinary perspective (Kohli, 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Vallalpando, 2003).

This dissertation utilized critical race theory to provide an additional perspective to analyze the participant's experiences. Critical race theory was chosen as a way to contribute to the existing conversation about race and racism in education and Greek life (Solorzano et al., 2000) and to illuminate racial inequalities and hierarchies (Patton et al., 2007). The study provided a forum for the voices of the seven Black female Greek student participants to be heard. Through the discussion and implications it also challenged the current, dominant perspective and ideology of color-blindness and race neutrality within the Greek system. My hope is for this perspective to increase advocacy efforts towards a more inclusive racial Greek community.

As a White researcher examining the experiences of Black women, it was important for me to consider the implications of utilizing critical race theory within this study. While it provided me a venue for the voices of my participants to be heard, there is also the belief by some scholars of color that "for Whites to move into the area of critical race theory would be a form of colonization in which we [White individuals] would take over critical race theory to promote our own interests or recenter our positions while

attempting to 'represent' people of color" (Bergerson, 2003, p. 52). By incorporating critical race theory into this study, I had to actively ensure that attention was not deflected away from my participants because of my own racial identity.

Throughout this study, I remained cognizant of three tips recommended by Bergerson (2003) that can help White scholars committed to fighting individual and structural racism. First, critical race theory reinforces the importance of centering race in our personal lives and our work. Second, critical race theory is a framework developed by people of color to understand and explain their experiences and to move toward social change and racial equity. Third, White scholars must join the fight to legitimize research that comes from the lived experiences of individuals who have traditionally been marginalized (Bergerson, 2003).

For me, I had to understand the privilege I am awarded by being White. I had to accept that I am racist in that I benefit from this privilege. I had to acknowledge that racism exists. Specific to this dissertation, I reflected on my privilege of being a member of a historically White Greek-lettered organization and a staff member overseeing the growth and expansion efforts of a historically White men's fraternity. Due to this professional role, I believe I have the opportunity to challenge racism within Greek life, specifically the structural racism and inequalities that continue to inundate the community. However, as a White woman, this opportunity can be met with tension, both internally in deciphering how to navigate the conversation and externally by individuals who do not believe White individuals can effectively challenge racism. Bergerson (2003) noted, "I believe that White scholars have an important role in creating an environment that recognizes the need to ask difficult questions and challenge traditional notions in our

personal lives as well as our work in education" (p. 61). Through this dissertation, I worked to accomplish this role and overcome potential tension through the presentation of my findings. To ensure the women's stories were represented as they experienced them, I decided to analyze their experiences in terms of Allport's hypothesis first and then utilize critical race theory to examine their experiences from the critical race perspective.

Methods of Preparation

Methods of preparation refer to the criteria necessary for the formation of the methodological foundation of the study. The section will include the intentionality statement of the study and a description of the researcher connection to the topic.

Intentionality Statement/Clarifying the Statement of Purpose

Because phenomenology is the study of a phenomenon (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004; Hayes & Singh, 2012, Johnson & Christenson, 2012; Jones et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), it is important to specify the phenomenon of this study. This is accomplished through an intentionality statement, "a clear and direct statement of the phenomenon under investigation" (Vagle, 2009, p. 2). In regards to research, intentionality can be defined as the meaningful relationship between subject and object, or how subjects find themselves in relation to objects (Vagle, 2009). As a result, the intentionality of this research study was the meaningful relationship between Black women (subject) and their membership (object) within a historically White Greek-lettered organization. The phenomenon of the research study is how Black women describe their membership within historically White Greek-lettered organizations,

including their motivations to join, challenges they faced within their organization, and how they met those challenges.

Researcher Connection to the Topic

An important quality of human science research, including phenomenology, is a desire to conduct research surrounding a topic that "reflects the interest, involvement, and personal commitment of the researcher" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 20). This quality was constantly considered during my selection of a dissertation topic. As the primary researcher of this study, I am a White individual who identifies as a woman and is a member of a historically White Greek-lettered organization. Since a young age I have been challenged to accept all people and was raised in an environment where cross-racial interactions were encouraged. Growing up, I had friends from different races. I have always been open-minded to experiences outside of my comfort zone. I believe my background impacted my self-proclaimed identity today as a social justice advocate.

I have been involved in many areas of higher education and student affairs since my undergraduate years, including residence life/housing, first-year programming, orientation, and most recently Greek affairs. In higher education settings, inclusion of all individuals is vital (Edwards, 2006). As a student affairs professional, it is my responsibility to assist in ensuring that each student at an institution or organization where I work feels welcome and accepted.

Currently, in my role as a practitioner within Greek life, this responsibility falls within my work with Greek communities on college campuses. However, this professional expectation I have placed on myself can be challenging to fulfill, as the historical foundation of Greek-lettered organizations was based in racial and religious

exclusivity during an era of extreme racial injustice and inequality (Torbenson, 2009).

While all formal racial and religious exclusionary entrance requirements have been

eliminated since the 1970s, Greek life remains racially divided on many campuses today,

with a majority of participants being White, even at racially diverse institutions (Park,

2012; Torbenson, 2009).

I believe this responsibility is not about forcing the diversification and integration

of historically racially segregated organizations. Rather, I believe I must challenge others

to engage in the topic of race and within the Greek community. To do this, first, I must

demonstrate my willingness and desire to broach the subject of race. Second, through

this dissertation, I sought to give voice to the individuals who have crossed racial barriers

to join a Greek-lettered organization. I wanted to allow others to hear from their

experiences to recognize that cross-racial membership is possible. However, while such

membership is possible, I also utilized a critical race theory lens to identify the challenges

and negative realities that exist within Greek life due to race. I believe this approach will

provide insight into how to make this diversification and inclusivity a reality for other

individuals who seek to cross the color line within Greek life.

Methods of Collecting Data

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the data collection

process, including a description of the three sites for the study, the criteria for

participation, the recruitment and selection of participants, and a description of the data

collection process. This data will contribute to gaining an insider perspective of the lived

experience of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations.

Description of the Sites

This study occurred at three universities, Alpha University, Beta University, and Gamma University. Each institution is private institution and located in within sixty miles of a metropolitan city in a southeastern state. The three universities have an active Greek community, with both historically White and Black Greek-lettered organizations.

The initial intention of the study was to utilize Beta University and two additional universities, Delta University and Epsilon University, rather than Alpha University and Gamma University. This decision was based on the similarity of institutional sizes and Greek systems between Beta University, Delta University, and Epsilon University. However, after a lack of willingness participants at Delta University and difficulty completing the Institutional Review Board process at Epsilon University, the study was extended to include Alpha University and Gamma University. Similar to the initial three universities, the final three were selected due to the diversity of their student populations. By choosing to conduct research at three different institutions, this study seeks to increase the generalizability of the research findings. To protect the anonymity of the participants, specific statistics about the institutions are not included.

Criteria for Participation

To participate in a phenomenological inquiry, participants should have experienced the phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 1998). For this study, the following criteria, based on the Newsome (2009) study, were used to select participants:

1. The participant must be at least 18 years old;

2. Enrolled as an undergraduate student at one of the three site institutions;

3. As the purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations, the participant must:

   a. Identify as a Black woman*;

      *The study was proposed as an investigation of women of color in historically White Greek-lettered organizations. However, to provide specificity to the experiences of the participant sample, the decision was made to narrow "women of color" to "Black women." The decision to use the racial descriptor "Black" rather than "African American," was made as a result of Newsome (2009)'s study.

   b. Be an initiated member of a sorority affiliated with the National Panhellenic Conference.

4. The participant must be willing to:

   a. Provide demographic information to the researcher in the form of a participant information form (Seidman, 2006);

   b. Participate in two 60-90 minute face-to-face audio recorded interviews.

Sampling Methods

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study. Purposive sampling allowed me to define characteristics of a specific population and locate individuals who matched these characteristics based on their own judgment (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). This type of sampling is based on the belief that the sample can contribute to and expand the knowledge base of the study, or facilitate the expansion of describing a phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). It is specifically used when the researcher wants to further the understanding of a specific

topic from a participant and therefore must select a sample from which the most information will be gathered and that will provide the data necessary for the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

In addition to purposive sampling, snowball sampling was initially considered as an another way to ensure as many individuals as possible who matched the selection criteria were considered for the study. Snowball sampling is a technique used to further recruit participants by asking each identified participant to identify one or more additional people who meet the specified characteristics of the study and may be interested in participating (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). However, ultimately it was not used as none of the participants identified others for the study.

Participant Recruitment & Selection

For this study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was required from several entities (Appendix A). To fulfill the requirement of Epsilon University's separate IRB approval process to conduct research involving their students, I attempted to complete their process. Unfortunately, I was unable to complete it due to a username and password requirement to complete the application that I was never able to receive which ultimately led to Epsilon University being removed from the potential sites. Additionally, after a delay in locating participants and making the decision to expand the study to include additional sites, I completed the required IRB approval process for Beta University and Gamma University. The final approval necessary was from the National Panhellenic Conference. Once I received approval from each institution and the National Panhellenic Conference, I began the recruitment and selection of participants.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) specified that the first step of identifying and selecting study participants involves gaining access into the environment where the study will be conducted. To successfully negotiate entry, I had to understand the hierarchy and rules of the Greek system at each institution and how to reach the specific population. Through this understanding, I determined the professional staff members in the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life at each institution would be the appropriate individuals to contact to receive permission to gain access and entry (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

To recruit participants, an email (Appendix B and C) was first sent to the Greek advisor for the National Panhellenic Conference sororities within the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life at each institution. Each advisor was asked to email the presidents of the historically White Greek-lettered women's organizations on their campus and provide a letter from me describing the study and requesting help in identifying potential students who fit the study's criteria (Appendix D and E). The president was then asked to forward an email to these students about the study, including information about my background, the purpose of the study, and a request for their participation in the study. However, after several months of no response, the decision was made to expand the criteria for participation to include Black alumnae members of historically White Greek-lettered organizations, Beta University and Gamma University, and the use of professional staff members within student affairs at each institution to assist in the recruitment of participants. Ultimately, after receiving the Institutional Review Board approval from the modifications for the study, I received confirmation from seven undergraduate women to participate in the study. As a result, although the criteria for participation had been

expanded, the final group of participants included only undergraduate Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations.

Once I received confirmation of the willingness of the women to participate, I conducted an informational meeting via a phone call with each participant. This meeting served to inform the participant with specifics about the study, including the purpose and research design. I communicated the expectations of the study relating to the time commitment and requirements of the participants. Before the end of the meeting, the participants had an opportunity to ask any clarifying questions and discuss concerns. After this meeting, I asked each woman to be part of the study. To confirm her participation, each woman was asked to complete a consent form (Appendix F). The consent form contained information about the researcher's statement, purpose of the study, study procedures, risks and discomforts, benefits, incentives, privacy/confidentiality, and the participant's rights to withdraw. With only receiving confirmation of interest from seven women, I did not have to make decisions concerning eliminating interested students due to saturation.

Seidman (2006) identified two criteria for researchers to meet when recruiting participants for a qualitative study: sufficiency and saturation of information. For this study to be effective based on sufficiency, the study was conducted with a significant number of Black women to reflect the range of participants that made up the population to allow for others outside of the sample to connect to their experiences. I adhered to this criterion by soliciting participants from three different institutions and different Greek-lettered organizations. I also sought to have saturation, or enough participants that no new ideas or themes emerged or were identified as the data was analyzed (Hayes &

Singh, 2012; Seidman, 2006). Fortunately, through the seven participants I interviewed, I was able to achieve saturation.

Throughout the entire study, I was available to answer any questions about the study from the participants, students at the institution, the Panhellenic Councils, the Offices of Fraternity and Sorority Life, and the different sorority organizations at both the institution and national level. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) provided questions that are commonly posed to researchers that they should be able to answer at any time. The questions range from the intention and potential disruption level of the research, how the researcher will disseminate the findings, the significance of the identified participant group being utilized for the study, and what the participant will gain or receive in exchange for their participation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Each participant picked her own pseudonym with which she felt most comfortable. Pseudonyms were also used for the names of their schools. All participants were treated with respect and professionalism. The study adhered to all rules, policies, and procedures for qualitative research by the Institutional Review Board for the protection of Human Subjects, including keeping all documents containing research data in a locked file cabinet in my home. As a courtesy to those providing their time to participate in the study, I provided a $20 gift card.

Overview of Data Collection

This study included two approaches for data collection. I collected demographic information in the form of a participant information form to assist with contextualizing and analyzing study results (Seidman, 2006). Data was also collected utilizing two

individual interviews with the participants. Through the data collection, I focused on investigating the experience of being a Black woman in a historically White Greek-lettered organization directly as the participants live it (Jones et al., 2014). The study was originally proposed to include a photography component; however, this method of data collection was removed after the interviews process. This decision was made because the photographs presented by the participants did not connect to the study in the way I had initially hoped and did not provided added insight into the experiences of the women as it related to the study.

 Participant information form. The participant information form served two purposes for the study: (1) to facilitate communication between the participants and me and (2) to document basic information and participant data that assisted with data reporting and contextualizing and analyzing the study (Seidman, 2006). For this study, the participant information form (Appendix G) included information about the participant's background including race/ethnicity, age (to confirm the participant was at least 18 years old), and contact information; high school demographic information; academic status (freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior); and involvement within their institution, including Greek-lettered organization name, number of years in their Greek-lettered organization, legacy status (whether or not the participant has a family member, including parent, grandparent, aunt/uncle, or sibling in a Greek-lettered organization), and their recruitment process. Each element of this form was important as it provided information about the participant's past, which could serve as an influential factor in the participant's decision to join a historically White Greek-lettered organization.

Individual interviews. The use of research interviews is one of the most

common forms of data collection for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2009;

Moustakas, 1994). The research interview is defined as a qualitative process used to

obtain in-depth information about a participant's thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning,

motivations, and feelings about a topic [phenomenon] (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

The decision to utilize individual interviews demonstrates the researcher's interest in

hearing other people's stories (Seidman, 2006). For participants, their story telling

process is a meaning-making process for them as each word they share is a "microcosm

of their consciousness" (Seidman, 2006, p. 7).

The purpose of interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of

other people and using the participant's story to make meaning of her experience

(Seidman, 2006). Patton (2002) further described the purpose as to "allow us to enter

into the other person's perspective…it begins with the assumption that the perspective of

others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (p. 341). Van Manen

(1990) also believed the purposes of the phenomenological interview are to serve "as a

means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material" in order to develop "a

richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon" and to serve as a mechanism

to develop a conversation to create a relationship with the interviewee about the meaning

of her experience (p. 61).

To understand the experiences of Black women in historically White Greek-

lettered organization from their own voices, the use of interviews provided the best

instrument for data collection. For this study, phenomenologically based interviewing

was used. According to Seidman (2006), this type of interviewing combines life-history

interviewing and focused, in-depth interviewing based on and informed by assumptions

drawn from phenomenology. Interviewing from this lens involves utilizing mainly open-

ended questions to build upon and explore participants' responses; the participant is

guided through reconstructing their experience within the topic under investigation

(Seidman, 2006).

Within phenomenologically based interviewing, the actual interviews followed a

modified version of the phenomenological interview structure created by Schuman

(1982), which specifies a series of three separate interviews with each participant

(Seidman, 2006). This structure provides the setting for participants to feel comfortable

enough with the researcher to give meaningful responses about the context of their

experience. The recommended series of three interviews allows interviewer and

participant to reconstruct the experience and place it in context. Within this study, the

three interviews were combined into two. This decision was a result of time constraints

for college students to be able to commit to three interviews.

The interviews began with a focus on life history, which established and

contextualized the experience. Following this, a focus on the details of the experience

provided the structure for the participants to reconstruct the concrete details of their lived

experience within the context in which it occurred. The second interview, reflection on

the meaning, encouraged the participants to reflect on the meaning of the experience they

had discussed during the first interview. In this interview, making sense of this meaning

required the participants to evaluate how the factors in their lives intersected to bring

them to their current experience. For this method of interviewing to be successful, the

first interview set a foundation for the second (Schuman, 1982; Seidman, 2006).

Instrumentation, Interview Guide, Format, and Protocol. The interviews ranged in length between 30 and 90 minutes in length and were spaced between three days and two weeks apart. While each interview varied in length, the depth of the details shared was immense. The interviews followed a semi-structured format. In semi-structured interviews, I devised a loose interview protocol based on the Newsome (2009) dissertation with several open-ended questions (Appendix H), worded in a way to give participants leeway in answering. While this type of interview structure allowed for the participant to be involved in "constructing the structure and process" of the interview (Hayes & Singh, 2012; Jones et al., 2014), an interview guide was used to ensure the same type of questioning and inquiry was used with each participant (Patton, 2002). Within the interview guide, additional questions were included under each primary question. The additional questions were utilized to probe for deeper response and allow the participants to explore their experience more deeply.

I made an audio recording of each interview. The interview began with a review of the interview protocol, including obtaining participant permission to take notes as needed during the interview process. Following the interview, I recorded my thoughts about the interview in a contact summary sheet. This process allowed me to identify the basic details and initial observations of the contact with each participant (Hayes & Singh, 2012). The contact sheet included questions requiring elaboration, questions already covered, notes regarding where to begin during the next interview, information about special circumstances that may affect the quality of the interview, and various reminders to prepare for future interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). It also allowed me to conduct a recursive check of the interview protocol. If needed, the findings of this check could be

used to make slight adjustments to the protocol to ensure more thorough, future processes (Hayes & Singh, 2012). The list of questions utilized for the interviews and the contact sheet are presented in Appendix H and Appendix I, respectively.

   Transcriptions. At the conclusion of each interview, the audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim by a hired transcriber. After each transcription, I compared the document to the audio-tapes and made any changes necessary. This step of the transcription process served as a way for me to immerse myself in the data (Patton, 2002). This entire process is used to ensure the transcription accurately reports the elicited data (Hayes & Singh, 2012).

Methods of Organizing and Analyzing the Data

   In qualitative research, data analysis is an open-ended and inductive process (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Phenomenological data analysis is composed of several phases and begins from the very first data collection (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Data analysis is the process of systemically searching and arranging the data, including the interview transcripts and field notes, for the researcher to determine findings and relate them to the literature and broader themes (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003). For this study, data analysis followed the general qualitative study process outlined by Creswell (2007). Additionally, components of Patton's (2002) and Moustakas's (1994) method of data collection were utilized.

   The data analysis process began with organizing and preparing the data. This phase included transcribing interviews, recording field notes, and arranging the acquired data (Creswell, 2009). During this phase, it was important for me to ensure the focus of the study and review of the data remained on the experience of the participants. To

accomplish this, I utilized two concepts, epoche and bridling. Moustakas (1994) described epoche as a process where "to a significant degree, past associations, understandings, facts, [and] biases [of the researcher] are considered and attempted to be set aside" (p.116). More specifically, through epoche the researcher will remain introspective to refrain from judgment, bias, or assumptions (Hayes & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2002). By remaining introspective and aware of my bias and assumptions regarding the study, this process helped prevent me from influencing the study's data collection or analysis. Through incorporating bridling into this process, I was able to continually consider the connection between my biases and assumptions and the data collection and analysis (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008; Vagle, 2009).

The next two phases involved reading through and coding the data (Creswell, 2008). These phases allowed me to get a general sense of the information and my own reflection on the meaning of the data. I listened to the interview while reading the complete transcript several times to reconnect with the participant's stories. As I listened to and read each transcript through line-by-line analysis, I incorporated the first three of the steps outlined by Moustakas (1994) by "consider[ing] each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience, record[ing] all relevant statements, and list[ing] each nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statement" as part of the horizontalization process (Hayes & Singh, 2012, p. 355). Specifically, for the fourteen interviews (two per participant), I highlighted all participant comments and made notations of important words, statements, and ideas mentioned by the women in the margins of the printed interviews. This horizontalization step, a form of coding data, ensured I treated each

aspect of the data with equal value to begin the process of identifying meaning units (Hayes & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002).

For this study, I also utilized Auerback and Silverstein's (2003) criteria for coding transcripts and notes. The criteria includes: (1) whether or not the item relates to the research concern; (2) whether or not the item helps to understand the participants better and clarify the participants thinking; and (3) whether or not it simply seems important, even if there is no particular reason why (Auerback & Silverstein, 2003). Once I completed this process for each interview, I created a Microsoft Excel document where I listed brief descriptions of the highlighted sections. This process resulted in 404 rows of data before considering duplicate responses. Upon reducing this initial data to only nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements, 58 codes were identified.

The remaining phases involved the creation of interrelated themes and descriptions and interpretation of the meaning of these themes and descriptions (Creswell, 2008). Through these phases, referred to by Patton (2002) as the synthesis phase, textual descriptions (an account of what was experienced) and the structural descriptions (how the phenomenon was experienced by the participants) were formulated by creating another Excel document with verbatim examples of participant's responses from their interviews. The synthesis phase also incorporated the last four steps of Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological data analysis: relate and cluster the invariant meaning units into themes, synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience by including verbatim examples, reflect on the textural description and through imaginative variation construct a description of the

structures of the experience, and construct a textual-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience (Hayes & Singh, 2012, p. 355).

During this synthesis stage, I recognized a connection between the textual and structural descriptions and the conditions outlined in Allport's (1954/1979) intergroup contact hypothesis. As I condensed the 58 identified codes into preliminary themes, I made the decision to utilize Allport's conditions (equal group status, friendship potential, pursuit of common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support of authorities) to frame the understanding the meaning and depth of the essence of the positive experiences of the participants (Hayes & Singh, 2012). Thus, the four identified themes mirror the conditions outlined by Allport (two themes, pursuit of common goals and intergroup cooperation were combined into one – pursuit of common goals through intergroup cooperation). As a result, the hypothesis emerged not only as a way to analyze, but also frame my findings.

