THE RE-CONCEPTUALIZATION OF HISTORICALLY WHITE FRATERNITIES AND SORORITIES; THE BLACK EXPERIENCE.

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Abstract

Higher education administration scholars have researched the benefits and challenges of joining fraternities and sororities as well as Greek life’s impact on students’ overall sense of belonging at a university. However, there is limited research surrounding cross-racial membership, specifically Black students that join historically White fraternities and sororities. This phenomenological, qualitative study utilized Critical Race Theory to understand the lived experiences of Black students who joined White fraternal organizations. Five superordinate themes and two sub themes emerged. They are (1) Racial/Cultural Socialization (2) Salience of their Racial Identity (3) Lack of Exposure to Greek Life (3 a) Recruitment Experience (4) Perception of Historically Black fraternities and sororities and (5) Leadership Opportunities and Personal Connections (5 a) Negative Membership Experience (5 b) Black Gravity.

Understanding the experiences of Black students that join historically White fraternities and sororities can provide insights into how a group of students navigate the color line.

*Keywords:* Critical Race Theory, phenomenology, cross-racial membership, fraternities, sororities, Black students, higher education, Greek organizations
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“But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

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Chapter One: Problem of Practice

The prevalence of racial segregation in historically White fraternities and sororities is undeniable (Hughey, 2007, 2010). Many university administrators struggle with the value of the Greek experience, and question whether or not socially responsible leaders are created due to past practices of discrimination and exclusivity (Martin, Hevel & Pascarella, 2012; Muir, 1991). These practices strengthen the notion of homogeneity while unfavorably highlighting and celebrating the uniqueness of difference (Laird, 2005).

Recent incidents of racial and cultural insensitivity displayed by historically White fraternities and sororities challenge the notion of inclusivity and social integration of Black members. At the University of Florida, two members of a historically White fraternity wore black face, thick gold chains, baseball caps, and pants that hung low during their annual “Rockstars and Rappers” theme party (Crabbe, 2012). At the University of California, San Diego campus, a historically White fraternity hosted a ghetto-themed party in honor of Black history month known as the “Compton Cook Out” (Gordon, 2010), and at the University of Southern Mississippi, a historically White sorority hosted an 80s theme party where a few White members dressed like the Huxtable family from the 80s sitcom “The Cosby Show” (Kemp, 2011). Events like these contribute to racial division within the undergraduate community and add to an atmosphere of intolerance on campuses. The Greek community can be viewed as a microcosm of the overall campus climate. Specifically, White fraternities and sororities could be viewed as setting the “tenor of campus life” (Hughey, 2010, p. 653).

The literature about the history of fraternities and sororities is extensive, describing the strong sense of belonging and the social mobility encountered by their members. Yet, there is also an abundance of literature describing the issues that the Greek community faces, such as
hazing, sexual misconduct, homophobia, heterosexism, academic dishonesty, and substance abuse. However, there is a gap in the literature about students of color in historically White fraternal organizations. The “perspective of nonwhite members who gain entry into historically White fraternities and sororities are often absent, resulting in an even greater marginalization of nonwhite voices” (Hughey, 2010, p. 654). Understanding the experiences of Black students that join historically White fraternities and sororities can provide insights into how a group of students navigate the color line.

**Significance**

Phi Kappa Sigma, founded in 1850, was the first fraternity to create an anti-discrimination clause. The members of the organization believed that “the true strength of a fraternity derives not from the amount of its members; but from the strength of the relationship between each member” (Zita-Bennett, 2011, p. 2). With expansion efforts in the North, the fraternity wanted to develop new chapters without color barriers and racial exclusions. However, the larger movement to end racial discrimination within historically White fraternities did not officially occur until the 1960s with extreme pressure from host colleges and universities (Zita-Bennett, 2011).

In order to end racial discrimination within the fraternity and sorority community, institutions were forced to operate with two distinct strategies. They established stringent deadlines by which inter/national organizations needed to declare that their members did not discriminate and/or they provided special provisions for local chapters who disregarded their national exclusionary policy to remain university affiliated (Newsome, 2009). When discriminatory clauses were removed from historically White fraternities in the 1960s, invitations to join were extended to Black students at various institutions. While institutions were
concerned about the inclusion of Black students within historically White fraternities and sororities, they were not aware of the internal struggles that Black students faced. The decision to accept an invitation from a historically White organization was not always easy, as they were sometimes criticized and often ostracized by other Black students on campus. The decision to decline membership was largely influenced by an individual’s pride and commitment to their Black culture and identity. Sidanius, Van Laar, Levin, and Sinclair (2007) described a desire for ethnic organizations to provide a space for strong identity development and, in turn, to develop a desire for cross-cultural contact.