Bridling

Throughout the data collection and analysis, I utilized bridling and reflexivity (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008). This process is defined as when researchers take an open stance to scrutinize their involvement with the phenomenon and continually reflect upon how meanings develop and "come to be" within the research and data collection (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Different from the traditional notion of bracketing (the process of a researcher setting aside their pre-understandings of the phenomenon being studied), bridling considers, through continuous analysis, how the researcher's pre-understandings might influence the phenomenon under investigation (Vagle, 2009; Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009). This method allowed me to utilize my own

subjectivities and experiences throughout the process and data analysis. In turn, bridling

journal entries and reflexivity (active self-awareness and reflection) were utilized

throughout the data collection and analysis stages (Hayes & Singh, 2012) "as a space to

wonder, question, think, contradict, or agree with theoretical frameworks and data within

the study" (Lee, 2010, p. 60). Through these entries, I was able to deeply immerse

myself in each stage of the data collection and analysis. This journaling also enhanced

the trustworthiness of the data (Hayes & Singh, 2012).

Strategies for Trustworthiness

Within qualitative research, the goal of trustworthiness is to support the argument

that the findings provide material "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.

290). To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I incorporated the four principles of

Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I

implemented several tools to adhere to these areas of trustworthiness in the study.

Credibility. Credibility refers to an evaluation of whether the research findings

represent a believable interpretation of the data drawn from the participants, or the

internal validity or believability of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The credibility of

this research study was established through the use of Patton's (2002) three elements of

credibility: (1) rigorous methods for gathering data through engagement with the

phenomenon through consideration of my own exposure, the participant's experience,

and the related literature and ensuring data analysis addresses issues of validity,

reliability, and triangulation; (2) credibility of the researcher, including their educational

background, experiences, and self-presentation; and (3) a philosophical belief in the value

of qualitative inquiry, including the admiration of the research that led the researcher to

respect the beliefs and views of the participants. To ensure each of these elements were met, I also informed the participants that my methods were secure, my belief in the research was genuine, my credentials were authentic, and my intentions were sincere.

Validity and Reliability. Within qualitative research, validity is defined as "evidence of authentic, believable findings for a phenomenon from research that results from a strict adherence to methodological rules and standards" (Hayes & Singh, 2012, p. 192). Essentially, validity refers to ensuring the data collection is adequately designed to measure what it is supposed to measure (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). To increase internal validity, I deeply analyzed the current data and literature on the topic and immersed myself in the data collection and analysis phase. This allowed me to gain a deeper understanding into literature and the experiences of my participants and how the two relate (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). External validity was ensured through the presentation of rich, thick descriptions of the narratives shared by each participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, I utilized member checking by sharing the interpreted themes and final report with the participants to ensure the accuracy of my interpretations of the responses describing their lived experiences (Creswell, 2009; Hays & Singh, 2012).

Reliability refers to the researcher's ability to explain the phenomena under investigation as others may see it (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). I employed two techniques to enhance reliability, (1) maintaining a bridling journal and (2) the use of peer examination. By incorporating peer review into this study, I was able to have a devil's advocate to provide an external check of the research process through asking clarifying questions about methods, analysis and interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In general, the credibility, validity and reliability of the study is based on the truthfulness of the

findings and conclusions gained through effectively hearing and documenting the voice of the participants in the specific context.

Triangulation. This study consisted of three different types of triangulation (Denzin, 1970). First, data triangulation was achieved through identifying seven women from three different institutions as participants (Patton, 2002). Data triangulation was also completed through cross-referencing this study's data to existing literature and empirical studies. Second, theoretical triangulation was achieved through utilizing Allport's Intergroup Contact Hypothesis and Critical Race Theory to interpret the data. Third, the data was collected at multiple points in time through the use of a two interview structure with the participants. Triangulation was especially important as it increases probability that findings will be credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability. Transferability correlates to external validity and describes the extent to which the findings might apply to others in similar settings or transfer beyond the scope of the project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was addressed through a thorough review and incorporation of the literature. Additionally, the use of three institutions and two methods of data collection increased the transferability of the study.

Dependability and Confirmability. Dependability demonstrates that a study is consistent across time, and researchers and changes over time are taken into consideration. To account for dependability, I kept a bridling journal and tracked themes chronologically as they emerged. Confirmability means that the study accurately reflects participants and not interference from the researcher, as well as that the data has been confirmed by someone other than the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability was established through the use of a research team. For this study, my research team

consisted of six individuals: a White female currently pursuing her master's degree, a White female master's degree graduate, a White male and Black female doctoral student, a Black doctoral candidate, and a White Doctoral graduate. Members were chosen due to their understanding of qualitative research and interest in the phenomenon under investigation. The research team assisted with data analysis, including coding transcriptions and determining final themes. In addition to the research team, I completed member checking with the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through this collaboration, I was able to ensure the voices, opinions, and perspectives of the participants were adequately portrayed through the study.

Conclusion

Phenomenological methodology was used as the research approach for this dissertation study. The study was grounded within Allport's (1954/1979) intergroup contact hypothesis. Additionally, critical race theory was utilized to provide an additional perspective for the discussion. This chapter provided an overview of the methodology utilized for this study. The findings of the study, including detailed descriptions using the words of the Black women members of historically White Greek-lettered organizations participating in the study are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Utilizing phenomenological methodology, this qualitative study incorporated personal narratives to construct and explore the experiences of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations. I identified and explored the factors influencing the decision of the women to seek membership in their sorority and how they navigated their experience within their organization. The following research questions (RQ's) guided this study:

RQ1: What pre-collegiate background factors influenced the decision of Black women to seek membership in historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

RQ2: What collegiate factors or anticipated benefits influenced the decision of Black women to seek membership in historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

RQ3: How do Black women describe their experience within their historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

RQ4: How do Black women navigate their experience in historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

To provide a foundation for the study, this chapter describes the data analysis process and offers an introduction to the participants. Then the results of the study are presented utilizing the themes identified through the data analysis process. The four themes, equal group status, friendship potential, pursuit of common goals through

intergroup cooperation, and support of authorities, are supported through textual and structural descriptions directly from the participants.

Data Analysis Summary

Following the process outlined in chapter three, open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. The interviews followed a modified version of the phenomenological interview structure created by Dolbeare and Schuman (1982) by collapsing their intended three interview structure into two. The first interview focused on life history and the details of the experience while the second interview encouraged the participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and was held in a location of the participant's choosing away from distractions and others to ensure confidentiality. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were analyzed following the phenomenological methods outlined by Creswell (2008) with components of Patton's (2002) and Moustakas's (1994) methods of data collection.

During the coding phase of the analysis, a research team composed of six individuals assisted with creating initial codes that were utilized by me in the horizontalization process. Following the horizontalization process, the synthesis stage allowed me to formulate 56 textual (an account of what was experienced) and structural (how the phenomenon was experienced by the participants) descriptions through interpreting the meaning of the participant's words (Moustakas, 2004). Lastly, these textual and structural descriptions were condensed into four themes connected to theoretical constructs to provide the meaning and depth of the essence of the experience of the participant (Hayes & Singh, 2012)

Participants

For a phenomenological study to be completed accurately, it is important to identify participants who have direct experience with the specific phenomenon. Therefore, purposive sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Johnson & Christensen, 2012) was utilized to select participants. Other than one participant, Stacy, I had no previous knowledge of the women. Each participant identified as a Black woman initiated into a historically White Greek-lettered organization at one of the three predominately White institutions. These institutions were selected due to the diversity of their student population and interest from their students to be a part of the study. Participants included two undergraduates from Alpha University, four from Beta University, and one from Gamma University. In order to provide participants with confidentiality, participants selected pseudonyms. An overview of participant background information can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Age	Year	Race	Ethnicity
Estrella	19	Sophomore	Did not identify	"Melting pot of all of the world and US"
Felicia	20	Senior	Black	Did not identify
Haleigh	21	Senior	Black	Did not identify
Isabelle	21	Senior	Black	African American
Sasha	21	Senior	Black	American, Jamaican, Antiguan
Scarlett	20	Junior	Black/Latina	Puerto Rican
Stacy	21	Senior	Black	African American

Through the women's interviews, I noticed how similar their backgrounds and experiences were to each other, a finding that was purely coincidental as they were not selected due to their commonalities other than all being Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations. As I continually reflected on the participants' stories during the data analysis, I recognized the importance of not only sharing their experiences as a group, but as individuals. I felt it was vital to provide an in-depth description of each participant because of the connection between their backgrounds and the findings of this dissertation. By providing an individual overview of participants, the reader will be able to develop a foundational understanding of the women's backgrounds to better grasp the essence of the factors influencing their experience within their organization.

To ensure the participants' stories were adequately portrayed to the reader, the following section will give voice to their individual experiences through the utilization of their own textual and structural descriptions. The participant overviews will be structured through four paragraphs: (1) pre-collegiate environment, experience with racial diversity, and support for cross-racial interaction; (2) reasons for selecting their institution, perceptions about the campus climate, and the impact of being a student of color at a historically White institution; (3) why they chose to pursue their historically White Greek-lettered organization; and (4) their overall experience within the sorority. Due to the connection between their backgrounds and the findings of this dissertation, I felt it was important to provide an in-depth description of the participants to represent their stories first as individuals before introducing the four themes of the study.

Participant One – "Estrella"

Estrella is a 19 year old sophomore attending Alpha University. She attended a predominantly White elementary school, which is where she recalls her first experience interacting and developing a friendship with someone outside of her race. For her, describing this experience was easy as "*all of [her] friends growing up were not Black...[she] got to grow up with a White childhood.*" Her predominantly White elementary school was her comfort zone "*because that's what [she] was used to.*" In middle school, her county was redistricted and she changed schools to a more racially diverse school, where she experienced "*culture shock because everyone was like 'you're Black!' and [she] was like 'no, I'm not!'*" Even with a few Black friends, Estrella's pre-collegiate identity in her eyes, more closely aligned with what she believed it meant to be White, especially due to her not identifying with "*the Black nuances that [she] should have learned as a child or growing up*" and having a "*more structured and sheltered childhood*" that "w*as more centered or what [she] would expect or learning now what happened in more of a White person's family childhood than a Black child's childhood.*" When asked to describe how she identifies herself, she answered, "*I don't know if I would identify with race. I don't know what I am, like I said, I'm a big melting pot of the world.*" For Estrella, this outlook appeared throughout her two interviews with the different terms she used to describe herself, ranging from "*weird*," "*different*," to even a "*Golden Oreo*" to depict her belief that she's "*light on the outside and also a White child on the inside.*"

Estrella believed "*Alpha University chose [her] more than [she] chose Alpha.*" However, she credits the "*instant click*" she felt with the school to its size, beauty, and

traditions, proximity to her hometown, the support of her mother, and her financial aid package as the ultimate deciding factors for attending Alpha University. Alpha University's classification as a predominately White institution was also appealing to Estella, as "*[she] didn't wanna go to a historically Black college.*" She supported this decision in her explanation that,

> *It's a lot of Black people and I can't do that many people [laughs]. I just, I can't. It's a lot of people there and they are all being pro-African American. I'm just like "stop, sit down, be quiet, shhhh, it's okay, we're all good," type of thing. And I was like "I wanna go somewhere where if I feel I have an issue that, as a Black person, I can advocate, I can do it, and my point may get across with not a million other Black people there. I just, I don't know. It's, it's something that I guess I went into saying "I wanna go to an all-White school" and that's what happened.*

When discussing her institution that she "*loves,*" she mentioned her high level of comfort with the campus environment because "*everyone knows you.*" With such an open and accepting environment, Estrella did not believe she or her involvement was affected by being a Black student at a predominantly White institution. As someone who has always been involved, "*going to college, [she] didn't really change.*" She believed her institution promotes cross-racial interaction "*tremendously*" and encourages all students to get involved with each other and the community.

From the moment Estrella saw the movie *Legally Blonde*, a movie based on a White, blonde woman in a historically White Greek-lettered organization, Estrella knew

she wanted to join a sorority like Delta Nu, the sorority in the movie. In describing her reaction to the movie, she says,

> *I didn't know what it meant. I didn't know what it was like, but I told my mom when I was in like, third or fourth grade, "I'm gonna join a White sorority." I was like, "I'm gonna be in the Legally Blonde sorority and I'm gonna have all of these friends and its gonna be great. It's gonna be perfect." That's exactly what happened.*

As a result, Estrella was not interested in joining a historically Black Greek-lettered organization even after participating in a mentoring program sponsored by two of the historically Black Greek-lettered organizations aimed at introducing young men and women to these organizations. This experience was positive for Estrella, but where she "*realized [she] didn't like it and didn't want to do it.*" Once at Alpha University, she attended an orientation event where she was allowed to spend the night at a sorority house and learned about recruitment. She participated in recruitment and decided on her current sorority because of an "*instantaneous moment*" when she realized "*this is where [she] belonged*" and had found her "*fit.*"

Estrella's experience within her sorority is something she "*loves.*" It is her "*family.*" It is where she laughs, is herself, has serious conversations, and calls "*a home within my college life.*" She described her experience as "fun" and "not intimidating or anything" due to how much she loves her sisters. When asked to describe her sorority experience in five words, she chose "*awesome, nutty, beautiful, amazing, and home.*"

Participant Two - "Felicia"

Felicia is a 20-year old senior attending Beta University. Felicia identifies as a Black, Nigerian woman because she has "*a lot of cultural ties with Nigeria.*" Through being able to continually visit Nigeria, she "*feels like [her] cultural identity has stayed intact.*" She was born and raised on the West coast of the United States where "*it's not unusual for your friendship groups to span like multiple different cultures.*" As a result, her first experience interacting and developing a friendship with someone outside of her race occurred at an early age, and throughout her life she had a lot of friends of different races and cultures. For as long as she can remember, cross-racial interaction was not only encouraged and supported, but was the norm for her community, with social cliques being determined by interest rather than race. In describing her pre-collegiate friendships, she mentioned, "*my friend groups at home, none of us are the same ethnicity, like we're all very different and that's very like, it's very usual back home.*"

Felicia chose Beta University due to the high caliber of the school and academic reputation. She felt "*super comfortable on campus*" and welcomed to "*join any kind of club or activity*" which allowed her to maintain the same high level of involvement she had in high school. She did not believe that being a student of color at a predominantly White institution influenced her involvement. She described her interactions with her peers, both White students and other students, as "*good*" and "*something I've never had to really stop and think about.*" When asked about how Beta University promoted diversity, she commended them on their efforts.

> *I think when you look at the other schools, just around, Beta in comparison, Beta is doing an amazing job and I think that they are doing really well in the sense*

that like they have, they really love diversity,...it's like they, they love the diversity

of their students and they promote it. And then they try to be very proactive in the

sense that if there's anything that kind of threatens the diversity on campus, they

try to kind of nip it in the bud before that happens which I really appreciate.

Felicia entered Beta University with a preconceived notion of what it meant to be Greek based on the stereotypes of Greek life at large southern state institutions. She quickly learned that her assumptions were inaccurate and realized Beta's "*Greek life is very different from a typical southern school so [she] was more interested.*" Without having friends at Beta University due to her cross country move, she decided to go through recruitment because "*joining a sorority would be the quickest and most fun way*" to meet a lot of people. She initially considered joining a historically Black Greek-lettered organization; however, because these organizations do not allow freshman members, she did not pursue membership in the organizations so that she could "*join a sorority right when [she] got to campus.*" She ultimately decided to join her organization based on "*comfort*" and "*fit.*"

Felicia's experience within her organization is "*good, really good.*" It is something that she cannot comprehend "*how many girls [she's] met that [she] has become really close to and how much [she] love[s] it.*" The sorority has become her "*big family*" of "*sisters there whenever [you] need them.*" She feels "*comfortable*" within her organization. She never doubted decision to join and cannot think of college without it. She described this feeling.

I sat down and tried to [think of her life without it]... I can't like even in the

smallest ways, it's been...it's just always been there and sometimes I really don't

understand how I got through this one semester without [the sorority]! So it's

just been such a big part of my college experience and then such a positive way in

big ways and little ways.

When asked to describe her sorority experience in five words (she could only think of

three), she chose,

Unexpected, because if someone told [her] during recruitment that [she] would

be the president of [her] sorority and have as many close friendships as [she]

does, [she] wouldn't believe it; fun, because [she's] had a lot of fun; and once-in-

a-lifetime, because it's an experience [she] would not trade for the world.

Participant Three - "Haleigh"

Haleigh is a 21-year old senior attending Alpha University who identifies as a

Black woman. She was raised in a small town and attended predominantly White schools

pre-college. As a result, describing her first experience interacting and developing a

friendship with someone outside of her race, "*wasn't really a problem for [her] cause*

[she's] always had a diverse group of friends growing up." This was especially apparent

in her advanced placement classes where she was "*one of the only minorities in the*

classes with the advanced learning students" as "*basically White people were all that*

were in the class." Unfortunately, while this allowed her to develop friendships with

individuals of different races, it also "*created a divide with [her] Black friends because*

they would kinda think that [her and her friends] thought that [she] and like some of the

other Blacks that were in the class were better than everyone else." For her, she knows

"*that wasn't the case.*" This also led her to experience microaggressions throughout her

pre-college years. She shrugged this off, saying that she was,

Kind of used to it by now cause growing up I was always called like an oreo in high school. Because nobody ever saw me like interact with my Black friends unless it was during sports practice because I was with the White kids in classes. They automatically assumed that I was an Oreo, like White on the inside Black on the outside. And then in middle school I was bullied by the people who were the same color as me because they didn't like me and then I don't know just for…I don't know...so, I'm just kind of used to being that only Black kid in the situation.

Regardless of these experiences, she quoted Martin Luther King, Jr. in saying she was raised to be "*encouraged to not look at somebody because of the color of their skin but look at them for the content of their character*" and to "*befriend everybody*" because being from a small town, "*you either talk to people or you don't.*"

Haleigh decided to attend Alpha University because she "*wanted a college where [she] could get away from home but be close enough to where [she] could go back home.*" After receiving a scholarship to play sports, she found a fit she desired through the small college feel and "*how everybody literally is like a family and a support system here.*" For her, the connection to a family atmosphere made her "*love*" her university.

We don't just tell people that just to get them to come here. Like it really is a family. And everybody just wants to see you succeed so that's what I really looked for and that one on one attention especially being from a small town. You couldn't get that if you went to a larger university.

Furthermore, this atmosphere contributed to her comfort with Alpha University and her willingness to interact with everyone and across-racial lines.

[Alpha University] empowers the person. They don't care if you're White, Black, if you're you know Hispanic, Latino, Muslim, or whatever it is, you know they don't care. They just want you to…I don't know just embrace yourself, embrace who you are. So I just feel that by embracing that and having that support system...and having friends around you that may not particularly look like you but have the same motivations that you do, it creates a bond that everybody kinda just goes together so you know you end up with a cross friendship like racial friendships whether you want it to or not.

Haleigh was "*not interested in joining an organization at all, particularly not a White Greek organization*" at Alpha University. After suffering an injury that left her unable to play on her sports team and "*feeling like [her] team turned their back on [her]*," she decided to explore Greek life after "*seeing how everyone had the support system behind them in the Greek organizations.*" She quickly realized "*she wanted to be a part of it*" and decided "*to do [her] research.*" Ultimately, through being recruited to join her organization by women in her residence hall and classes, she "*started building friendships with the women*" and chose her organization based off of its philanthropy, "*following [her] heart*, and where she had the "*most in common*" and was "*comfortable.*"

Haleigh's experience within her sorority has been a "*very good experience.*" She "*found a family*" to help her "*overcome a very tough time.*" She can "*just be [her]self*," "*call on anyone*," and "*find support*" through her sisters who she loves. When asked to describe her sorority experience in five words, Haleigh chose "*unique, loving, support system, family, and comrade.*"

Participant Four - "Isabelle"

Isabelle is a 21-year old senior attending Beta University who identifies as a Black woman. Throughout her pre-collegiate years, she was very involved in school through extracurricular activities and honors/advanced placement classes. As she recalled, her first experience interacting and developing a relationship with someone outside of her race, "*wasn't really anything out of the norm*" as "*a large majority of my friends were not persons of color.*" With both of her parents being educators, Isabelle was encouraged to be friends with anyone, as "*it wasn't really a 'make friends along racial lines,' it was just like a 'make friends.'*" However, even with her openness to cross-racial friendships, Isabelle encountered difficulty during her junior year as being the only Black student in some of her advanced classes which "*with kids being the kids that they are, thought the perfect kind of ammunition to make jokes along racial lines.*" Fortunately, with the help of her guidance counselor she was able to overcome this difficulty and reflects on the other three years of high school as being very positive.

From a young age, Isabelle began researching colleges based on rankings due to her desire to eventually attend an Ivy League or academically rigorous institution. She chose Beta University due to its proximity to home, encouragement of family, reputation of her major program, and receiving a scholarship. After initially considering attendance at a historically Black university, Isabelle sought "*seeing and meeting people who did not grow up in the same cultural diversity as [her].*" This was something she found in Beta through finding "*friends of all different races, religions, and cultures*" that was "*really invaluable to [her].*" Her friendships have influenced her comfort level to where she feels "*pretty comfortable*" with the campus environment of Beta University. When asked

how being a student of color on a predominately White institution has impacted her involvement, she replied,

I don't think it has had any bearing whatsoever. I've always had a history of joining a bunch of organizations...I think I try to approach things without having my past experiences with being a person of color influence it. I kind of just try to approach with, do I like being in this kind of organization? If so, then I try to join it.

While she does feel comfortable on campus and does not feel impacted by being a student of color on Beta's campus, she does not believe that Beta University promotes opportunities for cross-racial interaction, especially due to two large controversial racial incidents that have occurred on campus. For her, this shows that no institution is "*impervious to ignorance*" and has not "*colored [her] perception of the university*" or how she believes she is treated as a student of color by the university.

Joining a Greek-lettered organization was something that was on Isabelle's "*radar for a lot of [her] life because [her] father was in a historically Black fraternity and [her] mother almost joined a historically Black sorority.*" However, after arriving at Beta University and "*not having a very positive perception of the historically Black organizations,*" Isabelle considered other options. The thought of joining a historically White organization was something that she "*was not sure about for a very long time*" because of the things she heard "*like the stereotypes - they're superficial, they're racist - and that was scary.*" After being asked by several friends to go through recruitment with them, she agreed. Through recruitment she "*didn't feel judged*" and chose her organization based on "*fit*" and feeling she was "*home in their house.*"

Isabelle's experience within her sorority has been "*very positive*" and she has "*loved every minute of it.*" She has met new people and had impactful experiences she might not have, had it not been for her sisters. However, to get to this point, "*it took [her] some time to get comfortable with the idea but once [she] did, um, [she's] really, really happy that [she] did it.*" When asked to describe her sorority experience in five words, she chose "*loud, close-knit, enthusiastic, crazy, and loving.*"

Participant Five - "Sasha"

Sasha is a 21-year old senior attending Beta University who identifies as racially Black and ethnically as an American, Antiguan, and Jamaican woman. Growing up, Sasha was involved in everything including community service, the school newspaper, theatre/drama, and honors/advanced placement classes. Sasha was raised in a predominantly White environment. Her first experience interacting and developing a friendship with someone outside of her race was in preschool. Throughout "*school, [her] groups of friends were diverse*" in that she "*was encouraged to interact interracially because there wasn't really another option unless you wanted to be alone or interact with yourself.*" In middle school, she experienced discrimination, was often termed the "*token Black girl,*" and told that she was "*not like the other Black girls.*" In high school she attempted to get away from these microaggressions "*because it wasn't a good experience.*" However, through these experiences she learned how to recognize her true friends as she "*examined who [she] was friends with and why [she] was friends with them.*" It was not until high school when she was a camp counselor that she developed close friendships with other Black women and experienced "*the first time [she] was in a space that wasn't majority White*" which "*was really good for [her].*" Looking back on

her pre-collegiate years, her experiences allowed her to describe the impact of being Black in a predominantly White environment, how to navigate and assimilate into a "*White environment*," and the importance of talking about race.

Without ever visiting the university, Sasha selected Beta University due to her gut that "*it just felt right*" and having received scholarship. She considered a historically Black university, but decided against it because her grandfather did not want her to attend and a fear of not getting a scholarship. The opportunity to have professors of color and the difference in the racial makeup and diversity between her high school and Beta University were also appealing factors. Unlike other participants who constantly felt comfortable with their campus environment, Sasha's comfort "*depended on the day*," especially due to the same controversial racial incidents mentioned by Isabelle. However, through finding "*really good people to surround [herself] with*," she has had a good experience. "*As an institution, [she] doesn't love Beta, but [she] definitely loves the experience that [she] was able to make for [herself]*." Additionally, for Sasha, being a student of color at a predominantly White institution did influence her involvement. It motivated her to "*create a very solid Black community, number one, and become increasingly more involved with social justice initiatives*." This is especially important for her because of her belief that Beta University does not promote opportunities for cross-racial interaction and friendships. Rather, she states, Beta University believes they are "*so diverse that it will just happen, but its not enough*." Her friendship groups mirror this as "*in certain organizations, [she] has a lot of interactions with people of all races, but the friendships and partnerships that [she] has forged - most of [her] friends and the ones [she] is closest to - are people of color*."

Greek life was not something that was initially on Sasha's radar when she arrived at Beta University. If anything, she believed she may join a historically Black Greek-lettered organization; upon realizing the organization she was interested in was not at Beta University, she reconsidered her options. After witnessing several of her friends join historically White Greek-lettered organizations and talking to other women of color in these organizations to make sure it was something she could do, she decided to join. She picked her sorority based on the connections she found with the women and knew during recruitment that "*if [she] didn't get in [her sorority] then [she] wouldn't be in a sorority.*"

Sasha's experience within her sorority has "*been good, like nothing particularly terrible has happened.*" She attributed her experience to the "*fun*" she has had and "*the close friends that [she] has made.*" However, she noted that her experience "*depends on the day,*" as it varies from "*fun, stress, love, hanging out, and other adjectives.*"

Participant Six - "Scarlett"

Scarlett is a 20-year old junior attending Beta University. She identifies racially as Black/Latina and ethnically as a Puerto Rican female. She was raised in a "*stereotypical, Southern, conservative, suburbia town.*" After middle school, she moved to a more rural area where she experienced "*a culture shock.*" Because of this she "*didn't necessarily care for [her] pre-college experience just in the sense that was kind of hard for [her] to find people that [she] actually connected with.*" As someone who was always identified as the "*token Black girl*" in all of her classes, including her honors/advanced placement courses, this connection was even more difficult. Growing up in a predominantly White environment, she found it challenging to distinctly

remember her first experience interacting and developing a friendship with someone outside of her race because she "*never grew up in a way that [her] parents stressed about [her] race being different that others.*" For her, she "*remembers more meeting people of color than [she] does befriending people outside of her race, especially because [her] mom is mixed-race.*" From a young age, her parents instilled the "*philosophy of not judging anyone*" and provided opportunities to "*surround her with as many people that were different than [her]*" which "*made [her] a lot more accepting.*" She credited any feelings of "*alienation*" or "*difference*" she faced due to her "*liberal views,*" and nothing that was "*defined by any racial tensions or racial barriers at her school*" as she never can recall a time when "*because of [her] race, [she] was standing outside of this circle of people.*"

Scarlett chose to attend Beta University due to its proximity to a city, small school feel, and the academic reputation and caliber. At Beta University, she "*saw [herself] fitting into the student culture*" and found the "*racial diversity, diversity of thoughts, and diversity of culture*" she desired in a campus. Even though she sought racial diversity, "*it was shocking for [her] to come to Beta and see so many other people of color at one place.*" She described this feeling as "*not unsettling*" but nice to know "*there was more of [her] out there.*" Scarlett felt "*incredibly comfortable*" with the campus environment and culture of Beta University and praised the university in "*promoting an environment where it felt easy to make friendships, even across-racial lines.*" She believed she was able to "*mesh right into the culture*" as soon as she arrived on campus. Due to this, she did not believe being a student of color on a predominately White institution has "*influenced her involvement negatively or positively.*" To her it was important to

approach her involvement "*without considering that [the racial] part of my life*" but rather the "*things she liked to do.*"

Scarlett entered Beta University "*very against Greek life due to horror stories about rush and recruitment*" from her friends at bigger state schools. After witnessing a lot of her "*friends who were similar to her become members and come out relatively unscathed*," she realized that Beta was different from other schools and "*reevaluated her decision to go through recruitment.*" Even though many of her family members were members of historically Black Greek-lettered organizations, because of her desire to be in a bigger organization, "*she was drawn to the White-lettered organizations.*" She joined her organization based on finding a "*fit and home*," "*being drawn to them*," "*feeling comfortable*," and being "*pushed to go outside [her]self.*"

Scarlett "*has had a great time so far*" in her experience with her sorority. Through her organization she has found "*the openness and friendliness that drew [her] to Beta*" as well as support. When asked to describe her sorority experience in five words, she chose "*positive, fun, self-esteem building, open, and pride.*"

Participant Seven - "Stacy"

Stacy is a 21-year old senior from Gamma University. She identified racially as Black and ethnically as African American. She moved from Togo, West Africa to a mixed race, lower economic community in the United States when she was young. In elementary school, she moved again to a predominately White community. Stacy was raised to "*branch out*" and be "*welcoming to all people of different races.*" In recalling her first experience interacting and developing a friendship with someone outside of her race, she mentioned not "*recognizing them as a different race or any different from me or*

the other kids." Arriving in the United States without an understanding of English, her White teachers in her elementary school community "*taught [her] to speak English so [her] English was a little more pronounced and proper*" than other kids, a trait in which she was often teased. As a result, she often felt different from other Black students at her school who were "*typical stereotypical like Black people*" due to her "*proper*" ways and the feeling that "*they weren't too accepting of her.*" When asked to discuss this further, Stacy replied,

> *Within the Black community, the Black culture that I've experienced, there are people like me who are Black who speak like proper English, who...essentially, if you go back to like third-grader terms, they are Oreos, and then there are the stereotypical types who probably speak in Ebonics or shorthand or very, uhh, brutally and aggressively, although they probably don't mean to be, it's just how they speak...so in terms of that like I feel like that's kind of the core differences between, people would say "educated" Black people versus like the stereotypical Black person...I have friends whose English is not as proper as mine but I can still understand them. We get along just fine and it's because there's a mutual respect of where the other is coming from.*

Even with this disconnect with certain students, she described her friendship group as "*diverse,*" with her identifying as the "*the minority race*" as most of her friends "*were White, Hispanic or some Asian descent and maybe one other Black person.*"

Stacy made the decision to attend Gamma University due to its price, student body size, student diversity, low student to professor ratio, and that it "*seemed like a safe choice.*" She found the environment as a student of color at Gamma University as

"*normal*" and a place where "*doesn't feel discriminated*" and "*feels accepted and included in everything.*" Through this connection, she believed she made the right decision in choosing not to attend a historically Black institution. Similar to high school, Stacy is very involved at Gamma University, including taking honors/advanced classes, and does not feel this involvement is impacted at all by being a student of color at a predominately White institution.

Stacy "*had no intention of going Greek; not because of [her] race, but it wasn't on [her] radar in the things she wanted to do*" at Gamma University. With a perception that Greek-lettered organizations "*stereotypically discriminated,*" she only decided to go through rush because of being asked by friends. After being the process, "*[she] took it more seriously when she started visiting the houses and could see [her]self*" in them. She "*never even considered an all-Black organization because [she] felt it would deter what Gamma University teaches in general, like to be a diverse welcoming group of people.*"

Stacy described her experience within her organization as "*really good, it's what you make of it.*" She credited her experience being better because "*[she] has such a diverse group of women around her.*" Through her organization she has been able "*to meet and learn about a great deal of women*" and "*done things she would never have considered.*"

Summary. These stories offered a biographical introduction to the participants' experience. To develop an image of each participant, their (1) pre-college background, experiences with racial diversity and support for cross-racial interaction, (2) reasons for selecting their institution, perceptions about the campus climate and the impact of being a

student of color at a historically White institution, (3) reasons for pursuing Greek life and choosing their historically White Greek-lettered organization, and (4) experience within their organization, was discussed. This information provided context for the connection between each participant's experience and the identified themes.

Themes

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations. Initially, in my dissertation prospectus, I proposed to utilize both Allport's hypothesis and critical race theory as the theoretical framework to ground the study. Yet as I interviewed the participants, heard their stories, and began my data analysis, the connection between the perceived positive experiences of the women and Allport's hypothesis became apparent. Thus, it was clear that for me to stay true to their stories and their experiences, I needed to utilize Allport's hypothesis for my initial analysis. Furthermore, as a White woman, I struggled with the feeling that if I utilized critical race theory throughout my entire analysis that I would be challenging the essence of this dissertation, to describe how these seven Black women describe their experiences within historically White Greek-lettered organizations.

Based upon the analysis of interviews, four themes were identified: (1) equal group status, (2) friendship potential, (3) pursuit of common goals through intergroup cooperation, and (4) support of authorities. The four themes mirror the conditions of Allport's (1954/1979) intergroup contact hypothesis (two conditions, friendship potential and intergroup cooperation were combined into one theme). Allport (1954, 1979) and Pettigrew (1998) found when the five conditions existed between members of different

racial groups, positive intergroup interactions and attitudes and reduced prejudice would result.

However, I also recognized that by presenting the themes only in the manner described above, one could potentially conclude that all women who cross-racially join a historically White Greek-lettered organization have positive experiences, or that their positive descriptions of their experiences represent the only perspective of Black women on the racial dynamics within their organizations. As a result, while critical race theory was not used to develop the identified themes, it will subsequently be presented in the discussion, implementation, and recommendation section to provide an additional perspective on the topic of this dissertation. Through this approach and the utilization of textual and structural descriptions from the voices of the participants, I was able to stay true to their lived experiences and then also provide a critical race perspective on their stories.

Theme One: Equal Group Status

Allport (1954/1979) stressed the importance of equal group status *within* the situation. Inherently, with students of color only representing three to four percent of the membership within historically White Greek-lettered organizations (Hughey, 2015), it may be difficult to argue that within these organizations equal group status can be maintained. However, while several of the participants directly stated their belief that they were an equal within their organization on the local level, this theme more closely aligned with the connection each participant felt to their White sisters and organization. Having been raised in similar predominately White environments with diverse friendship groups and having more of a connection to historically White Greek-lettered

organizations over historically Black Greek-lettered organizations, the women felt their experience closely aligned and was equal to that of their sisters. Conversely, even with the connection the women felt with their organizations at a local level, the women recognized the difference in the representation of women of color at the regional and national level.

   Background of Predominately White Environment. Each of the participants was raised in a predominately White environments at some point in her pre-collegiate years. Four of the participants (Estrella, Felicia, Scarlett, Stacy) changed schools between kindergarten and high school (three were redistricted and one moved), a move that lead them to experience "*culture shock*" of meeting new peers. They were all very involved throughout their pre-college years, with four participants (Haleigh, Isabelle, Sasha, and Scarlett) being in advanced placement/honors classes. Each participant recalled at least one instance of being one of only a few Black individuals in a setting, including within their advanced placement/honors class, their friendship group, or sports team. As a result of this, all seven mentioned experiencing being tokenized and referred to as "*White*" or an "*Oreo*" (Black on the outside and White on the inside) throughout their lives due to their dialect, habits, how they were raised, and the "*stereotypical images*" of what it means to be White or Black.

   When asked to describe their first experience interacting and developing a friendship with someone outside of their race, each participant recalled a memory from their early childhood. For them, recalling these memories were easy due to their upbringing in predominately White environments. They discussed the friendships with their peers centered around their classes, extracurricular activities, and sports, rather than

race. Each woman expressed a willingness to be friends with anyone outside of their race because it was "*what [they] were used to.*"

The impact of their pre-collegiate environment on the women's openness and willingness to be friends with people of different races was apparent in each participant's story. Each woman possessed a background of being raised in environments where cross-racial interactions not only occurred, but was the norm. From being "*encouraged to interact interracially because there wasn't really an option otherwise*" (Sasha), to being challenged to understand race and power dynamics (Sasha), to being pushed to "*befriend everyone*" (Haleigh), to having parents as educators (Isabelle and Haleigh), to being a part of a mixed-racial family (Scarlett), the reason for this support varied amongst the participants. Isabelle elaborated on this.

> *Looking back in high school, a large majority of my friends were not persons of color. They tended to be White. It influenced me to make friends in college. I was more open to making friends of different races and colors, because it was what I was used to.*"

Consequently upon entering college, the women viewed other individuals, including Whites, with similar backgrounds as their peers and in many instances, their equal peers. The participants shared the feeling that their pre-college environment played a factor in their decision to join their historically White Greek-lettered organization. Sasha reflected on this, "*I am just used to being in majority White spaces, so that was never a huge deal for me and probably made it easier for me. It was something that was never like, 'I can't join this organization, 'I won't fit into this organization,' or 'I can't be in this organization.'*" Felicia commented "*I never saw it as a racial thing because*

I'm from California so it's just that everyone is so diverse." Haleigh echoed similar

sentiments in "*I'm always use to a diverse group and not being around people that are*

exactly like me."

  Positive and Equal Experience. Within their specific organization on their

campus, five women (Estrella, Felicia, Haleigh, Scarlett, and Stacy) expressed their belief

that their experience was the same as their White sisters. Felicia stated, "*I don't think my*

experience [has] really been any different. I haven't really like thought of it in that way,

umm, yeah, I don't think it's been any different than anyone else's." This feeling of

equality was connected to the participant's homophily and propinquity, the tendency to

form friendships with others who are similar and share similar experiences (Fischer,

2008; Quillian & Campbell, 2003; Stearns, Buchanan, & Bonneau, 2009). Identifying as

an equal contributed to the women's sentiment that their experience within their

organization was positive.

  While the women believed they had the same overall experience as their White

sisters within their organization, three women did mention specific instances where

differences did occur. Scarlett recognized the inequality present within the organization

was attributed to age, not race. She noted, "*I feel like they've been there longer, they've*

earned a little more respect. They have done a lot more things for [the sorority] than I

have. But I don't think that's something that's unattainable to me with the next couple of

years of my time on [Beta]'s campus."

  For Sasha and Isabelle, this difference was connected to race, a trait they

recognized their White sisters did not have to consider. Sasha discussed this, "*I think it's*

one less thing they probably think about actively. Like a lot of those girls, I don't think

they think about being a White person in certain spaces, or any spaces." Isabelle

elaborated in recognizing that

> *I can never not wonder if, "this person doesn't like me because they don't get*
>
> *along with my personality" or is it that "this person doesn't like me simply*
>
> *because of the color of my skin." Like, what factor... like, what does my... does*
>
> *the color of my skin have a...or because I'm Black... play a factor in for why you*
>
> *treat me the way you do?...I feel like for the girls that are not persons of*
>
> *color...like for them, it's easier to be, like, "Oh, it's just because I did something*
>
> *she didn't like or she did something that I didn't like."*

Isabelle was also one individual who mentioned not always feeling like an equal within

her organization. When asked if she felt she was an equal, she replied

> *"Some days, yes, some days, no. Some days, I do feel like...and those are*
>
> *particularly negative days, but some days, I do feel like I...like, people are kind of*
>
> *looking at me...and it's the ones that don't really talk to me. Like, they kind of look*
>
> *at me...as less than, or they don't consider me as a sister. And so, like... But I*
>
> *don't feel that way, umm, with the grand majority of the sorority. It's only with*
>
> *those specific people but…"*

However, after making these statements about the perceived differences and small

incidents of not feeling like an equal, the women quickly turned the conversation away

from age or race back to their overall experience. For Isabelle, after the abovementioned

quote, she continued with "*But in terms of, like, my overall experience, I don't think it's*

been very different at all."

Decision to Join a Historically White Greek-lettered Organization. Given

that the women made the decision to join a historically White Greek-lettered organization

instead of a historically Black-lettered organization, at the time of their decision to join

Greek life, they felt a stronger connection to the historically White organization. Four of

the women spoke directly to their reasoning behind joining their organization over a

historically Black organization. Their decision was based off of their backgrounds and

experiences, including desiring exposure to individuals who did not look like them and/or

were more similar to their friendship groups before college.

Stacy made the decision for two reasons, first because of who she connected with,

I wasn't always the first to be accepted, like most of my friends were either, like,

Asian, Hispanic or White. Like I didn't have very many Black friends and if I did it

was usually through like, my parents because I had to be there. So I felt like if I

were to join like a historically Black, um, Greek organization, it probably would

be kind of awkward for me, just because like, I wouldn't understand some of their

culture, some of their – like it's not, um, similar to my own.

Second, she sought a new experience.

With same race organizations I felt like it's going to be the same conversations,

same events, it's going to be routine. Every so often you might find someone who

is a little different and has like all of these different things going on,

but…generally for the most part I like being around people who are as diverse as

I am.

Haleigh expressed these two similar sentiments in, *"I just didn't want to be around*

people who were exactly like me...it's not about joining [something or] somebody that

looks like me...And I guess that's why, that's what weighed really differently is that I

wanted that diversity because there's all sorts of ethnicities in mine [Greek-lettered

organization]." Haleigh also felt it was important to follow her intuitions with who she

connected with, "*I ended up following my heart and I just had more in common with the*

people in the White organizations, I guess because that's where I was comfortable...I

kinda clicked with that group. So you know, so that's why I did it." Isabelle's decision

was influenced by attending Beta University, "*I think just being here, it made more sense*

for me to do it because the historically White sororities were doing all the things I liked,

and I saw their presence on campus and they made an impression on me a little bit more

than the African-American sororities." For Scarlett, her choice was based on the size and

diversity of the organization.

> *I think that for me I just was drawn to the White-lettered organization just*
>
> *because they're a lot bigger. They're a lot more developed. And also because*
>
> *here they're not necessarily just White like they might be at another school so I*
>
> *think that for me I viewed it as that's definitely something that's like historically*
>
> *White-lettered but not present day [all White].*

Racial Representation at the Organization's National Level. Felicia, Haleigh,

Isabelle, Scarlett, and Stacy discussed the difference in the representation of women of

color on a regional and national level from the local chapter of their sorority. Felicia did

not think negatively of the difference and explained this through her recollection of

attending her sorority's national conference.

> *They weren't as many just like women of color, like in comparison to [Beta]'s*
>
> *chapter, but they were not like not any, like, there were good amount but just*

wasn't as many as [Beta]. My experience was fine, it was nothing unusual, or

something that made me uncomfortable. I felt comfortable walking to other

sessions like everyone was so sweet just like trying to get to know each other so

convention was good.

Stacy believed that she was represented on the national level by "*a quarter*" but was okay with this statistic.

Like if you look at, like the website, I think in like a group of four or five there's

like, maybe one. One other, um, woman of color and – I mean that's expected, it's

like – but it's not odd to see, it's not like, like if I saw that on the website I

wouldn't think, "Oh, well, you know, why aren't there more Black people than

White people?"...It's expected. This [students of color in historically White Greek-

lettered organizations] is a relatively new concept.

Scarlett echoed Stacy's belief that cross-racial membership was a relatively new concept but that it was slow moving.

That's something that's happening and I think that it'll happen on its own but I

think that at this current moment it's kind of like slow moving process [here] and

in other places in the United States. So, I think that it's one of those things where I

definitely wish that I was a little more represented on the national level...but I

don't think that [my sorority] as an organization is standing in the way of that I

think it's just as longer process of people kind of removing the stigmas they have

of White letter organizations and of women of color in White letter organizations.

Isabelle also recognized the new concept but elaborated on this sentiment that it was "*trailblazing.*" "*I'll look at other websites...and I'll see a Black girl. 'Like, yay. Like,*

that's fun...we're coming into an organization and it's not where people would normally expect us to be. And that's great!' And I think it's trailblazing." She continued by mentioning,

> *My idea is...is to try to not look at it through a lens of, uh, is my...is there someone who looks like me and are they representing me? Like, because we're all ideally supposed to be in one organization that stands for these values and... like, regardless of racial lines. Values should extend across-racial lines and it shouldn't really matter.*

For her, she believed it was important to base the organization on values about race.

On the contrary, Haleigh believed that she had no connection to the regional and national level.