Tillar’s (1974) study of the racial integration of social fraternities in six southeastern universities concluded that there was a need for strategic analysis of the experiences of Black students joining historically White fraternities and it would be instrumental in understanding the current phenomenon. Even forty years after Tillar’s work, the need still exists, as the enrollment of Black students has significantly increased and the numbers of Black students joining historically White fraternities and sororities has also increased. In the mid-1970s, only nine percent of college students identified as Black, while today over fifteen percent identify as Black (US Department of Education, 2013). Although there are no remaining legal barriers or restraints against membership today, the racial makeup of historically White fraternities and sororities continues to be largely White students.

Research Questions and Goals

The following research questions guide this study:

1. How do Black students perceive their membership in historically White fraternities and sororities?
2. What are the unique experiences of Black students who join historically White fraternities and sororities?

In an effort to better understand the experiences of students that engage in cross-racial membership in Greek organizations, it is important that their lived experiences are shared. Through their stories, there is an opportunity to demystify assumptions and gain a clearer perspective of racial integration. The implications of this research were two-fold: (1) it allows institutions an opportunity to better understand racial climate and the issues surrounding inclusivity and connectedness; and (2) it allows patterns to emerge and guide fraternities and sororities in their work toward social justice issues and self-awareness. By advancing knowledge of this phenomenon, the study will contribute to the overall development of professional practice.

**Organization of Thesis**

In order to address the research questions, this thesis follows the conventions of scholarly research. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the topic and presents a historical foundation about fraternities and sororities, focusing on historically White fraternities and sororities and their anti-discrimination clauses. The theoretical framework that guided and informed the research is Critical Race Theory, discussed in the next section. Chapter 2 reports the extant literature exploring cross-racial membership in Greek organizations and the multidimensional model of race identity. Chapter 3 describes the research methods utilized and the approach to data collection, specifically a qualitative approach using interpretive phenomenological analysis and the multidimensional model of racial identity instrument to look at perceptions and meaning-making experiences. Chapter 4 presents the data collected and Chapter 5 interprets the findings.

**Theoretical Framework**
Black students’ engagement in out-of-class activities provides a unique opportunity to acquire social status by accessing resources and joining exclusive networks (Harper, Davis, Jones, McGowan, Ingram & Platt, 2011). Black students’ sense of belonging at predominately White institutions is largely based on their interactions with students that are from different racial and ethnic groups. Unfortunately, Black students’ belongingness is often susceptible to micro-aggressions, racist stereotypes, and racial stigmatization (Strayhorn, 2008). Micro-aggressions are defined as “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed at people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000, p. 60). If university administrators would like to provide support and improve the experiences of Black students who join historically White fraternities and sororities, it is imperative to understand the racial realities. The study sought to clarify and explain this phenomenon by providing Black students’ unique perspective of an aspect of their racial reality. Critical race theory grounds the study in societal definitions of racial barriers and assumes the need for active transformation.

According to Anfara and Mertz (2006), when a theory is developed, it endures a highly abstract thought process and evolves in stages. University administrators rely on theories to interpret and guide their work with students of diverse backgrounds. Theories serve as a conduit to provide common language and to define important developmental issues. They provide a perspective that can help define a phenomenon. Student development theories have not always discussed race, racism, and racial realities, and have often ignored the importance of the overall student identity (Patton, McEwen, Rendon & Howard-Hamilton, 2007).

Critical race theory (CRT) originated in law and legal studies and evolved in the 1970s in response to the lack of progress in civil rights issues surrounding political reform (Taylor, 1998). It sought to provide a means of understanding the lack of economic uplift and justice for people
of color. Critical race theory swiftly and naturally progressed throughout many disciplines, becoming interdisciplinary, and often found in conjunction with sociology, women’s studies, education, and history, to name a few (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical race theory’s strong message has resonated with scholar in the field of education, who find it particularly helpful and impactful. CRT challenges the belief that the experiences of the dominant culture are the normative standard and conceptualizes the distinctive experiences of people of color as important. It provides a lens to view the social and experiential contexts surrounding racial oppression and the particular dynamics surrounding racial exclusion and inequalities (Taylor, 1998).