> *They [the national level] need to recognize people like sisters of color on a national level because, you know, I'll kinda see other minorities but that they are more fair skinned, like they're not Black, they don't have dark skin. They'll kinda recognize those people maybe in a group shot every once in a while, but like, if you don't have you know the long hair, like fair skin, like you're just kinda invisible and that's when I feel like if on a national level they kinda could recognize and you know embrace that you have sisters that are different I feel like, you know or we'd be more comfortable.*

However, like the other women, Haleigh did not directly state that this impacted her view of the difference between their local organization and the national level.

Summary. The women in this study identified the connection they felt to their historically White Greek-lettered organizations and the equal status they had with their

sisters. They chose to join their organizations due to their familiarity with the women in the organizations based on their upbringing in predominantly White environments and the similarity between their friendship groups before joining the organization and the relationships they developed within the sorority. While they were able to describe a feeling of connection and equality amongst their sisters, three women (Sasha, Isabelle, and Haleigh) mentioned instances where their equal group status were challenged. Yet, even with these memories, they did not allow these experiences to alter their overall experience within their organization.

Theme Two: Friendship Potential

The decision to join a sorority is based on many different factors depending on the person. For the seven women in this study, finding an organization where they "*fit*," often due to the organization's diversity and history of cross-racial membership, influenced their decision to join. Being new to their colleges and looking to meet people, pursued involvement in an organization where they could find a support system and connect to others similar to them. Haleigh described this, "*you know just seeing how everybody had the support system behind them in the Greek organizations, I wanted to be a part of that.*" Within the conditions of the intergroup contact hypothesis, they sought a place with the potential to forge a friendship (Allport, 1954/1979; Pettigrew, 1998).

Decision Based on Fit, not Race. Estrella, Haleigh, Isabelle, Scarlett, and Stacy made their decision to join their historically White Greek-lettered organization based on the fit they found within the sorority and not on the context of race. Estrella approached recruitment with the understanding that "*choice opens you up to really identify with what you identify with as a person.*" Through this she realized the importance of being in an

organization with people who fit what she desired in an organization and "*who [she] really identif[ied] with.*" Haleigh also described her decision was about connection and fit, "*honestly it's not about joining someone that looks like me. It's about what we're founded upon and what, you know, I feel is important to me.*" She continued, "*it just doesn't matter what color you are, you know if you like what your organization is founded upon, if you like, you know, what they stand for, if you like the people that are in it, if you feel that you fit in, then, you know, do what makes you happy.*"

For Isabelle, it was important to her for race to not be a factor in the decision.

There are gonna be experiences that I'm going to have where I do have to think about it, but within the sorority, I try not to let it come into that part of my life at this point in time. And one might really question the motives behind why I do that and one might say I am suppressing it. And that's...that's a pretty decent interpretation of the way I act but to me, I don't see...I just...It's because I choose not to let it.

Scarlett also sought connection, comfort, and fit, "*I think that here [Beta University] they just kinda push you to go towards what you feel comfortable with. And I think that that's where I ended up, being pushed towards...my friend group.*" Lastly, Stacy desired to be a part of something and made the conscious effort to not think about race, but rather just being part of the group. She mentioned, "*my race isn't something that I...that is my main focus all the time. I have so much else going on and I like to be open to others.*" Her belief was,

At the end of the day, it's just what matches up with me most. Even if it does, you know, lack some of the cultural stuff with an HB [historically Black], um, with an

HB organization, you know I – I can make up for that because we [her sisters]

still have the same values and still have the same beliefs and things like that and

we can find common ground on other things. You know, so at the end of the day,

it's like you – it's not just one aspect of the organization, you have to critically

evaluate all of it and see how it fits with you and how you'd fit with it.

Diversity of the Organization. Haleigh, Stacy, and Felicia discussed the importance of diversity within their organization. Haleigh joined her organization because it had "*people of all shapes and sizes and we [didn't] have a particular stereotype.*" Stacy had a similar account of her organization, "*not all of us are super tall and athletic and frame-y like we all like, there's a variety of like, shape when you look at us and there's a variety of person, value, belief, and everything. Like we're not just cookie-cutter Stepford wife.*" She also appreciated the fact that her organization "*celebrate[s] our faith, we celebrate our own, um, beliefs and opinions and things like that and it's just – it's normal, like it's like very comforting. It's not like you have to feel ashamed for anything that you feel or anything like that.*" Felicia connected her organization's diversity to the fact that it is celebrated, but that her sisters do not seek a certain quota based on race.

> *I don't think that like color is viewed super heavily like we don't look at certain*
>
> *people like, "Oh!" We don't try meet a quota or anything like that like that's not*
>
> *something that we do but at the same time we definitely love to celebrate how*
>
> *diverse people are, like, we would love to have more diverse sisters and that's not*
>
> *just in race but that's also like background. Where they're from, what they do on*
>
> *campus. So, I think diversity is definitely celebrated in our chapter.*

Sasha, Scarlett, and Stacy referenced the impact their institution and its openness to diversity had on their willingness to seek membership within their organization. When recalling her recruitment experience, Sasha said,

> *There's definitely in some Greek letter organizations that I know that race was a part of the reason that I probably didn't get a good [feeling] - or like if I was other, like if was at [a big southern university], I would not be joining a White Greek-lettered organization like I know that for a fact—and even if I tried, I wouldn't be a part of it.*

Scarlett had a similar feeling.

> *I think that a different organization, like different school with maybe those same feelings of support weren't there, I can't say that I would have gone the same way that I did but I think here, knowing that no matter where I went – a White-lettered organization, a Black-lettered organization, or if I join the, like you know, Hispanic interest sorority – like I kinda knew that there wasn't gonna be any judgment from either side. So I think that that definitely helped my decision.*

She elaborated on the impact of Beta's environment.

> *I think that's definitely kind of the big difference here and I think that I can say that probably if I'd gone to a place like [a big southern university] or a place like [another big southern university], I don't know how comfortable I would felt rushing an environment like that. And I think [Beta] just like tries to really even the playing field as much as I can in that regards.*

Stacy credited the small size of her campus as important because both the campus and Greek community are inclusive, diverse, and accepting which promotes student interactions regardless of background.

Felicia and Sasha acknowledged their organizations' shortcomings related to diversity.   Felicia commented, "*I feel like our organization can be like more diverse. But I think it's like the extent that I think about it too, like, oh like we can definitely be doing more, we can always be doing more.*" However, in furthering her response, she mentioned "*I've never really thought that like people just view me as only the race that I am,*" which she credited to why increasing diversity might not be on the forefront of everyone's mind. Sasha expressed her fear that her organization was becoming less diverse which worried her.

> *I think something that's interesting about [my chapter] is that they pride themselves on how…well, our chapter…prides itself on how diverse it is, and not speaking just on race but like the different things people are involved in campus, you know, the different places that people are from…uhmm, blah blah blah…and I think, I hope that I can be a part of making sure that doesn't change. Because when I came into [my sorority], that was true. I hope it continues to be true.*

Lastly, Stacy commented on the conundrum of maintaining diversity for the right reasons.

> *Like in terms of recruitment, like people might joke about like a quota of certain races that we should get just to show the campus that, "No, we're not like an all-exclusive organization." but like, in complete and total honesty, like if you're gonna ask the sisters, they would say like, "Yeah, sure, we could – it would be*

nice to have like a more eclectic mix of races." but it's neither like our

prerogative to make that kind of quota.

History of Cross-Racial Membership. Along with the importance of finding

diversity within their historically White Greek-lettered organization, Estrella, Isabelle,

Sasha, and Scarlett noted the positive effects of joining an organization where cross-

racial membership had already been accepted. Scarlett found "*comfort with watching her*

friends go through the experience of joining and being successful." Sasha agreed with

this, "*I think knowing that other Black girls whom I knew well were in the organizations I*

felt comfortable enough to even rush in the first place." Isabelle's connection to her

resident assistant and a Black woman in a historically White Greek-lettered organization

helped her make the decision to join her sorority. "*She encouraged me to like follow my*

heart about what I really wanted to do. And she said you know some people they may not

like the decisions that you make but that's okay...she kind of sealed the deal for me."

Estrella was proud of her sorority's status as the first organization to accept

cross-racial membership on her campus. She noted the importance of this for her and the

> *Desire to join an organization that had already accepted diversity….I wanted a*
>
> *mix of people. So I guess going into uhm my organization, I didn't wanna be with*
>
> *uhm a group that had never let a person of color in. Like you know, going into the*
>
> *houses and seeing their uhm composites. Like, I didn't wanna be in a house that*
>
> *had never let someone of color in. I didn't wanna be in a house that let all of the*
>
> *people of color in. So I guess, it was a mix of the two.*

When asked why this was important for her, she responded,

> *I didn't, I don't know if I didn't want to be that first person, and then have to like pave the way for other people but I just didn't want to be the only one and have nothing to like connect to anybody else…I think it would have made it just harder. Like, I'm I guess, I want to say I'm a passive/ aggressive person, like I don't like conflict…So I wouldn't have liked to have to fight my way to feel accepted, so I guess, I guess that is one on the main reasons like if they hadn't already accepted girls of um, color, I don't think I would want to be the first one and have to fight and even if they had like maybe said, oh, we accept everyone, I mean, I understand you accept everyone, but that's not what your history says, you know what I mean. Like it's not like we accept everyone and then you join and it's kind of awkward because I don't have anything really in common with anybody because I didn't grow up the same way you did, or I don't have anything in common with you because I don't look the same way you do, I just can't.*

Sasha, Isabelle, and Haleigh also recognized the support they received from being a part of an organization with other women of color. Sasha felt a sense of community and an extended family within the other Black women in the sorority, "*I think a lot of the Black girls within the sorority…you know we're not best friends, we do have support of one another regardless.*" Isabelle paralleled the necessity for her connection to other women of color to being "*a minority in a majority situation.*" For her,

> *There was one other girl who joined with me who was Black as well. And they [her sisters] do notice that we kind of stuck together. And part of that probably was a bit because we were both Black and you just want… It's kind of one of those*

have each other's back. We gravitate to what makes us most comfortable. But

then, part of that was also just because, like, I convinced her to do it. So she

didn't really know what was going on to begin. So she kind of just kind of hung by

me to sort of, like, so we could go through it together.

Isabelle found this connection important on the national level of her organization. "*On a*

national level you know it's funny like because other Black [members of her sorority]

from different chapters will find Black [members] [through social media] and be like 'oh

we're Black [members]" and connect with them. She credits this to,

> *I think that people would add me because we kinda look the same on the outside*
>
> *and then I guess their feeling kinda the same -- It just…it just kinda happens. You*
>
> *know you don't really search for it...I guess you just tend to like flock to people*
>
> *that are like you in different situations and it just happens.*

Summary. The women desired to be a part of an organization that welcomed

diversity and had a history of cross-racial membership. For them, this allowed them to

base their connection and potential for friendship within the group on how well they "*fit*,"

rather than their race. While they experienced certain shortcomings in their organizations

surrounding views on the diversity, they discussed how beneficial the environment was

for them and their connection to their organization.

Theme Three: Pursuit of Common Goals through Intergroup Cooperation

Allport (1954/1979) hypothesized that successful intergroup contact and prejudice

reduction required both groups within a situation to work together and rely on each other

to achieve a common goal. Estrella, Felicia, Haleigh, Isabelle, Sasha, Scarlett, and Stacy

identified this goal through the creation of a sisterhood within their historically White

Greek-lettered organizations. Their pursuit of common goals was also achieved through the benefits they received within their sororities. However, while the women connected to their organizations, found the sisterhood they sought, and identified the benefits they gained through the sorority, their intergroup cooperation was tested through the barriers, microaggressions and racism they experienced or witnessed during their involvement. The recognition of the obstacles identified by the women was important because within the intergroup contact hypothesis, the pursuit of common goals is dependent upon intergroup cooperation. Thus, if intergroup cooperation is jeopardized, the development of a sisterhood or achievement of goals might be threatened.

Sisterhood/connection. The women desired a sisterhood and a connection with the women within her organization. A sisterhood was an answer for why they desired to be a part of, how they benefitted from, how they connected to, and how they created meaning within the organization. The women recognized the "friendship potential" of forming a relationship and bond with their sisters.

Felicia measured her connection to her sorority based on her sisterhood. She described the sisterhood as "*her best friends and support group.*" Through the sisterhood she found "*friendships that extend beyond the sorority*" and women that "*fill the void of not having friends and family at [Beta] by always being there for support and comfort.*" She felt the strong connection she had to her sisterhood is based on a "*lifelong bond*" with "*each woman wanting the chapter to do well*" and "*helping each other be and do better even if they don't have common interests.*"

The "*lifelong bond*" described by Felicia was synonymous to Isabelle's "*unbreakable bond*" that she has found within her sisterhood. Haleigh credited the bond

she had with her sisterhood to "*being a part of something that is bigger than what I am.*" Her sisterhood means "*having sisters that you know are found upon the same things that you cherish and you ideally believe in and then just having the same you know ritual that we all share…[amongst] a diverse unique group*" of women. Scarlett also connected her sisterhood to "*something bigger than herself - a common group who works together to create our best image*" She felt, "*that, as a whole...I can approach any of them like with anything that I'm feeling, negative or positive, and I know that they are going to help me through that.*" Stacy commented on her "*unconditional bond,*" "*a system that I can relate to, rely on, and respect without any kind of judgment.*"

Benefits Achieved. Being a part of a historically White Greek-lettered organization provided significant benefits for the women, especially sisterhood and friendship which were mentioned by all the participants. While many of them did not anticipate the benefits they would receive from their organization, they were able to describe them when asked. Stacy believed that she became "*more outgoing, rational, smarter, mature, and competent*" through the experiences she gained through her organization. Isabelle credited her organization for "*turning her into more of a feminist,*" "*boosting her confidence,*" "*becoming less timid*" and "*more open minded,*" "*being able to speak her mind without offending people,*" and "*learning how to view things from multiple perspectives.*" Scarlett found "*support,*" "r*ealized what she is capable of,*" and "*moved out of her comfort zone*" through her interactions with her sisters. Haleigh "*learned how to count on others,*" "b*ecame more accepting and patient,*" and "*less defensive.*" Felicia felt she "*had grown and matured.*"

The women also described tangible benefits they received through their involvement in the sorority. Felicia, Isabelle, and Scarlett found a "*greater connection to their campus*," "*more ways to be involved with other organizations*," and "*experienced more things in their community through their sisters*." Overall, they enjoyed how their organization "*opens doors to new experiences*" (Felicia). Felicia and Scarlett also discussed their appreciation of the "*diversity of their sisters*" and "*connecting with like minded people*" (Scarlett). Stacy found a "*great deal of references of girls I can go to...and stay in touch with in the future*." Haleigh mentioned a similar benefit in "*gaining leadership skills*," offering a "*new perspective to the organization*," and being able to "*network in the career field that I want to be in*" especially because "*the percentages of the race, the people, are, you know, predominately White*." Haleigh was also very connected to her organization's philanthropy and contributed a benefit of the sorority in "*being able to help people*."

Barriers Experienced. As mentioned above, the women benefitted greatly through their membership within their organizations; however, they also experienced barriers that could have potentially hinder the achievement of these benefits. The women had different viewpoints when discussing the barriers they faced. Scarlett, Felicia, Stacy, and Estrella, specifically confirmed that their barriers were not racial but caused by other factors. Scarlett mentioned the cost of the organization as being a potential barrier.

I think the only thing that really kind of made me, like, really hesitant about

joining is that it is really expensive. So I think that here, what I've seen kind of as

a trend is like a lot of times sororities are filled with a lot more, like, affluent

girls. And like I pay my own dues just because my parents kind of believe in like

making kids pay for their own things.

Felicia's barriers were related to her parents. She explained, "*I haven't really*

faced any barriers. It's never been like, I think the hardest one was just like explaining to

my parents like what Greek life is and trying to get them on board? Umm, I think that

was like the biggest one…but otherwise, nothing." Stacy believed her barriers were

related to a lack of time due to her involvement in other organizations and having a job.

Estrella faced barriers in having her voice heard as a new member of her organization.

She described,

> *Being a new member, and wanting like to have some type of change and just move*
>
> *forward in the new chapter and then try to get like your voice heard, enough to*
>
> *where you are thought of, your opinion matters to the older members because you*
>
> *are still...technically [a new member] we haven't like officially become [initiated*
>
> *sisters]. So I guess just like our voice matters but I guess not as much as older*
>
> *members because they have been there longer, so they have a little bit more say in*
>
> *what happens but I guess that's just how the chapter works.*

Similarly to Scarlett, Felicia, Stacy, and Estrella, when asked about barriers they

faced, Haleigh and Isabelle believed they had not faced any surrounding their race.

However, as they dissected this more, racial barriers surfaced. Haleigh initially

mentioned time as her only barrier and that, "*I do miss out on quite a lot of stuff...I don't*

have a choice but to be at my other commitments sometimes and I don't know..I guess

that's kinda one of the hardships that I do face is that I like don't spend time

more…enough time as I would like with them." Yet, Haleigh described barriers she faced

in being the only person of color in certain situations, such as when her organization helped with the initiation of a new chapter with other local area chapters.

> *You know, I was the only Black person there and like it threw everybody off and like I was really uncomfortable and the situation, but you know whenever they saw that you know I was just kinda just like everybody else they kind of you know accepted me if that makes sense.*

Isabelle began the conversation on barriers by identifying race was not a barrier for her, especially in recruitment.

> *I saw other girls of color that were there as well. So, I guess, it didn't bother me that much that I was. Because I wasn't the only one. But no one really like drew attention to it, like, at all. Like there was nothing, there was nothing that was said that you might be in like, "Oh, so…!" Like, in any sort of way that like drew attention to my race at all. Like so I was really happy about that as well. Um, and that didn't make, it didn't make me feel isolated, which I really, really appreciated. But yeah, I definitely saw the other girls like going through— and it's been growing each, each year. So, and that's something that's really positive as well so like yeah, I didn't feel like there is anything that isolated me or challenged me because of the fact that I was a woman of color doing it.*

Conversely, Isabelle indirectly referenced racial barriers she faced through her descriptions of the difference between her experience and her White sisters experience within their organization. Having experienced being treated differently, she elaborated,

> *Sometimes like, when I, like kind of like seeing the reality of the way people have treated me, that's also kind of made me dislike sometimes being a sorority. But*

like, in the end I kind of tried to reevaluate like, why did I join? To make sure like

I remember why I joined. And like, have I lived up to the reasons for why I joined

the sorority? Like, have I found really good friends that I can be friends with for

the rest of my life, who… Who, like, understand me and who… who aren't like...

who get on... like our personalities are very, very compatible, that kind of thing.

And, like, it's just for me, it takes a while for me to like sort of reevaluate like,

why I did what I did. But yeah, there have days when I'm like... you know, if I

haven't joined this I would have a hundred extra dollars a year to just do things!

But that's okay. So, but no. Like in the end I think that they are very short-lived.

It's not a very, it's not a very, it's not like an insidious kind of thing that like stays

with me and like kind of ruminates within my head. It's always like a… "No, this

is why I did it"...And like really the pros outweigh the cons.

Her final barrier related to the organization in its lack of recognition of race. She

explained this, *I think my sorority does a really good job of not like bringing attention*

to... like, it's like a double-edged sword, like, they do a really good job of not bringing

attention to—but they also have a need to like acknowledge it in some ways but not

others?"

For Sasha, the barriers she faced within her organization were connected to race.

First, she described not being visually represented.

I think as far as being represented largely, like looking at our social media like I

don't see my face a lot, which is frustrating and something that I want to address,

but it's also difficult because they'd be like, "oh, well, you know, like there's

only," like there will be excuses, you know,...[which is] frustrating and

unfair...like it shouldn't be that way, like we're a group of [over a hundred] girls and you can't represent all of us?

Second, she felt unheard, something she did not necessarily contribute to race.

Sometimes I felt like I wasn't being heard. Um, but it wasn't because…I don't think it's necessarily because of race, because there are bunch of White girls trying to defend the same people that I was...Um, you know, people I really like. The one thing that made me really upset is we have no Black girls in our new pledge class, like it's literally zero. And I was surprised...which is really frustrating for me.

Lastly, Sasha referenced the barriers that she and other women of color faced participating in recruitment.

Number one, I think people don't really…going through the recruitment process, a lot of people don't think about race, like on our [the sister] side [the ones recruiting new members]. Um, and the very same reason that they [the sisters] are saying people are and they're not sure or not nice, it's because…like people think that Black girls are not nice all the time. Like that happens all the time, people think we're sassy, we're mean, we're loud, we're scary, we're intimidating, like…and I think that carries over into the way people portray, um, different girls, like different percep– different stereotypical perceptions, um, that people kind of approach via confirmation bias? Definitely contributes to how they talk about girls during recruitment, or how they talk to girls during recruitment.

Racism within the Greek Community. When asked if as a Black woman in a historically White organization, they had ever felt different or singled out based on their

race or witnessed any racist acts within their organization, each woman answered no. While Scarlett and Isabelle did mention microaggressions, "*I think like every now and again, you will like hear jokes or something like that, but are like pretty, like well intention, nothing like too serious, or like anything too offensive*" (Scarlett), they did not connect these incidents to racism. However, the women were intentional in specifying that although discrimination and racism did not exist within their own sorority, it existed within their Greek communities, particularly the fraternities, or at other universities.

Felicia mentioned not witnessing any racist acts *"within my organization, but within the Greek community, our Greek system isn't perfect. I know they're really trying to work towards it being better."* Stacy echoed similar sentiments, just on a larger scale, in reference to racist acts, in "*my chapter? No. That's how I'll say that. Um, I'm sure it happens at other universities or some more conservative universities, like it's expected.*" Stacy also discussed the racism she had witnessed within the fraternities.

> *It's never been like, violent acts, it's just – or like even like open taunting or things like that is just kind of a general – like, they never would express their racism towards the person, they probably just speak about it among themselves and have it that way. Um, the most they would do is probably just kind of passive-aggressive stuff.*

Felicia, Isabelle, Sasha, and Stacy contributed to the discussion on racist acts they had observed within the fraternities on Beta's campus with the same example. Felicia recounted,

> *I can definitely see discrimination within who gets into what house, really couldn't get into the house during parties or like they let in a bunch of...if you*

don't know a lot of brothers, don't let in, certain people and not others, and there

is this, like, list because you're not on the... It's like a hot mess.

Sasha elaborated on this by stating, "*the more darker and Blacker you are the more likely*

it will happen." Isabelle noticed,

That they, we would come, like, as we were going up to the door, they were

consistently turning away guys of color and umm, but we got to the door. I

thought I wasn't going to get in just because I'm of color. So, like, I went in—and

they let me in but the guy behind us, he was…he was Indian. They just didn't let

him in. And there were really no White guys [that they didn't let in], some, but

consistently it was guys with color. Like those were the only people not getting

into the, into the party.

Sasha had not experienced racism within her specific organization, but because of

witnessing racist acts on her campus, recalled being on guard for more to occur.

Especially,

When I'm in situations with White people, I'm kind of waiting for something racist

to happen and like have my guard up to like deal with it, because I feel

like…sadly, you kind of have to because eventually it happens, um, but I think

that's should like you're conscious of a lot of things that's kind of true for any

situation that you are in, you're kind of…You don't want to be surprised what will

happen.

Unfortunately for Sasha, when racist acts do occur, "*that's the time that I feel isolated*

because a lot of people in Greek life don't talk about it...being a part of the White Greek

community and having that happen, like, I [get] annoyed." When asked how to fix this, she bluntly replied, "*how do you fix people who do not care*?"

   Summary. Successful intergroup cooperation require both groups within a situation to work together and rely on each other to achieve a common goal (Allport, 1954/1979). The women developed this intergroup cooperation through their sisterhood and the connections they formed to experience numerous benefits as a result of their participation in the organization. However, their positive experience and their intergroup cooperation with their sisters were challenged through the barriers, microaggressions and racism they experienced or witnessed during their involvement.

Theme Four: Support of Authorities

   Support was a common theme for the participants. Pettigrew (1998) noted support establishes norms of acceptance within the intergroup relationship. In turn, the women acknowledged the effects that receiving this support from their family and friends had on their experience.

> *By embracing [who you are] and having a support system...and then you know*
>
> *having friends around you that may not particularly look like you but have the*
>
> *same motivations that you do...it creates a bond that everybody kinda just goes*
>
> *together so, you know, you end up with a cross friendship, like racial friendships,*
>
> *whether you want it to or not. (Isabelle)*

Pettigrew also recognized that support should discourage ingroup-outgroup comparisons. Unfortunately, with many of the women recalling situations where they had to defend their decision to join their historically White Greek-lettered organization, the women were not exempt from experiencing these negative comparisons.

Support Received. Estrella described the support she received from her mother

and friends from the moment she told them she was interested in joining her sorority

because "*I think most of my friends already knew that I was gonna join a White one.*"

Sasha and Isabelle experienced similar receptions and support from their family and

friends, with Sasha's mother telling her she was supportive as long as the organization

was not "*destructive.*" Scarlett recalled the support she received to join whichever type

of Greek-lettered organization she desired.

> *I know there's a lot of girls who I think go within a historically Black-lettered*
>
> *organization just because of like familial obligations, but I knew like with my*
>
> *parents that they were gonna kind of support me with what was gonna make me*
>
> *happy and with what I wanted to do. And I knew that, like I brought my mom and*
>
> *grandma to a mother- daughter weekend last year like they loved it, like they*
>
> *loved my sisters, they love their moms. And like, so I knew that there wasn't gonna*
>
> *be like any kind of tension coming from my family for me going with a White-*
>
> *lettered organization versus a Black-lettered organization.*

Felicia did not receive the same instantaneous support from her family due to

their preconceived notions of Greek life "*as things that they would watch on TV, like*

Animal House, so like all the negative stereotypes about Greek life"; however, after

explaining to them her Greek experience, "*they eventually like came around, they realize*

that it's something that I wanted to do" and supported her. Stacy experienced a similar

situation to Felicia. Due to her status as being the first person in her immediate family to

attend college and have the opportunity to be involved in Greek life, Stacy's parents did

not understanding her interest in joining but eventually accepted and supported her decision. She discussed this,

> *They [her parents] are very supportive of the decisions I make and we have a lot of talks about what I am doing and why I make decisions and how I make decisions and essentially it's like, okay, this is what you want to do, but what's it going to do for you? Like, how are you going to benefit from whatever it is you are doing or choosing to do? So yeah…They think [my sorority] is a good idea.*

Haleigh's parents initially did not understand her decision to join because of the cost associated with membership; however, like Felicia and Stacy, after she explained her interest in joining to her family, they became supportive and accepting of her choice.

In addition to immediate family and friends, Stacy, Isabelle, and Sasha mentioned the support of their school administration with mixed reviews. Stacy praised Gamma University in the way they handled incidents within the Greek community.

> *The campus reaction [to a racist event] I think was a wonderful way to show whoever that person was that how accepting this campus is and that there – probably the only who has these annoyances and they're in the wrong place. Because the campus, like they're – people don't share that opinion.*

Isabelle described her comfort with receiving support from the Sorority and Fraternity Life office, "*I think if there were barriers and I needed to go to a certain protocol of who to contact or who to talk to, like, I wouldn't feel… I wouldn't feel anxious about doing it.*" This was exemplified in her willingness to approach administration when she noticed racist acts occurring surrounding the previously

mentioned fraternity parties, "*things get done if they find that you have an issue with it.*" Recognizing she had the support of the school, she,

> *Reported it! I was like, "Oh, OSFL [Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life], like, um... XYZ fraternity was not at all allowing people into their house, and I don't know whether there was some reason for that but to me it looks like it was on the basis of race. And so, and I don't think that's okay." They checked into and the fraternity got sanctioned.*

Sasha's viewpoint of the administration at Beta University was very different from Isabelle's recollection. "*I feel, I don't know, it, a lot of times it feels like you can't go to any of the administrators because they won't care in the way that they need to. Or they can't care the way that they need to because they're more worried about keeping their jobs than anything else.*"

Defending being a Black Woman in a Historically White Greek-lettered Organization. After articulating their overall experience as positive, the women had at least one example of having to defend being in their organization. Scarlett, Estrella, and Haleigh recalled instances of justifying why they decided to join a historically White Greek-lettered organization over a historically Black organization. For Scarlett, this involved having to educate her family on her choice, especially due to being a legacy within historically Black Greek-lettered organizations.

> *I think some of my extended family wasn't as much disappointed as they were just a little bit confused just because it wasn't something [a Black woman joining a White organization] that they'd heard of before. They weren't really sure how that was gonna be for me or if I was like being accepted just to like fill a quota versus*

because like I was actually wanted in that house and that kind of thing. And also

the rush process is a lot different. So, I think that was like, I think it was just more

of a lot of like questions and like a lot of curiosity.

She also explained the criticism that she received from other people of color about her

decision.

I think that, generally speaking, the only criticism I get is from other people of

color. It's not from other White people that I know or that I interact with, because

for them, I think a lot of them don't…Like, they don't really understand why

people are so against joining their organization because to them it's just an

organization, right? Like it doesn't have any like stigmas to it or anything like

that. And so I think like they're open to anyone joining, that's going to kind of

promote their sisterhood and like enhance their sisterhood. And I think like a lot

of other people of color, because I do have this other option open to me, are

wondering what would make me choose to go with the historically White letter

organization versus something that's not."

This criticism contributed to her being questioned by outsiders about whether she was the

"*token Black girl*" within her organization from outsiders. *"I think like sometimes there*

is always going to be that question like, "Oh, oh are you the token Black girl kind of

thing."

Estrella also had to defend her decision to her extended family and family friends

after they treated her differently when they learned that she had not joined a historically

Black Greek-lettered organization.

[My family friend] had like a, like a not a mean look, but it was not pleasant, it's

like what are you doing with yourself kind of a look. So I explained to her what it

was and I was like its organization, its otherwise known as a White organization,

and she was like oh, man, girl, and then she just kind of gave me this look don't

you know you supposed to be in a Black sorority?

This interaction was common for Estrella among her extended family and friends. She

described this, saying *"it's so hard to tell some people back home that I was in a White*

sorority, they were like you are shaming your race blah, blah, blah. So it's not like a

complete comfortable thing for people to accept." She overcame this by recognizing that

"I accept it so I don't really care what they think."

Haleigh discussed *"having friends that are a part of historically Black ones...I*

don't know how to explain it...I guess you know some of my friends they don't understand

why I did it [joined her sorority]." She also recalled experiences where others, both

Whites and Blacks, were *"shocked that they [her organization] have Black people,"*

incidents that she calls *"uncomfortable."* Sasha had a similar experience navigating a

feeling of shock from others. She elaborated this shock had created a sense of fear in her

about people potentially not believing she is a member of her organization, *"What does*

that mean more largely and what does that mean when I graduate and tell someone that

that I am a [member of her sorority] and they'll be like, "No, you're not!" You know,

what's that gonna be like?" Lastly, Isabelle referenced other's belief that she joined her

organization to be "White."

I feel like it's kind of one of those… I didn't join this to appropriate, I guess,

White culture, I just did this because I like the people and I like the values kind of

thing. It wasn't a, it wasn't that I'm doing this because, "Oh! I want the

connections and I want to become a White girl!" No, that wasn't—That wasn't

the motivation behind this.

Stacy, Sasha, Felicia, and Haleigh all mentioned incidents where others,

especially people of color, assumed that because they were Black and Greek they were

members of historically Black Greek-lettered organizations. Stacy explained this

assumption, "*if you know they are Greek but they don't know what, they just assume that*

umm you would most likely be in an all-Black organization." Sasha expressed frustration

over this assumption after she experienced it firsthand, "*I was so mad. And the worse*

thing I was so mad because it was another person of color. She wasn't Black, so maybe

that would make sense. But I was pissed, I've never been more mad, never been more

mad. Like about one individual thing, I was like…this can't be real life!"

Summary. Support was a key factor for the participants to make the decision to

join and stay in their historically White Greek-lettered organization. According to

Allport (1954/1979), authorities should support positive contact for successful intergroup

interaction. The stories of the women about the actions of their immediate family and

close friends exhibit this supportive nature. However, the women also described having

to overcome a lack of support from certain family members or friends about their

decision to join their organizations or assumptions placed on them by being Black and a

member of a Greek-lettered organization.

Conclusion

The preceding chapter presented the lived experiences of seven Black women in

historically White Greek-lettered organizations. The chapter began with a review of the

background of each participant to provide the reader a foundational understanding of their pre-collegiate environments, reasons for selecting their institution and joining Greek life, and their overall experience within their organizations. Following this overview, the four themes were presented: (1) equal group status, (2) friendship potential, (3) pursuit of common goals through intergroup cooperation, and (4) support of authorities. The thematic findings identified in this chapter serve as the basis of the discussion and implications in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations. This study is important as it provides a voice to these women in the discussion of cross-racial membership in Greek-lettered organizations that has largely been excluded from the literature. Four themes emerged from these participants experiences: (1) equal group status, (2) intergroup cooperation and friendship potential, (3) pursuit of common goals, and (4) support of authorities. Allport's (1954/1979) intergroup contact hypothesis was utilized as the theoretical framework to organize and discuss the participant's responses. Critical race theory provided an additional lens and perspective to the discussion and implications sections. The study addressed the following research questions.

RQ1: What pre-collegiate background factors influenced the decision of Black women to seek membership in historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

RQ2: What collegiate factors or anticipated benefits influenced the decision of Black women to seek membership in historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

RQ3: How do Black women describe their experience within their historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

RQ4: How do Black women navigate their experience in historically White Greek-lettered organizations?

Chapter four described the study's findings. This chapter will provide a discussion of the findings as they pertain to the research questions, critical race theory, and the literature presented in chapter two, as well as boundaries of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research. It is my desire that this study will be utilized by fraternity and sorority life professionals, including Greek-lettered organizations headquarters staff, as a resource in providing support to future individuals hoping to traverse the Greek color line and to organizations wishing to achieve greater racial diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, I hope this dissertation will motivate individuals, both within and outside of the Greek community, to discuss and challenge the topic of race within the Greek system.

Discussion of the Findings

This study involved seven participants who self-identified as Black women members of historically White Greek-lettered organizations. The participants attended one of the study's three predominately White private institutions within sixty miles of a southeastern metropolitan city. Two women, Estrella and Haleigh, were undergraduates from Alpha University; four, Felicia, Isabelle, Sasha, and Scarlett were from Beta University; and one, Stacy, was from Gamma University.

I examined the experiences of these seven Black through the lens of Allport's (1954/1979) intergroup contact hypothesis. This was designed to offer a broader understanding of cross-racial membership within Greek life, including factors that influence the decision to traverse the color line, the benefits individuals received through their organization, and barriers individuals faced or witnessed within their participation. Qualitative data collection and analysis was completed utilizing components of Creswell

(2007), Moustakas (1994), and Patton's (2002) processes. Through an ongoing review of the data to generate codes and themes, horizontalization, bridling, and consultations with a research team, four themes were identified from the data.

The four themes mirrored the conditions of Allport's (1954/1979) intergroup contact hypothesis (two conditions, friendship potential and intergroup cooperation were combined into one theme). The themes and related sub-themes were identified across the participants' experiences and presented in detail in chapter four. Table 5.1 provides a review of them along with their connection to a specific research question.

Table 5.1
Themes Identified During Data Analysis

Theme/Sub-Theme	Description	Connection to the Research Questions
Theme 1	**Equal Group Status**	**RQ1-3**
Sub-Theme 1.1	Background of Predominately White Environments	RQ1
Sub-Theme 1.2	Positive and Equal Experience	RQ3
Sub-Theme 1.3	Decision to Join a Historically White Greek-Lettered Organization	RQ2
Sub-Theme 1.4	Racial Representation at the Organization's National Level	RQ4
Theme 2	**Friendship Potential**	**RQ2/3**
Sub-Theme 2.1	Decision Based on Fit, not Race	RQ2
Sub-Theme 2.2	Diversity of the Organization	RQ2
Sub-Theme 2.3	History of Cross-Racial Membership	RQ2
Theme 3	**Pursuit of Common Goals through Intergroup Cooperation**	**RQ2/RQ3**
Sub-Theme 3.1	Sisterhood/Connection	RQ2
Sub-Theme 3.2	Benefits Achieved	RQ2
Sub-Theme 3.3	Barriers Experienced	RQ4
Sub-Theme 3.4	Racism within the Greek Community	RQ4

Theme/Sub-Theme	Description	Connection to the Research Questions
Theme 4	**Support of Authorities**	**RQ4**
Sub-Theme 4.1	Support Received	RQ4
Sub-Theme 4.2	Defending being a Black Woman in a Historically White Greek-Lettered Organization	RQ4

Within this dissertation, it was essential for me to acknowledge my subjectivity, or the identities I brought into the research process (Mruck & Breuer, 2003). As a qualitative researcher, this subjectivity has the potential to impact my observational capabilities, the relationships formed with my participants, and/or their view of me as a researcher and their willingness to be open and honest throughout the study. My subjectivity included my role as a White researcher and the power and privilege inherently awarded because of my race.

However, to arrive at the identified themes, determine how to present the findings within the research questions, and effectively describe the experiences of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations, I had to do more than just acknowledge this subjectivity. I had to challenge myself to understand and unpack what it truly meant to be a White woman attempting to complete research on the experiences of Black women – a challenge I struggled with throughout this entire process.

As I embarked on writing this dissertation, I knew it was possible to have a positive experience through cross-racial membership within Greek-lettered organizations; I had seen it through my own interactions with my chapter sisters or students I have advised or recruited to be a part of the fraternity where I currently work. Through witnessing discrimination and racism within the Greek community and watching people

not receive membership into an organization based on the color of their skin, I also know

that not every person's experience is positive. In turn, I was excited to hear the

participants positively describe their experience. However, even though I was receptive

to their recollection of this experience being equal to their White sisters, I could not

escape a feeling of apprehension about their stories – that something was missing, that

they were not sharing everything, that their experience could not be as positive as they

described, especially because of the minimization of micro-aggressions they faced and

racism they witnessed while describing their "*positive experiences.*"

Yet, as a White woman, I questioned my feelings of apprehension. Who was I to

say the description of their experience was flawed, if this was the experience the

participants described? Who was I to challenge the stories of Black women, who trusted

me, a White researcher, to accurately tell their stories, as they presented them? Who was

I to question how they defined their motivations for joining, the barriers they faced, or

how they navigated their experience?

Furthermore, as I wrestled with finding the answers to these questions, my

apprehension intensified through the influx of news and media headlines about practices

of segregation and acts of racism within Greek life. Through these stories, I grappled

with the question of whether, if I only presented the stories of the participants through the

positive lens they described, this dissertation would lead readers to believe Greek life is

in a post-racial state void of segregation or discrimination. How could I incorporate

current events, such as the continued segregation practices of historically White Greek-

lettered organizations at the University of Alabama (Chang, 2015) or the posting of a

video of Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity chapter members reciting a racist chant

(McCoy, 2015), into the discussion of this dissertation without casting doubt on the participants' experiences?

Eventually, to stay true to the participants' stories, I made the decision to utilize Allport's (1954/1979) intergroup contact hypothesis to frame the study's themes and discuss them as they relate to the research questions. For me, this choice was fitting because of my belief that the participants' experiences were accurately described by the hypothesis. The participants exhibited each of the conditions identified by the hypothesis as necessary to reduce prejudice and increase intergroup contact, thus supporting their positive experience within their organization. Yet, as a social justice advocate and a professional in Greek life dedicated to raising awareness about race and racism within the community, I did not feel comfortable only utilizing this hypothesis. It is not that I am saying that my findings are wrong; rather, I felt obligated to present an additional perspective. As a result, the remainder of this section will discuss the findings, first as they relate to the research questions, using the Allport framework, and then through a critical race perspective.

Connection of the Themes to the Research Questions

Through this study, I sought to understand how seven Black women describe their experiences within historically White Greek-lettered organizations. Four research questions were addressed and are presented below in terms of their connection to the themes and Allport's intergroup contact hypothesis (1954/1979). This format allowed the research questions to be answered directly from the thematic analysis, which utilized textual and structural descriptions from the voices of the participants.

Pre-Collegiate Background Factors (RQ1). Students are a byproduct of the environment in which they were raised (Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007; Stearns, Buchanan, & Bonneau, 2009). As a result, research, including this study, has documented the correlation between pre-collegiate environments and opportunities for students to engage with diverse individuals and the frequency and quality of interracial interactions and friendships in college (Bowman & Denson, 2012; Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan, & Landreman, 2002; Saenz, 2005; Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007; Stearns, et al., 2009). Within this study, the correlation between the participant's pre-collegiate background and the decision to join a historically White Greek-lettered organization was examined. Specifically, the study identified the environment in which the participant was raised (***subtheme 1:1 – background of predominately White environments***) and the participant's friendship groups (***theme 1 – equal group status***) as pre-collegiate background factors that contributed to their decision to traverse the Greek color line.

The study's seven participants were raised in predominately White environments and attended predominately White schools prior to college*.* Throughout their stories, the women discussed the impact of this environment on their openness, willingness, and desire to have cross-racial friendships both pre-college and upon entering college. They directly attributed this to being raised in an environment where interactions across racial lines were not only encouraged but were the norm. Furthermore, the women recollected the effects of being one of only a few Black individuals in a setting. Each spoke of memories of being tokenized and referred to as being "*White*" or an "*Oreo*," which lead to the women relating more closely to their White peers.

The women's desire to join a historically White Greek-lettered organization to connect and interact with diverse peers, with whom they often identified with more than with their same race peers, directly reflected the concept of homophily and propinquity (Chang, 1996; Fischer, 2008; Quillian & Campbell, 2003; Stearns et al., 2009). Homophily, the tendency to form friendships with similar others, and propinquity, the tendency to form friendships with others who share the same situation were exemplified throughout the study. Having been raised in similar predominately White environments with diverse friendship groups and resonating more with historically White Greek-lettered organizations than with historically Black Greek-lettered organizations, the women felt their experience closely aligned with and was equal to that of their White Greek sisters. This connection also demonstrated the findings of Saenz, Ngai, and Hurtado (2007) that Black students raised pre-college in homogeneous, predominately White environments were likely to have enhanced positive interactions with their diverse peers. Furthermore, students bring the habits of how they form friendships pre-college with them to college; as a result, students with interracial friendships during high school have a greater proclivity to form similar friendship patterns upon entering college (Quillian & Campbell, 2003; Stearns, et al., 2009). Thus, the experiences of the women in this study align with the findings of Chang (1996), Quillian and Campbell (2003), Saenz, et al. (2007), and Stearns, Buchanan, and Bonneau (2009).

Chavous's (2000) study on the predictors of Black students' organizational involvement in the dominant culture at predominately White colleges was confirmed by the findings of this study. Chavous (2000) connected the background of college students to their organizational involvement and found Black students raised in neighborhoods

with fewer Black peers, thus having the opportunity for more interracial contact, reported being involved in more non-ethnic or non-cultural activities. This finding was supported in this dissertation through the connection of the participants' predominately White upbringing and their desire not to seek membership in a historically Black Greek-lettered organization. Chavous (2000) also confirmed the link between the strength of an individual's racial centrality and their involvement. Students who defined race as a less central part of their identity participated in fewer Black organizations (Chavous, 2000). Within this study, the women reported a disconnect between themselves and their race, either through their understanding of their own racial identity or their friendship preferences. For the women, this was exemplified through their closer connection and greater desire to interact with their White peers over those of their same race.

The findings of this study were also consistent with the research conducted on cross-racial membership within historically White Greek-lettered organizations (Hughey, 2009; Newsome, 2009; Sargent, 2012; Seetharaman, 2007). In each study, before entering college, the participants were raised in predominately White environments, attended predominately White schools, felt disconnected from the Black community, and possessed friendship groups of mostly White or diverse individuals; thus, they desired to become a part of an organization reflective of their upbringing. The participants in this study described the correlation between their desire to be a part of a historically White Greek-lettered organization and their ability to connect with their Greek sisters because they were accustomed to being one of only a few Black students within their pre-collegiate environments.

The kind of pre-collegiate experience described above has also been shown to have negative consequences. Within the Newsome (2009) study, three men expressed feelings of being ostracized, alienated, or ridiculed by other Black students for their association with White students. As a result, these three men eventually sought membership in their White organization because their negative experiences created a feeling that they could not successfully join a historically Black Greek-lettered organization or assimilate into Black culture. The women in this study did not demonstrate the same negative experiences. Their decision to not join a historically Black Greek-lettered organization was not based on doubt about whether they would be accepted, but rather on circumstances including the size of the organization, timing of recruitment, and their desired organization not being on their campus. They believed their background of being surrounded by White peers and accepted by them helped their assimilation into their selected organization.

Ultimately, when describing her pre-collegiate experiences, each participant portrayed a similar background. Through their upbringing in predominately White environments alongside the majority/in-group race, the women were accustomed to interacting with others racially different from themselves. They connected more to their White and diverse peers than to other Black individuals. They understood the effects of being tokenized as one of a few Black individuals in a setting and became accustomed to this situation. They were raised being called "*White*" or an "*Oreo*"; ultimately these became terms with which they self-identified due to the constant comparison. As a result, for these women, the choice to join a historically White Greek-lettered organization was based on the connection they felt to the organization due to the

similarities between it and their upbringing; and their motivation and was not related to race.

Collegiate Factors or Anticipated Benefits (RQ2). This study examined the collegiate factors or anticipated benefits that influenced the decision of the participants to seek membership in a historically White Greek-lettered organization. When identifying these factors, the participants provided similar accounts and examples as to why they ultimately crossed the color line. Specifically, the women credited their choice to finding a fit within their organization (*sub-theme 2.1 – decision based on fit, not race*), and to connecting, feeling comfortable, and developing a sense of belonging with the women (*sub-theme 3.1 – sisterhood/connection*). Through this fit and identifying a "*place to call home*," the women did not believe their choice was transformational or out of the ordinary. They desired to be in an organization similar to what they were familiar with through their upbringing, friendship groups, and pre-collegiate environment. They sought to join an organization that was diverse (*sub-theme 2.2 – diversity of the organization*) and had previously welcomed individuals of all races (*sub-theme 2.3 – history of cross-racial membership*). For them, joining their organization was not about the benefits it would bring them (*sub-theme 3.2 – benefits achieved*), but rather finding a place to develop friendships (*theme 2 – friendship potential*) and a sisterhood based on commonalities rather than race (*theme 1 – equal group status*).

Park (2008) and Schmitz and Forbes (1994) found White Greek women members attributed the segregated nature of Greek life to comfort, happenstance, convenience, and individual choice. The women in both studies believed that the membership process was race-neutral and dependent on the fit between the sorority and the person. Intriguingly,

the Black women within this study attributed the same factors as motivations to join a historically White Greek-lettered organization. This finding demonstrates that the concepts of homophily and propinquity do not have to be based on race, but rather on how one's upbringing impacts who individuals connect with and their identity. Similarly, the Black women in this study who cross-racially joined their organization felt a greater connection and identification with their White peers.

The participants' stories about their motivations for joining their historically White Greek-lettered organization paralleled those within the Newsome (2009), Sargent (2012), and Thompson (2000) studies. The women described how their willingness to associate across color lines, their previous interactions with individuals who were different from them, and their openness to diversity contributed to their decision to join (Newsome, 2009; Thompson, 2000). They also identified influence of friends within the organization, interest in meeting new people, and desire for a sense of belonging as additional motivating factors (Newsome, 2009; Thompson, 2000). The participants possessed a willingness to challenge the Black/White Greek life dichotomy. However, this decision was only based on seeking affiliation with organizations with racial diversity and a history of cross-racial membership (Newsome, 2009; Sargent, 2012) where they would be supported and encouraged by current members of the organization (Sargent, 2012).

The participants explained that the hardest decision they made was whether or not to be a part of Greek life. Their decision was not affected by joining an organization of a predominately different race. Once they decided to join an organization, becoming a member of a historically White Greek-lettered organization was not out of the ordinary

for them. They did not experience the feelings of being ostracized or alienated that McClure (2006) found many Black students at predominately White institutions face that result in feelings of pressure to conform to the White ideal. They did not need to seek "knowledge of the unknown" (p. 30) that the participants in the Sargent (2012) study referenced, as the members of the organization were their friends and individuals they connected with and understood. Because of this connection, they did not consider the negative factors Hughey (2007/2009/2010) identified that students of color consider about historically White Greek-lettered organizations when deciding whether or not to join cross-racially. These factors include the belief that the goals and interests of the organizations do not relate to the issues and problems affecting students of color, the recognition of the racist history in which the organizations were founded, the fear the organization was not racially diverse or accepting of others, and the perception of being perceived as a "sell-out" to one's race.

The women also commented on the impact of the campus environment on their decision to join a historically White Greek-lettered organization. They felt their institution's support of cross-racial interaction, diverse student body, and accepting environment factored into their choice to accept their invitation of membership. While two of the women were more critical of their institution, overall the participants felt comfortable on their campuses. This was congruent with Saenz, et al.'s (2007) findings that a person's overall comfort within the campus environment is a determinant of positive contact with their diverse peers. The participants' positive outlook about the campus setting also allowed them to explore involvement opportunities with organizations they were interested in, rather than needing to identify counterspaces or

form "supportive alliances" to assist with their acclimation to a predominately White collegiate campus (Grier-Reed, 2010; Stearns, et al., 2009; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Tatum, 1987). This finding challenges previous findings about diversity within predominately White campuses (Cole & Jacob Arriola, 2007; McDonald & Vrana, 2007). Previous research has concluded that students of color feel disconnected from the campus environment. This is a result of the feeling that the campus was unwelcoming, hostile, and unsupportive of the needs of students from underrepresented groups. However, within this study, the participants did not experience these hurdles and instead felt a connection to their campus.

These women joined their Greek organizations to meet people, form friendships, and create a sisterhood. When asked to identify the benefits they considered in their decisions, the women mentioned, "*to gain sisters,*" "*to meet people,*" and "*to be a part of something.*" These considerations aligned with previous studies on the reasons students of color join historically White Greek-lettered organizations. Each of the studies found the desire to belong, make friends, and get involved in campus life as main reasons to seek membership within their organization (Hughey, 2009/2010; Newsome, 2009; Thompson, 2000). Only one person mentioned the connection between being a member of a historically White Greek-lettered organization and future networking employment opportunities that Hughey (2009) found in his study.

While the study did confirm several of the reasons students choose to cross-racially join Greek-lettered organizations, it also found differences from previous research. The participants did not describe the same perceived benefits of joining discussed in the Newsome (2009) and Thompson (2000) studies, i.e. the leadership and

involvement opportunities offered, the social aspect of events and parties provided by the organization, and the chance to make a difference within the organization. Rather, the participants described these as benefits they received through their involvement and mentioned their impact on their experience as members rather than citing them as reasons that influenced their decision to join.

Specifically, the participants identified similar collegiate factors they considered in their decision to join their organization. They sought membership based on developing a connection and fit with the women in the sisterhood. They believed their institution's welcoming and supportive environment and openness to diversity impacted their ability to "*find a home*" within their organization. When questioned about the benefits they anticipated through joining, they each mentioned gaining sisters and friends and being a part of something bigger than themselves through developing a sisterhood. Through their involvement in the organization, they were later able to define the additional benefits they received.

Description of their Experience (RQ3). The purpose of this study was to describe the experience of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations. Overall, the women described their experience as positive (***theme 1 – equal group status; theme 2 – friendship potential; theme 3 – pursuit of common goals through intergroup cooperation; and theme 4 – support of authorities***). Besides the sentiment of positivity, they also cited equality to describe their membership in their organization (***sub-theme 1.2 – positive and equal experience***). Specifically, Estrella, Felicia, Haleigh, Scarlett, and Stacy stated that their experiences were the same as their White sisters. Isabelle and Sasha mentioned a few incidents of not feeling like an equal;

however, their overall analysis of their experience was also positive. This positivity was evident through Isabelle's account of her sorority.

> It's been great and I've loved every minute of it. I've loved that I've gotten to meet new people because of it. I loved that like, I now have more things to do like, been introduced to parts of [the city] I never would have seen um, all through going out with the sisters which is really nice. So it's been great.

Felicia also referenced not being able to consider her life now without her sorority.

> I sat down and try to... I can't like even in the smallest ways, it's been...it's just always been there and sometimes I really don't understand how I got through [one semester without it]! So it's just been such a big part of my college experience in such a positive way in big ways and little ways.

Through their involvement in their organization, the women were able to form friendships and create a sisterhood. They grew as individuals through their membership, becoming "*more outgoing, rational, smarter, mature, and competent*" (Stacy), "*open minded and accepting*" (Isabelle), "*confident*" (Scarlett), and "*accepting*" (Haleigh). Their organizations helped them connect to campus and become more involved in other organizations and the community (Felicia, Isabelle, and Scarlett) and "*gain leadership skills, new perspectives, and network*" (Haleigh). Each of these achieved benefits supported the findings of Newsome's (2009) study. The benefits the women gained through their participation contributed to their extremely rewarding experiences and the feeling of "*zero regret*" (Scarlett) about their decisions to join these organizations.

Similar to the current study, the participants in Hughey's (2010) study expressed the same sense of achieving intimate and sincere friendships and felt genuinely accepted

most of the time within their organization, feelings they associated with their positive experience. However, like Isabelle, they also "recognized the strength and authenticity of the kinship bond was fragile" and that "racial tensions always lurked beneath the surface" (p. 669). Conversely, this study did not confirm the "paradox of participation" (Hughey, 2010, p. 672) or the need for racial assimilation to achieve authentic and full acceptance that Hughey's participants faced. For the participants in his study, their experience also involved performing racialized schemas for the benefit of the historically White Greek-lettered organization. This included members of color, particularly Black members, being deemed as the "perfect fits" (p. 661) for community service and philanthropic events, often being forced to plan and implement said events. This profiling caused participants to describe their experience as a "double-sided framing process" (p. 663) where they were outsiders who were not authentic, full members within their organization (Hughey, 2010).

Based upon the participants' positive outlook on their time in their historically White Greek-lettered organizations, the findings of this study support Allport's (1954/1979) intergroup contact hypothesis. Through their stories, the women mentioned traits of each condition that Allport argued were necessary for interactions to have positive outcomes for the individuals involved. The participants regarded themselves as equals in their organizations, saw the friendship potential of others in their organization, were encouraged to pursue the common goals of their organizations, experienced intergroup cooperation, and had the support of their institution, family, and friends for cross-racial interaction. Ultimately, their description of a non-racist and non-discriminatory culture and climate within their historically White Greek-lettered

organization can be linked to having an experience that encompasses each condition of the hypothesis.

It is important to recognize that these women chose to join their organization based on their upbringing in predominately White environments and the similarities between their friendship groups before joining and the women within the organization. For them, it was more significant that they joined Greek life in general than that they joined a White organization. They joined an organization where they hoped and perceived that they would be accepted, be treated as equals, and have a positive experience. They entered their organization seeking an outcome that encompassed the positive conditions outlined by Allport's (1954/1979) hypothesis. This study confirms the hypothesis. However, the issue of self-selection bias (the idea that the most prejudiced individuals may avoid intergroup contact altogether, while those who are more interested in intergroup contact with other individuals may specifically seek out such situations) within this study should be acknowledged; thus, the findings of this study are specific to these women (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Overall, the women's experience was positive. This resulted from perceiving themselves as equals within their organization, becoming a part of a group where they had the potential to forge a friendship with the other members, finding a common goal of sisterhood, achieving intergroup cooperation, and receiving support in their involvement. The participants mentioned encountering incidents of negativity and hardships in their participation; however, in describing them, they minimized the events and quickly returned to their overall positive description of their experience.

Navigation of their Experience (RQ4). On the surface, the women described their experiences as positive and initially did not recognize the barriers they faced within their involvement. However, after further probing they eventually discussed barriers they faced (***subtheme 3.3 – barriers experienced***), including witnessing micro-aggressions, not being represented at the national level of their organizations (***subtheme 1.4 – racial representation at the organization's national level***), and having to defend their membership within their organization because of their race (***subtheme 4.2 – defending being a Black woman in a historically White Greek-lettered organization***). They also acknowledged the racism they had observed within their communities (***subtheme 3.4 – racism within the Greek community***). Throughout their stories, they credited the support they received from others as positively impacting their experience (***theme 4 – support of authorities; subtheme 4.2 – support received***).

By initially seeing their experience as void of barriers, the women did not experience the same difficulties assimilating into the White Greek culture as the individuals in the Hughey (2009) and Thompson (2000) studies. This is credited to the connection they felt within their respective sisterhoods. Furthermore, based on the conscious decision to join an organization that welcomed racial diversity and had a history of cross-racial membership, the women did not experience the same challenges identified by Newsome (2009). They were not faced with being the first Black person their sisters knew, losing a sense of their Blackness, or adjusting to the cultural differences between themselves and other members within their organizations (Newsome, 2009).

They also did not place the same significance on the challenge associated when confronted with racial jokes and racially insensitive comments as participants in the Newsome (2009) study. While the women of the current study did witness the same behaviors, they downplayed their significance and considered them as harmless jokes rather than seeing them as intentionally hurtful. This same reaction was expressed in identifying instances of racism within the Greek community. For the women from Beta University, this included witnessing students of color, particularly Black men, be denied entrance into a fraternity party due to their race.

In turn, they consistently had difficulty directly identifying any barriers or hardships they faced. It was only through the answers to other questions that they indirectly commented on occurrences that would be classified as barriers. The women mentioned being tokenized for their membership (Hughey, 2008; Thompson, 2000) and having to recognize the social implications of being Black in a White organization (Newsome, 2009). This included having to justify their decision to join their sisterhood and defend the assumption that because they were Black they must be members of historically Black Greek-lettered organizations. Sasha and Isabelle also commented on their organization's lack of recognition of race, especially in creating opportunities to discuss race within the sisterhood. Yet, even through each of these examples, the women always returned to the positivity and love they felt for their organization.

Discussion of the Findings in Relation to Critical Race Theory

Through this dissertation, I desired to understand the experiences of seven Black women within historically White Greek-lettered organizations. In the sections presented to this point, I accomplished this through the presentation of the viewpoints of their lived

experiences. However, as previously mentioned, based on the similarities of the participant's stories and the way I presented the themes and research questions, a reader could make erroneous assumptions about the experiences of all women who cross-racially join a historically White Greek-lettered organization. As a result, while critical race theory was not used to develop the identified themes, it will subsequently be presented in the remainder of this section to provide an additional perspective about the dynamics of race within Greek cross-racial membership.

The intention of the introduction of critical race theory into the discussion at this point was challenge to the idea that race is irrelevant to membership within Greek-lettered organizations. The participants' stories were not wrong, as they were their stories as they chose to share them. Yet critical race theory provided a lens to challenge the minimization of race and racism within their stories and to inform the discussion about the continued segregation of Greek systems on collegiate campuses today. It also offers an alternative perspective to make additional meaning of the women's experiences where they did not, or even could not, themselves. By challenging the topic of race within Greek life and its effects on social interactions, campus dynamics, and campus climates, individuals can benefit and better approach the topic of race.

The Permanence of Racism: Covert and Systemic Racism. Through the centrality and intersectionality of race, critical race theory postulates racism is normal, endemic, and permanent in today's society and a part of one's daily interactions (Solorzano, 1998). This tenet explains that the intersection of race and racism is a central rather than a marginal factor in examining experience. However, critical race theorists

argue that as a colorblind America, most people do not recognize the significance of race (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Park, 2008).

Within this study, when discussing the Greek system, most of the participants appeared to believe that race was not seen as important. This point was reflected in comments by Estrella, "*don't let race circumscribe your curiosity [to cross-racially join an organization],*" by Haleigh, "*join an organization that makes you happy, not on race,*" or by Stacy, "*people should understand that everyone has access to recruitment and there are no race based restrictions.*" Yet, the participants devaluing the topic of race may actually be documented as an indication of the actual relevance of race (Park, 2008).

Contrary to Stacy's belief, media headlines, such as "*Racial Segregation Still Rampant in Greek Life*" (Ruggiero, 2014) or "*Segregation Still Lives on in Alabama's Greek Sorority Row*" (Zengerie, 2014) about Black women's denial of membership into historically White Greek-lettered organizations at the University of Alabama, demonstrate raced-based membership restrictions still exist. More specifically, within Greek life, race matters and racism is present. "The American fraternity system has long been the site of pitched battles about racial integration, Confederate symbols and racist language" (Rosenberg, 2015, para. 2). The frequency at which fraternities and sororities have blatant racist displays seems to be increasing across all areas of Greek life, and the prevalence of social media and bystander videos has focused attention on such incidents. Greek-lettered organizations reflect a super-segregated and unequal system that is made up of college and alumni members all over the world (Hughey, 2015).

Although law prohibits race-based exclusion in college sororities and fraternities in the United States, racial segregation prevails. Greek organizations are not required to

publish demographic data about their members; however, anecdotal evidence exists that demonstrate that Greek-lettered organizations at predominately White institutions that have been historically segregated are not suddenly becoming diverse (Hughey, 2015). In turn, membership in White Greek-letter organizations by individuals of color is often hailed as a transformative step toward equality and unity (Hughey, 2010). "Even with diversity on university campuses, Greek institutions maintain the authority to segregate privilege and power…And past patterns of segregation, legacy, and elitism suggest the Greek community – unchecked – will continue as a bastion of classism and racism" (Chang, 2014, para. 20).

Yet, even with this analysis, recognizing the significance of race in Greek-lettered organizations does not mean that all individuals of color are discriminated against, do not receive invitations of membership, or experience acts of racial insensitivity (Park, 2008). It means acknowledging that race is often demonstrated in subtle and covert incidents. This finding was exemplified by the women's accounts that they had not been subjected to discrimination or been treated differently within their organizations, even with descriptions of experiencing microaggressions and witnessing racial acts within their Greek community. This demonstrates the need to continue to utilize critical race theory to illuminate racial inequalities and hierarchies within the Greek life (Patton, McEwen, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007).

The Rejection of a Colorblind Society. These participants were raised in predominately White environments. They possessed stronger relationships with their White peers than with their Black peers. They often experienced being tokenized as one of the only Black individuals in a setting. They remembered their first interaction with

someone of their own race, rather than their first interaction with a White person, because

that was less familiar for them. Due to this background, while only one woman explicitly

states it, the participants believe their upbringing and identity were more in line with that

of the dominant perspective. Thus, their stories involve a colorblind lens, a trait they

either do not recognize they exhibit or choose not to acknowledge.

Without naming the idea of being colorblind, the women described early

experiences of a colorblind mentality by stating that they did not recognize color, as they

based their friendships with individuals on similar interests rather than race. This

approach to creating friendships continued into college. This was reflected in their

decision to join their organization based on fit and connection rather than racial

considerations. However, critical race theorists reject a race-neutral, colorblind

philosophy (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Statements like, "I don't see color, I see humanity"

or "I don't think of you as being Black, I see you as a person," while well intentioned,

only demonstrate hesitation to discuss race and the minimization of the significance of it

(Park, 2008).

Furthermore, while most of the women gave numerous examples of being

colorblind, Sasha and Isabelle spoke actively against it. Sasha defined her view on

colorblind ideology, "*It's kind of like…okay, so you don't see the race, so you don't*

see…like it's if you don't see race, then it's inherent that you don't see me as a complete

human being, or any Black people, or any people that are of color. Like, it's impossible."

Isabelle said,

> *I understand the intention behind saying that [that you are colorblind] but at the*
>
> *same time it's kind of one of those, like, "If you don't see it then you don't have to*

talk about it"...But I guess, kind of the whole like bringing up, like, "oh, I don't

see color," thing is kind of pointless to me. It's kind of one of those like, "then

why bring it up?" Kind of thing. Um, and, and I don't really think that colorblind

theory is actually... I don't think it exists. Like, everyone sees color. Like, it's the

society we live in and it shouldn't, it's not really… I don't think it's true,

personally. And even, even if you really truly don't. Like, that's fine, but you don't

have to talk about it.

Through these statements, these two women reject a colorblind perspective and feel strongly that race should be noticed. Yet, at the same time, Isabelle's sentiments demonstrate the contradictory viewpoint that often accompanies race, the desire for race to be acknowledged but not discussed.

Whiteness as Property. Critical race theory describes Whiteness not as a biological category but as a social construction (Harris, 1993). While Whiteness can be considered the norm, critical race theory scholar Cheryl Harris suggests it is bettered considered as a form of property (1993). Thompson (2001) echoed this idea, stating "Conceived as legal or cultural property, Whiteness can be seen to provide material and symbolic privilege to White, those passing as White, and sometimes honorary Whites" (para. 1).

The tenet of Whiteness as property was exemplified throughout the participants' stories. Through their membership, the participants were awarded the "privilege" of being a part of a historically White organization that is known for its power and exclusivity. Yet, by examining the women's stories, it became clear they were not able to recognize this. Due to their background – how they were raised, their environment, their

family structure and where they attended school – the women did not completely identify

with their own racial group, thus they did not see themselves as different from their

White sisters.

As a result, they did not recognize the benefits awarded to them by their

membership, or the passive racism they were subjected to or witnessed. For me, seeing

someone being ejected or not allowed into a party because of race is something that for

many would be difficult to ignore. However, while each of the women from Beta

University witnessed this occur, only one reported it to University officials. Even more

significant is that at the same time the women witnessed this event, they were granted

access into the event, despite being individuals of color. In turn, without a personal

connection to and a strong sense of racial identity, and even though they were unable to

recognize the privilege they received through their membership, it was clear that that

these women were able to compartmentalize their largely "inclusive" experience within

Greek life apart from their peers who may have struggled to fit in or gain entrance to this

environment.

Additionally, Whiteness as property can be utilized to discuss the Greek system as

a whole. As a professional in Greek life, I understand the reality that within Greek

communities across the country, historically White Greek-lettered organizations are often

classified as the "norm" and culturally based groups are the "additional organizations"

that exist on campuses. This is demonstrated by historically White Greek-lettered

organizations being the only type of Greek organization on many campuses, the only

ones with campus housing, or the recipients of the majority of the resources provided by

Greek life professionals. Furthermore, the connection can also be demonstrated through

the stance of Greek life professionals, who challenge the notion of why Greek-lettered

organizations should still be classified by color, a statement demonstrated by a White

male professional's comments on Facebook following the Sigma Alpha Epsilon

Fraternity racist chant incident:

> I think it depends on the context. If we're talking about the historical reasons for
> the founding of NPHC [National Pan-Hellenic Council] and Jewish groups – sure.
> But if we continue to use "White" to describe the groups we're trying to say they
> were/are designed around race and that's absolutely false and allows the naïve
> students to believe that we're just operating our group as if they were created out
> of Plessy v. Ferguson. The mere existence of culturally based groups is a
> tremendous hurdle for some White students to understand the value of diversity
> when they see separation. I believe we have to model the way for our students
> (and outsiders) by leaving race and ethnicity out of it unless its in the proper
> context…I don't think anyone is saying that culturally-based groups have to
> diminish their identity – what I'm saying is that the traditional groups, regardless
> of their history or membership demographics doesn't mean they should be labeled
> as "White" because not one group was expressly created to promote or celebrate
> Whiteness. I use "traditional" in describing groups that usually are in IFC or
> Panhellenic, but maybe "general" is a better term. (Anonymous, personal
> communication, March 12, 2015)

Based on this Greek life professional's account, taking race and ethnicity out of the

conversation further perpetuates the idea of Whiteness as property that devalues the

experience and history of individuals of color and contextualizes them as "others."

The Commitment to Social Justice and Praxis. By incorporating critical race theory into the discussion of this dissertation, I am not trying to damn or call for the end of the Greek system. Through my commitment to social justice, I am hoping to call attention to a system that needs to be reexamined and needs to be reexamined and have real changes made. As a community, we must challenge ourselves to be better through reevaluating our practices of exclusivity, discrimination, and racism. We must approach the conversation about the future of Greek life through a social justice lens to recognize the world is constantly evolving. Instead of continuing to base our current practices on the history of how Greek-lettered organizations were founded, the Greek system must evolve. We have to challenge our community to be better and more welcoming. If Greek life is going to survive for another 200 years, we must shift the focus to the good and stop providing the media fuel for the firestorm that has focused on the negativity of the Greek experience. "There is nothing wrong with an organization being historically White, Black or otherwise. But historically powerful organizations can't be allowed to undermine the racial justice and social progress this country has worked so hard to achieve" (Person, 2013, para. 11).

Summary. By utilizing critical race theory in the discussion, I sought to provide an additional perspective. The women in this study may not have recognized the significance of race within sorority membership the same way a critical race theorist would have, due to their upbringing in a predominately White environment and their close connection to their White peers; yet, this is their lived experience. Their stories are only seven perspectives of the larger picture of the impact of race within contemporary Greek-lettered organizations. The intention was not to say that the women's stories as

they were presented in the thematic findings through Allport's (1954/1979) hypothesis were wrong or that critical race theory must be included or that the perspective offered by critical race theory is "right." Rather, it was to acknowledge the multiple lenses that can be considered when examining the role of race in Greek life, including cross-racial membership.

Personal Reflections

When I began this dissertation, I felt to discuss race I had to utilize critical race theory as my theoretical framework for my data analysis. As a result, even with my identity as a White researcher, I did not doubt my ability to utilize critical race theory to provide an additional perspective. I thought this was something that I could do. I describe myself as a social justice advocate. I am a member of a historically White Greek-lettered organization that welcomed cross-racial membership. I believed in my ability to recognize my White privilege and not allow it to effect my analysis of this dissertation. I trusted I would be able to adequately describe my participants' stories through their voices. I never considered that this would not be enough.

As soon as I completed first interview with my first participant, I quickly realized I might not be able to effectively approach my data analysis through a critical race lens. I developed an internal struggle to find the balance between staying true to the women's voices and challenging the status quo within Greek life. Ultimately, I made the decision to frame my thematic findings only through Allport's (1954/1979) intergroup contact hypothesis.

However, even though I was still able utilize critical race theory within the discussion, I initially felt disappointed in myself for having to make this decision. I felt

that I chose the easy approach. Yet, now, as I complete this dissertation, I realize that, as a White, novice researcher, it was the right choice. While utilizing critical race theory as the theoretical framework might have produced different themes, I completed what I set out to achieve when I started this dissertation, to bring additional awareness to the role of race in Greek life and cross-racial membership in historically White Greek-lettered organizations.

Boundaries of the Study

As with all studies, there are boundaries to note. This study focused on the experiences of seven Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations at three private universities near a metropolitan city in the southeastern United States. For this study, several boundaries are based on the sample. First, the small size of the sample should be acknowledged. Because few studies have looked at this phenomenon, a larger sample size would provide more confidence in the applicability of the findings.

Second, the participants self-selected to be involved in the study. Other Black women at the site institutions in historically White Greek-lettered organizations who chose not to participate and could have had different experiences were not represented. Furthermore, potential participants from Delta University and Epsilon University who chose not to respond where also excluded.

Third, the background and identity development of the participants must be considered. The participants in this study were raised in an environment where cross-racial interactions were common and encouraged. The study found the participants welcomed and sought the opportunity to interact with other races, which contributed to the participants' positive experiences within their organization. Additionally, while not

directly studied, each of these women possesses a similar understanding of their racial identity. Their reflection and ability to make meaning of their experience may potentially be affected by their identity. Thus, how the women described their experience at the time of the interview, compared to when they joined their organization or after they graduate, may be different depending on their identity development. It is necessary to recognize that these findings cannot be applied to all students of color in historically White Greek-lettered organizations as their backgrounds and experiences may be different than the participants in this study.

Fourth, it can be assumed that within this study the participants may have held back details of experiences they deemed negative because of their devotion to their sisters within these organizations. The bonds of sisterhood are innately strong. Even with the anonymity provided by the pseudonyms, they may have felt that revealing any negative information that might paint their organization or Greek life in a bad light could result in their own feelings of guilt or remorse or even hostility from other members.

Fifth, in addition to the potential apprehension to fully describe their experience, my lack of a prior connection to the participants may have also influenced their openness. This coupled with my identity as a White woman who works professionally in Greek life could have impacted their willingness to fully and honestly share with me. To prevent this, I worked to develop a relationship with each participant by sharing my background and intention for completing the study at our initial meeting. Yet, even though the participants were willing and did engage with me during the interviews, I cannot guarantee that my efforts were successful.

Outside of the sample, the final boundary involves the setting. Each of the participants positively described their institutions, including their comfort level and feelings of being welcomed, accepted, and included. They recalled having diverse friendship groups in college and discussed the diversity within the Greek community on their campus. However, not all universities can describe their environments in the same positive light, particularly when certain campuses are featured in the media for continued practices of segregation. As a result, the findings of this study may have been different if other institutions were included.

Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations. Through a qualitative research approach grounded in phenomenological methodology, this study allowed for the construction of meaning to come from the participant's stories. By emerging myself in the data collection and analysis, I developed a deeper understanding of the participants. This allowed me to identify implications for practice to navigate the racial constructs of Greek life.

Education about the Greek System

Professionals need to recognize their role in ensuring any student seeking membership into a Greek-lettered organization, regardless of race, is educated about the Greek community on their campus. Stacy commented, "*People should understand that everyone has access to Greek life and recruitment and that there are no race based restrictions, but I don't know if they do*." In turn, it is essential to help incoming students understand that they have this access.

To do so, professionals can provide education to help students recognize the difference between the Greek-lettered organizations that are available on their campus, particularly on campuses where additional councils besides the National Panhellenic Council and Interfraternity Council exist. This education can be provided through brochures for students and their parents about the Greek community and the different councils available. During orientation, specific sessions or workshops about Greek life could also be conducted, potentially featuring panels with current members of the organizations, including individuals who cross-racially joined. Sasha mentioned the importance of this. "*We never had anything like having students of color talk about their experiences in Greek letter organizations. Often when we have people who come to speak, they are White, so why do you think you are gonna be a part of one?*"

The participants also mentioned the need to provide education to debunk myths about being a legacy of a Greek-lettered organization. The women stressed the importance of this education because of the pressure placed on Black students related to the significance placed on being a legacy of historically Black Greek-lettered organizations. For these legacies, it is often an expectation within families to join the specific organization. Stacy mentioned the importance for women to not "*focus on being a legacy and potentially missing out on something because you aren't interested in the organization or it is not on campus.*" In addition to the myths about being a legacy, Scarlett mentioned

> *That's also another also problem with like, kind of, women of color joining these*
>
> *organizations, is that they don't want this people to perceive them as like someone*
>
> *who is not proud of their race or their diversity or where they come from…*

because they're joining a White letter organization. And that doesn't have to be

true. You can you know, I mean you can still have that pride of like where you

came from in you heritage and join a White letter organization. I don't think that

there's disconnect there. But I think a lot of people definitely see it that way.

Thus, workshops could dispel the myths, for both the family member and student, that

being a legacy to a specific organization is the only path to membership or

misperceptions about being Black in a historically White Greek-lettered organization.

Furthermore, these workshops can also convey additional options to explore within Greek

life.

Education about Cross-Racial Membership

Campus-based and Greek-lettered organization headquarters professionals should

ensure they are delivering a message of inclusivity to students considering membership

within any organization. This includes helping students understand they should pursue

membership based on the values of the organization and shared interests with the

individuals within the sisterhood/brotherhood, not just the history of the organization.

This recommendation was especially important to the women within this study.

Estrella expressed the importance for women of color interested in pursuing

membership into a Greek-lettered organization to "*follow what your heart tells you to do,*

and not what someone else tells you to do." She believed it was important to "*go through*

recruitment, follow what you think is right, and to hell with everyone else." Haleigh had

similar advice, "*Don't really worry about what other people say or do or think about you.*

It is what it is and your decision." Stacy agreed with the women in her belief that

individuals interested in Greek life should approach recruitment with an open mind in

order to explore the different types of Greek-lettered organizations and be able to find their fit.

Stacy felt it was essential to help students interested in Greek life understand the different organizations and their recruitment process to be able to make the best decision. She believed women do not always realize they have options; "*Women of color have the choice, um however, I think it should be an educated decision rather than just, "Oh, I'm Black, I should go with these girls*." Scarlett furthered Stacy's comment through her own experience.

> *I think like for me I found [my organization] as a result of similar personality*
>
> *traits from girls whom I thought are really connected to and have similar interests*
>
> *as me. And, I think that's the same when people find a Black organization. So I*
>
> *think it just kind of takes like kind of a paradigm shift of people thinking about it*
>
> *in a different way. And thinking that maybe a Black organization is for you but*
>
> *maybe it isn't but that's okay, because you still have this whole other field of*
>
> *options open to you.*

Lastly, Stacy suggested the need to understand the realities of cross-racial membership with Greek-lettered organizations.

> *I think the stigma towards it or just the general opinion is too flawed and biased*
>
> *and – then that's the thing when people aren't taking the time to have*
>
> *conversations with organizations [about cross-racial membership]. Like they're*
>
> *not – they're just making the assumption, festering it, and then just letting it sit*
>
> *rather than having genuine curiosity, going up to a member and asking them,*
>
> *"What is the likelihood of me getting into your organization? What is your*

experience? Do you think it's going to be weird for me," like – and then you get to know them. And that's the thing people don't take the time to get to know them. They just see the letters and then that's it.

Scarlett shared similar sentiments.

I think that it's just not as big of a deal as people want to make it out to be and I think that if people recognize that, I think that would help a lot of the diversifying efforts. Just because I think people think that the cross racial thing "must" create some sort of conflict. There must be some sort of tension...I think it's one of those things where it's kind of on both parties to kind of help it [more cross-racial membership within historically White Greek-lettered organizations] happen. So, it's on people of color to stop associating White letter organizations to something that's closed to them. They have to look at it as an option for them, when they're deciding where they want to fit onto the campus life. And I think it's also a little bit on people that are not of color to make sure that they're fostering that open, accepting environment and also make sure that they're maybe trying to put more people of color in positions where there are more visible so that other people of color could kind of see that and recognize that. Like, this is a place where they can potentially find themselves fitting in to.

Thus, ultimately, to ensure individuals wishing to pursue membership into Greek-lettered organizations are informed and educated about the Greek community, the responsibility must be shared across several entities, including campus-based and national office-based professionals, the current members of the organizations, and the individuals seeking membership.

Education on Race and Diversity

Greek life professionals should consider consistent, potentially mandatory educational opportunities for students and staff to raise awareness about race within Greek life. Newsome (2009) expressed a similar recommendation that Greek-lettered organizations need to become more aware and sensitive to members about situations and issues that may arise involving race, ethnicity, and diversity. Greek communities have the responsibility to take the initiative to educate members on these topics and the ability to shift the current paradigm that paints fraternities and sororities as racist and discriminatory. If organizations "commit to addressing some of these issues as they continue to recruit students of color, a rewarding fraternal experience for all members may occur" (Newsome, 2009, p. 166). Hosting educational trainings on topics such as diversity, racial insensitivity, and how to talk about race can provide opportunities for both staff members and students to become change agents at a grassroots level.

Additionally, it is important to encourage students to challenge the norms within their organizations. This includes working with organizations who are "*unsure of how they can really proceed by attracting more women of color without coming across as, 'Oh, we're trying to fill a quota or we're trying to do this*'" (Scarlett); believe "*they can't be racist because they're diverse, [specifically when] people defend them on that [or because] they're like one of the most diverse fraternities on campus, how could they be racist*?" (Sasha); or are controlled by older alumni(ae) who are influential in decision making and budgets. Professionals should help students understand that the future of their organizations is in their hands and provide the support and educational structure to challenge history, traditions, and beliefs.

Promoting Organic Versus Forced Integration

Throughout their interviews, the participants were intentional in discussing the importance of choosing their organization based on fit, the diversity of the sisterhood, and history of cross-racial membership within the organization. They expressed how these factors positively influenced their experience. They recalled how certain organizations on their campus did not possess these factors, resulting in them feeling uncomfortable and unwelcomed. They would rather a group be honest about their history and lack of diversity as "*it's better to not try to be someone you aren't*" (Sasha).

As stories of racial and social problems within Greek life continue to make headlines and gain public scrutiny, national organizations will be forced to evaluate their own practices, including the diversity of their organizations. However, Sasha mentioned the importance of "*not forcing groups to integrate or say all spaces are safe.*" The participants believed it was more important for organizations to be diverse because they desired diversity, not because they were forced to achieve a certain quota. Sasha questioned, "*It's more than wanting div – like wanting diversity to be a concern. I'm like, why do you wanted to be diverse? Is it because you want to look good or because you actually care about these people?*" Isabelle commented,

> *A lot of them [White Greek-lettered organizations] are looking to be more*
> *diverse. A lot of them are looking to bring in people of different backgrounds. And*
> *that is kind of the way that… That's kind of the trend of the way that things are*
> *going. And so, like, do not be afraid. Do it because you want to, don't do it*
> *because you feel like you have something to prove. Do it because it's something*
> *that you feel comfortable doing, that you enjoy doing.*

Providing Opportunities for Interaction

As one way to encourage students to challenge the status quo, professionals should create opportunities for all Greek-lettered organizations in a community to connect. Saenz, Ngai, and Hurtado (2006) stressed the importance of quality interactions between students of different races. Their findings concluded it was the responsibility of universities to provide students with opportunities to engage in meaningful and positive interactions (Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2006). Isabelle described a desire for the Greek community to interact more.

> *I kind of want there to be a little bit more... Exposure isn't really the right word but, like, more, I guess, the interaction with, like, the multicultural organizations? Like, I think that would be really, really good for my sorority. Not only because, like, "Hey, you're getting exposure with other cultural organizations!" But just because, like, we're all... We all wear letters. Like, we all stand for pretty much the same values. Like, so why not? Like... Why not just go ahead and do that? Like, why not reach across, like, racial lines or ethnic lines and kind of meet and—and—Meet in the middle and then we'll see what's common between us? But as a whole, no, we don't really discuss racial things. And I think, like... I think that my sorority is aware of it but they don't... It doesn't really... It doesn't really factor into a lot of things. Which is fine. Like, it kind of shouldn't, if that makes sense? Like, it shouldn't matter, like, if I'm Black, White, or Asian, and I didn't do something. Or I need to do something because I'm Black, White, or Asian. Like, it shouldn't really matter. But I would like to see more interaction between. Like, having that conversation. Like, acknowledging that it is there.*

Haleigh shared a similar sentiment.

> *I would like to see more from the White groups towards the historically Black ones because, you know, they [the historically Black Greek-lettered organizations] try to come and support everything we [her organization] do, but we, you know, everybody doesn't necessarily go and support them and I don't think that's right. We could do more together.*

She elaborated on the importance for different councils to learn more about one another, especially after realizing her sisters would often only attend events hosted by the historically Black Greek-lettered organizations if she was in attendance.

> *It's just something that just takes time and you have to evolve in it and you know just…know that it's ok to step outside your comfort zone. Cause I had to tell my sisters this too once. They were like [Haleigh] are you coming to such and like are you going to such in such organizations event and I'm like I'm not going to be able to. Oh we wanted to go but you're not gonna go…I was like you don't have to have me to go. Like they don't bite. They're Black just like me, it doesn't make a difference, like just go and talk to them they don't care. And then when they could see that, you know just because they're different and not you know…in the same organization that we are, you know it's ok.*

These opportunities should go beyond the typical annual event within Greek communities - Greek Week, where organizations are often competing against each other - to create multiple events throughout each semester to foster an environment of learning, openness, and exposure. This would ensure Greek members, who otherwise may have had little exposure to each other and to each other's races, have the chance to get to know

each other through different types of events. It would also remove some of the typical segmentation that exists between Greek-lettered organizations.

Additionally, similar to a suggestion by Newsome (2009), creating a joint Greek council is another way to provide opportunities for interaction. Joint Greek councils allow organizations to "gain respect, understanding, and appreciation of one's differences" by serving "as a tool for members to become more open to issues related to multiculturalism and membership diversity" (Newsome, 2009, p. 168). By creating a joint Greek council, the current separate councils could come together to learn more about one another, plan events, and collaborate on philanthropic and service activities. While communities may fight the elimination of separate councils or feel having only one council for the entire Greek community is not possible due to different governing structures, policies, and recruitment strategies, it is important to start the conversation about inclusion of all councils under one umbrella on campuses.

Creating Safe Spaces for all Individuals

While the participants did not feel they faced barriers that affected their overall positive experience, they did share examples of directly or indirectly experiencing and witnessing micro-aggressions, racist acts, and discrimination within their organizations and communities. Greek life professionals must recognize the potential for students, especially those who seek cross-racial membership, to be exposed to racially insensitive experiences. As a result, it is important to create safe spaces for individuals who feel they are victims of discrimination.

Safe spaces are places where anyone can relax and be accepted, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or unsafe because of their background or

incidents they have experienced (Advocates for Youth, 2005). Safe spaces are created by providing training to campus administrators, faculty, and staff on how to be an ally, advocate, and support to individuals facing experiences, such as racial discrimination or exclusion. Isabelle emphasized the importance of "*if you feel you are being tokenized, talk to someone about it*." By having these spaces on campuses, students are provided with an individual to talk to and a place to feel supported. Safe spaces allow a third party to offer help to victims, including strategies and coping mechanisms for navigating the negative experiences.

Engage in Race Based Conversations Related to Current Events

As media headlines are inundated with stories of racial incidents about Greek life, students and professionals often have mixed reactions, including feelings of relief that the story is not about them, the belief that their campus is different and similar events would not occur, or ignoring the situation. Even within this dissertation, the women were proud to discuss the inclusive, diverse environments of their campuses and Greek communities and only recounted the discrimination they witnessed when probed.

If and when racist acts occur on campus, studies have found institutions typically only respond if there is a potential impact on the institution's reputation (Schmidt, 2015). Even then, the response typically only addresses the racist rather than the racism (Schmidt, 2015). Specifically, research found that many college bias-response teams, teams employed to educate campus communities about biases, devote their time to punishing and condemning the perpetrators of specific acts and spend relatively little time on education, which is part of their charge (Schmidt, 2015). By placing attention on the individuals committing the event or "the few of us who are outliers to the inclusive

values of the campus" rather than the act itself, institutions are not acknowledging that systematic racism is a problem (Schmidt, 2015, para. 13).

At some point, preferably now, the prevalence of racism within the Greek community must be challenged. As professionals, we can no longer shy away or ignore the problem. We cannot believe the problem does not involve our campus. The current events in the media have serious implications for all campuses across the country as they "serve more and more as a testament to an epidemic within the culture, and less and less as an indication of just a few bad apples" (Anonymous, 2015, para. 1).

We must utilize these current events to be willing to discuss the topic of race and diversity within Greek life. We have to be able to ask the challenging and potentially uncomfortable question of whether similar events are occurring within our communities. Unfortunately, in many cases, the answer is yes, exemplified by a sorority woman's (outside of this dissertation) comment, "The same things that are happening at these other schools happen right here. The only difference is that they have been caught" (Anonymous, 2015, para. 3). Her comment begs another question for professionals to consider: Are our students not getting caught or are their actions being ignored?

In situations with a lack of thorough university oversight, incidents have the potential to be silenced, ignored, or swept under the rug. The result is a "truly dangerous silence that serves as an indirect approval of the values the Greek culture at large perpetuates" (Anonymous, 2015, para. 4). Furthermore, by ignoring such activities or advising organizations to be more careful with their events and what is documented, energy is being exerted on damage control rather than creating opportunities for open dialogue on issues of race within the community. We must address "the inappropriate

mode of silence and passivity that exists in our student community about these issues. The systematic discouragement of members to openly discuss grievances and internal problems is plainly wrong" (Anonymous, 2015, para. 24).

Outside of the recommendations of providing education and opportunities for interaction, we can no longer shy away from race-based conversations. Integration, forced or organic, isn't enough. There are deep beliefs that are held close to the vest because of familial, environmental, and religious beliefs that are challenging to combat. Racist events continue to occur within our communities. We should no longer allow race to be a four-letter word. We need to shed more light on this topic that is not just ignored, but run from.

> As a distinct culture of allied silence surrounds these [Greek-lettered] organizations, we are forced to ask ourselves if these famous centers of mystery, glamour, and exclusivity are any longer socially relevant or acceptable. It is becoming more apparent that the institution of Greek life needs to be reevaluated and evolve in order to survive in a world of increasing transparency and decreased tolerance of bigotry and disenfranchisement. Evolve or dissolve. (Anonymous, 2015, para. 25)

To decide which route we will take, we must engage in consistent, open, and honest conversations about race as they will allow us to create an environment of openness, inclusion, and understanding that is necessary for Greek life to survive.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study described the experience of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations. Because of the limited research regarding the role of race in

Greek-lettered organizations, continued research is necessary. Future studies can take different approaches to examine the topic of race, especially cross-racial membership, in Greek life.

After conducting this study, I would suggest future scholars replicate it at different types of institutions in various regions of the country. Each participant mentioned their campus environment as welcoming, diverse, and accepting of them as women of color. They felt comfortable on their campuses and did not believe their race impacted their experience or involvement at their institution. Yet, as research and current media headlines demonstrate, the participant's recollection of their collegiate experience is not representative of all campuses. This study was completed at three private schools within 60 miles of a southeastern metropolitan city. Expanding the sample to include public institutions and colleges and universities in various parts of the country can further the understanding of how these findings hold true for some students and how they differ for others depending on institution type, size, location, and culture. More specifically, as this study is expanded, it is important that it be replicated at institutions where integration within historically White Greek-lettered organization has been slower to be achieved.

The seven Black women in this study shared similar accounts of their positive experiences within their historically White Greek-lettered organizations. However, as previously mentioned, Greek life across the country does not always provide an environment where individuals would recount the same positive experience as these women. Future studies need to include the voices of women and men who did not have a positive experience and the contributing factors to this negative experience. This should include students who (1) encountered hurdles in their desire to join and through their

affiliation, (2) participated in recruitment and were not provided an invitation for membership, (3) participated in recruitment and were extended membership, but left their organization after joining. By understanding the obstacles and barriers these students faced, Greek life professionals can use the findings to develop strategies for helping students navigate their cross-racial membership and promoting continued diversification and integration of the Greek system.

Future studies should also examine cross-racial membership from different viewpoints. Possible studies include the experiences of White students in historically White Greek-lettered organizations with cross-racial membership, White students in historically Black Greek-lettered organizations, and students who cross-racially join any Greek-lettered organization (not just historically White and Black groups). While each of these recommendations focuses on the experiences of individuals, an analysis of what prevents individuals from cross-racially joining, both from the views of the individuals attempting to join and the members within the organization, is also necessary.

As I previously mentioned, I struggled with the use of critical race theory within this dissertation. In turn, it is important to continue utilizing this theory within the research to continue the conversation about race and Greek life, especially within White organizations. While I do not necessarily agree with critics who believe that White researchers cannot utilize critical race theory accurately, I do believe the women's stories would have been told differently through the lens of a Black researcher. Thus, I recommend the involvement of individuals of color not only as the participants but also the researchers in future studies on this topic.

Unlike Newsome's work (2009), this study did not incorporate an exploration of identity. However, even though the participants were not directly asked about their identity, their answers often included components of it. It became apparent to me that to truly understand how a person's background influences their choices in life, including the factors that influenced their decision to join a historically White Greek-lettered organization, their identity must be incorporated into the conversation. Through a critical race lens, I am also able to recognize the impact of individuals' self-assessment of their racial identity on their experiences, such as why the participants chose to not recognize and/or discuss certain racially-based facets of their experiences. As a result, future research should include an investigation of participants' identity development. Furthermore, an individual's identity is constantly evolving; thus additional recommendations include extending this study beyond the collegiate environment to include alumni(ae) post-graduation. This would provide a comparison between how individuals describe their experience while in the organization and after leaving the situation.

Finally, institutions and the headquarters of Greek-lettered organizations need to critically examine how Greek life affects the campus racial climate. It is necessary to document both the implicit and explicit ways students encounter race within the Greek system, as non-affiliated students or members of the organization. "No longer just a Black-and-White issue when it comes to race, students of color around the country are reinventing and challenging not only Greek systems, but also the very concept of what it truly means to be an inclusive campus community with opportunities for all students to flourish" (Park, 2008, p. 128). Thus, it is important to understand how Greek life plays

into this conversation to ensure it is aiding and not hindering in the creation inclusive

environments on college campuses.

Conclusion

In summation, it is important to recognize that cross-racial membership in

historically White Greek-lettered organizations is possible and can work. For the women

in this study, traversing the color line was easy. They grew up in a supportive

environment where color was not an issue. They had a great, positive experience within

Greek life, even though it was not void of directly or indirectly experiencing barriers,

racism, and acts of intolerance. Despite this, they loved their organizations and could not

imagine their lives without them. However, while this was their experience, their stories

also demonstrate the reality that race is still an issue within the Greek system.

In an environment where true integration has not been achieved and racism still

occurs, we need to create communities that are supportive and accepting of those who

wish to join any organization, regardless of race, particularly individuals who seek cross-

racial membership within Greek-lettered organizations. We must also support those

students who want to cross-racially join but are not welcomed and empower those who

do not believe they are able to seek membership because of the climate and history of the

Greek system on their campus. We must continue to assess our campus climates to ensure

that if we are advertising inclusive environments, we are also providing them.

We must seek to bring social justice to each campus to better prepare our students

for life beyond the walls of campus. We need to challenge our students to talk about race

and diversity and the impact of such topics. If we ignore the issues or do not encourage

and support our students to have these conversations, we cannot expect real change; rather, we are promoting the continued White/Black racial dichotomy of Greek life.

This study was encouraging. It showed me there are historically White Greek-lettered organizations where women of color can be accepted and have the sorority experience they wanted. But I would be remiss if I believed our work towards integration of the Greek system was complete. There are positives of Greek life: on average, students participating in Greek-lettered organizations donate over seven million dollars each year to philanthropic efforts, and the Greek system is the largest network of volunteers in the Unites States with members donating over ten million hours of service each year (North American Interfraternity Conference, 2014). However, the positives have been overshadowed by the recent national news headlines about acts of blatant racism and discrimination by fraternity and sorority members. It pains me to know that each person who seeks cross-racial membership will not have the largely inclusive experience that these women had.

In turn, as student affairs and Greek professionals, we must continue to challenge the current organizational and societal norms that allow the recent incidents to occur. We must recognize while these social organizations are an important part of the collegiate experience, it is important that we never forget the true purpose behind education: to provide a supportive learning environment that enlightens the minds of these students and prepares them for a world outside of the protective collegiate walls. To ill prepare these students to deal with complicated relationship-based issues around race is not just a disservice to these organizations, but to the larger society as a whole.

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Appendix A

University of Georgia Institutional Review Board Approval of Protocol

The University of Georgia

Phone 706-542-3199   Fax 706-542-36

Office of the Vice President for Research
Institutional Review Board

APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

February 14, 2014

Dear Laura Dean:

On 2/14/2014, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	The Experiences of Black Women in Historically White Greek-Lettered Organizations: A Phenomenological Investigation
Investigator:	Laura Dean
IRB ID:	STUDY00000598
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None

The IRB approved the protocol from 2/14/2014.

To document consent, use the consent documents that were approved and stamped by the IRB. Go to the Documents tab to download them.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

Larry Nackerud, Ph.D.
University of Georgia
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center   ◆   Athens, Georgia 30602-7411
An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution

Appendix B

Fraternity and Sorority Life Professional Email

Dear (Insert name of Fraternity and Sorority Life profession at each institution),

I hope this email finds you doing well. My name is Barbre "Bre" Berris and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counseling and Student Personnel Services program at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation. The study is titled *The Experiences of Black Women in Historically White Greek-Lettered Organizations: A Phenomenological Investigation*. The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of Black women in White Greek-lettered organizations at predominately White institutions in a metropolitan southeastern city. This study is intended to provide insight for higher education professionals who are addressing issues related to membership diversity within historically White Greek-lettered organizations.

I am reaching out to you to see if you would be willing to provide me with the names and contact information for the presidents of the Panhellenic sororities on your campus. After receiving the information, I will send them an email to ask for their help in identifying potential students who fit the study's criteria. If you are unable to send me their names, I would ask for you to send the email to them instead. A copy of this email is included as an attachment. Also, if you feel the email is better coming from you, please utilize the attached document to send the email directly to the presidents. Each president will be asked to forward an email to these students about the study, including information about the background of the researcher and the purpose of the study, and a request for their participation in the study. Additionally, if you directly know of any potential students who fit the study's criteria, please also feel free to forward them the attached email that will be sent to the presidents.

For this study, the following criteria will be used to select participants: identify as a Black woman, be at least 18 years old, enrolled as an undergraduate student, and be an initiated member of a sorority affiliated with the National Panhellenic Conference. The student must be willing to provide demographic information to the researcher in the form of a participant information form and participate in two 60-90 minute face-to-face audio taped recorded interviews (the second interview may occur via Skype/FaceTime, if needed) and the photography artifact data collection process.

Please let me know if you would be willing to assist me with the process of obtaining the presidents contact information. Also, please confirm that you received this email and whether or not you will be able to help. I look forward to hearing back from you with your feedback to this request. I am really excited about this opportunity to learn more about the experiences of individuals in Greek life and I look forward to working with (insert name of institution) to accomplish this.

Appendix C

Fraternity and Sorority Life Professional Email – Part Two

Dear Colleague,

I hope this email finds you doing well. As you are aware, I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Counseling and Student Personnel Services program at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a qualitative research study for my dissertation. The study is titled *The Experiences of Black Women in Historically White Greek-Lettered Organizations: A Phenomenological Investigation*. As campuses and chapters experience increasing diversity, it is important to hear the stories of women of color who have chosen to affiliate with predominantly White sororities; in this way, we can learn how to support both diverse women seeking affiliation in the future and their collegiate chapters.

I am reaching out to you to see if you would be willing to help identify potential participants, both current undergraduates and recent alumni, for this research study. If you directly know of any potential individuals who fit the study's criteria, could you please forward them the attached email that corresponds with status as a student or alumni?

For this study, the following criteria will be used to select participants: identify as a Black woman, be at least 18 years old, enrolled as an undergraduate student or graduated within the past five years from a predominately White institution, and be an initiated member of a sorority affiliated with the National Panhellenic Conference. The individual must be willing to provide demographic information to the researcher in the form of a participant information form and participate in two 60-90 minute audio taped recorded interviews (these interviews will take place in person/Face-to-Face, via Skype/FaceTime, **OR** a combination of the two) and the photography artifact data collection process.

Please let me know if you would be willing to assist me with the process of recruiting participants for this study. Also, please confirm that you received this email and whether or not you will be able to help. I look forward to hearing back from you with your feedback to this request. I am really excited about this opportunity to learn more about the experiences of individuals in Greek life and I look forward to working with you to accomplish this.

Appendix D

Sorority President Email

Greetings,

I hope this email finds you doing well. My name is Barbre "Bre" Berris and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counseling and Student Personnel Services program at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation. The study is titled *The Experiences of Black Women in Historically White Greek-Lettered Organizations: A Phenomenological Investigation*. The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of Black women in White Greek-lettered organizations at predominately White institutions in a metropolitan southeastern city. This study is intended to provide insight for higher education professionals who are addressing issues related to membership diversity within historically White Greek-lettered organizations.

I am reaching out to you to see if you would be willing to assist me with gathering potential participants for this study. If there are Black members in your sorority, I'd like to ask if you would be willing to send them the attached email from me, which includes information about my background and the purpose of the study and a request for their participation in the study. The name of anyone you identify will be kept confidential. Names of participant's Greek-lettered organization will not be identified or used in this study either. This will ensure privacy and confidentiality for all participants and their sororities.

For this study, the following criteria will be used to select participants: identify as a Black woman, be at least 18 years old, enrolled as an undergraduate student, and be an initiated member of a sorority affiliated with the National Panhellenic Conference. The student must be willing to provide demographic information to the researcher in the form of a participant information form and participate in two 60-90 minute face-to-face audio taped recorded interviews (the second interview may occur via Skype/FaceTime, if needed) and a photography artifact data collection process.

Please confirm that you received this email and whether or not you will be able to help. I look forward to hearing back from you with your feedback to this request. I am really excited about this opportunity to learn more about the experiences of individuals in Greek life and I look forward to working with your organization to accomplish this.

Appendix E

Potential Participants Email

Greetings -

I hope this email finds you doing well. My name is Barbre "Bre" Berris and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counseling and Student Personnel Services program at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation. The study is titled The Experiences of Black Women in Historically White Greek-Lettered Organizations: A Phenomenological Investigation. The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of Black women in White Greek-lettered organizations at predominately White institutions in a metropolitan southeastern city. This study is intended to provide insight for higher education professionals who are addressing issues related to membership diversity within historically White Greek-lettered organizations. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Please note that even though you received this email from either your Greek Advisor or organization president, this does not indicate their encouragement to participate, as it is your choice as to whether or not you participate.

For this study, I am looking to select participants who identify as a Black woman, are at least 18 years old, enrolled as an undergraduate student, and are an initiated member of a sorority affiliated with the National Panhellenic Conference.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked semi-structured open-ended interview questions about your experiences and feelings pertaining to your sorority membership within a historically White sorority and factors that influenced your decision to join. Your participation will involve two 60-90 minute face-to-face audio taped recorded interviews and a photography artifact data collection process as well as providing demographic information to the researcher in the form of a participant information form. The entire process should take between 2-3 hours. Interviews will be scheduled as soon possible and will be coordinated based on your schedule availability during the week. The interviews will be at a mutually agreed upon location. I will provide a 20 dollar Visa gift card to you for your time.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation will also remain confidential. While the results will be used in my dissertation, your identity and that of your school and sorority will be protected. This will ensure privacy and confidentiality for all participants and their sororities. Also, if you choose to not participate, it will not affect your standing within the organization in which you are a member.

If you would like to participate, please send an e-mail to me as soon as possible. In the email, please include your contact phone number and the best times to reach you. I will schedule a 15-30 minute phone/Skype call you to further discuss the details of the study.

I look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call or email me. I can be reached at bberris@uga.edu. Thank you in advance for any assistance you will be able to provide for this research study.

Appendix F

Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

"BEING A MINORITY IN A MAJORITY SITUATION":
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF BLACK WOMEN IN HISTORICALLY
WHITE GREEK-LETTERED ORGANIZATIONS

Researcher's Statement

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Purpose of the Study

I am conducting a research study called: The Experiences of Black Women in Historically White Greek-Lettered Organizations: A Phenomenological Investigation. The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of Black women in White Greek-lettered organizations at predominately White institutions in a metropolitan southeastern city. Additionally, I hope to identify and explore the factors influencing the decision of the women to seek membership into the organizations and how they navigated their participation. Specifically, the researcher will aim to provide insight for higher education professionals who are addressing issues related to membership diversity within historically White Greek-lettered organizations.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to…

• Participate in a phone/Skype call lasting approximately 15-30 minutes. This call will serve to inform you with specifics about the study, including the purpose, research design, and expectations of the study. Before the end of the meeting, you will have an opportunity to ask any clarifying questions and discuss concerns.

- Complete a participant information form with questions about your background and collegiate involvement. This form will facilitate communication between us and document basic information and participant data that will assist with data reporting, contextualizing, and analyzing the study.
- Participate in two in person/face-to-face interviews or one person/face-to-face interview and one Skype/FaceTime interview. The first interview will focus on your experiences before college and your decision to join your Greek-lettered organization. This interview will conclude with a focus on the details of your experience within your organization. The second interview will allow you to reflect on the meaning of the experience you discussed during the first interview, including evaluating how the factors in your life interacted to bring you to your current experience. The interviews will follow a semi-structured format.
- Provide photographic artifacts to document your friendship groups before college and within your Greek-lettered organization.

In total, your involvement will last approximately two-three hours over the course of the information meeting and two interviews.

Risks and discomforts

There is a possibility of a minimal level of risks or discomforts associated with this research if you agree to participate in the study. They include potential emotional discomfort when thinking about your membership within your organization, Greek community, or diversity within Greek-lettered organizations. I will be available to talk with you about any emotional issue that may arise or that you may experience within the study. I can also refer you to a campus professional to seek further support if you desire.

Benefits

The benefits for participating in this research include the opportunity to reflect on your Greek experience. This reflection will provide higher education professionals insight into the membership experiences of Black women in historically White Greek-lettered organizations. This information could assist these professionals with more informed practices on the topic of the role of race and diversity within Greek life. Results from this study will be sent to you upon completion.

Incentives

As a courtesy to those providing their time to participate in this study, the researcher will provide a $20 Visa gift card.

Audio/Video Recording

Your interviews will be audio-recorded by myself, the researcher. The tapes will be kept confidential. The recordings will be transcribed for data analysis. The audio-recordings will not be used for any other purposes and will be destroyed after my dissertation defense.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio-recorded or not. You will not be allowed to participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

      _____I do not want to have this interview recorded.

      _____I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

To protect the confidentiality of your involvement, your name, school, and Greek-lettered organization will be identified with a pseudonym. All data related to the study will be stored in a secure location. After the data is gathered and the interview is transcribed, any individual identifiers will be removed and replaced with your pseudonym. The results of the research study may be published, but your name or any identifying information will not be used. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. Also, if you choose to not participate, it will not affect your standing within the organization in which you are a member.

Principal Investigator/Advisor: *Laura Dean, Ph.D.*
Counseling and Human Services
ladean@uga.edu

Researcher: *Barbre Berris*
Counseling and Student Personnel Services
bberris@uga.edu

If you have questions

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me at bberris@uga.edu or my faculty sponsor at ladean@uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____   _____   _____

Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Appendix G

Participant Information Form

1) Name, including preferred name for the research

2) Contact information

3) Age

4) Race (Asian, Black, Latino, Native American, White, etc.)

5) Ethnicity (Bahamian, Haitian, Jamaican, etc.)

6) Racial makeup of high school (estimate percentages)

7) Current year in school (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior)

8) Why did you choose to attend this institution?

9) Name of your Greek-lettered organization and year/semester joined?

10) Are you a legacy? If so, which sorority?

11) How did you receive your bid? Formal or informal recruitment?

12) If you went through formal recruitment, how many people of color went through

the process with you?

13) How many women of color were in your new member class?

14) Are you a member of any other campus organization(s)? If so, please indicate the

name(s) and whether you hold any leadership positions.

Appendix H

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview One

- Describe your pre-college experience that may include types of activities you were involved in, your friendship groups, what you life was like then?
  - o Probe question: Describe your first experience of interacting and developing a friendship with someone outside of your race.
  - o Probe question: Describe your experiences pre-college and during high school of interacting with individuals outside of your race.
  - o Probe question: Explain the environment you grew up in, where cross-racial interactions were encouraged?

- What kinds of things did you consider when you chose a college?
  - o Probe question: How do you consider their college to be similar to or different from their high school?

- How would you describe the environment and your experience as a student of color at your institution?
  - o Probe question: Explain your comfort or lack of comfort level with the campus environment of the institution?
  - o Probe question: How would you describe your interactions with your peers, both White students and students of color?
  - o Probe question: Describe your friendship group outside of your WGLO.
  - o Probe question: Explain how being a student of color on a predominately White institution influenced your involvement?
  - o Probe question: How do you feel your institution promotes opportunities for cross-racial friendships?

- What made you interested in joining a Greek organization?
  - o Probe question: How did you learn about Greek life at your school?
  - o Probe question: Did you consider the differences between WGLO and BGLOs – in your eyes, what were the differences?
  - o Probe question: Prior to joining your fraternity, did you ever consider joining a historically Black fraternity? If so, why? If not, why?
  - o Probe question: Describe any past experiences and factors that have supported or influenced your decision to become a member of a WGLO?

- o Probe question: What exactly contributed to your decision to join a WGLO?
- o Probe question: Did you see any "payoff" or anticipated benefit in joining? If so, what?

- How supportive did you feel by family/friends about your decision to join a WGLO?
  - o Probe question: If a legacy, was it difficult to explain your decision to your family? Did they understand?
  - o Probe question: Discuss how your family and or friends perceived and or reacted to your decision to join a historically White fraternity.

- How would you describe your experience within your organization?

Interview Two

- What does being in your organization mean to you?
  - o Probe question: How do you believe your experience is different from your White sisters because you are a person of color in a WGLO?
  - o Probe question: How do you feel you may have had a different experience had you joined a BGLO?

- What barriers did you face surrounding your participation within your organization?
  - o Probe question: Discuss the recruitment process for your fraternity when you were recruited and any challenges, related to recruitment, that you experienced.
  - o Probe question: Describe a time when you have felt "different" and/or singled out based on your race in your organization?
  - o Probe question: Describe a time when someone outside of your organization treated you differently because of your membership?
  - o Probe question: How did you overcome the barriers you faced?

- Tell me about your connections with your sisters?

- Do you think about your race within your organization? How?
  - o Probe question: Are topics of race discussed within your organization? If so, in what settings are they discussed?

- Have you ever doubted your decision to join your Greek organization, or any Greek organization? If so, why?

- What would you like others to know about cross-racial membership in Greek-lettered organizations?
  - o What do you think prevents more students of color from joining WGLOs

- Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Appendix I

Contact Summary Sheet

1) Interviewer / Interviewee

2) Contact Date / Date of Report

3) Main issues or themes within the contact

4) Any discrepancies, if any, within the interviewee's responses

5) Any salient, interesting, or important information through/within the contact

6) Questions requiring further elaborations

7) Notes on items to cover in next interview and where to begin

8) Special circumstances that may affect the quality of the interview

9) General comments about how the interviewee's responses compared with other interviewees

10) Other notes, items to consider or remember, and miscellaneous information