In order to truly understand critical race theory, it is important to discuss and understand the relationship that exists within the critical legal studies movement. Critical legal studies was a response to the desire and demand for social change in the United States, highly influenced by the civil rights movement, women’s right movement, and anti-war sentiments. The premise for the critical legal studies movement was to radically transform policies in the legal system in order to diminish power structures that led to social injustice. For example, proponents believed that constitutional law was “legally empowered to support a cultural ethos of Black inferiority” (Tate, 1997, p. 197).

Critical legal studies revolutionized the assertion that an individual’s circumstance (ie, race, class and gender) should not automatically determine their place in the legal system. Critical legal studies further stated that it would be impossible to achieve justice by using the dominant notion of race, racism and social equality (Taylor, 1998). Critical legal studies became a new and much needed approach to examine systemic racism in the legal system.
Critical legal studies theory highlighted the need for political reform and assumed that racism was equivalent to other areas of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). According to Tate (1997), the distinction that exists between critical legal studies and critical race theory is the intellectual discourse addressing race and racism. Even though critical legal studies theory was influenced by civil rights discourse, it did not specifically highlight the experiences of people of color. Critical race theory scholars wanted to build on the existing legal scholarship and the activism while providing strategies to ensure that narratives of people of color were well heard.

Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Kimberle Crenshaw are scholars associated with the critical race theory movement (Tate, 1997). Bell, considered one of the founding fathers of critical race theory, used litigation to navigate the legal system and to socially engineer justice for all. Bell’s writing about race and law would become critical race theory (Tate, 1997). He analyzed racial patterns in American law and fought for racial remedies. He attempted to dismantle common language associated with civil rights. Delgado made pivotal contributions to critical race theory and was instrumental in arguing for the voices of scholars of color and women scholars in the area of legal discourse. He believed that the groundwork for social change was created through narratives and rich analytical discussion. Equally important, Crenshaw contributed to the development of CRT and provided a more detailed examination of race in US law by using black feminists thought. Together, these viewpoints led to a conceptual paradigm shift surrounding race and created critical race theory (Tate, 1997).

The basic tenet of critical race theory is that racism exists and is prevalent daily for most people of color, that it is a fact of daily life in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical race theory also suggests that racism is a problematic issue to address because it is not often acknowledged and, in most cases, only blatant forms of discrimination are confronted
Critical race theory contends that racial power is maintained over time, and even if individual racism is not present, institutional racism heavily permeates throughout the dominant culture. Carrasco (1997) wrote that critical race theory attempts to highlight and analyze the historical contexts of structures and policies. In a CRT lens, White middle class Americans should not be the standard and should not be used to measure differences, because by doing so, other important defining factors such as class, gender, and race are overlooked (Tate, 1997).

There are two schools of thought when it comes to the notion of racism: (1) race is a social construct and therefore racism and discrimination are a matter of attitude and mental perception; and (2) that racism is the way that privilege and status are assumed by society (Lorde, 1995). Scholars have questioned whether racism is a product of ignorance or a lack of experiences and encounters. Critical race theory assumes the first: that racism depends on the social construction of race and most importantly, focuses on the way it is manifested in society. CRT identifies and highlights individual isolated realities by using narratives to provide opportunities for creating communities with greater understanding for diverse viewpoints.

Critical race theory has brought racial discourse to the forefront. It challenges claims of color blindness because racialized structures and practices clearly exist. Scholars using the theory attempt to give a voice to the voiceless, providing a space for those that have been victimized to highlight their stories, and, presumably, combat inequality and injustice. They do this by examining and explaining existing power structures and focusing on persistent racial inequalities. Critical race theory is most effective when people of color to tell their story and recount their lived experiences by using their own frames of reference, important because of systemic oppression assumed in the dominant culture. CRT addresses disparity and the
challenge of understanding a person’s experience despite radically different backgrounds and perspectives (Trevino et al., 2008). Narratives can often challenge the status quo and provide the opportunity to build consensus by creating a shared understanding.

The narratives of marginalized individuals have value and can demystify systemic preconceptions. Systemic preconceptions can lead to racial discrimination due to generalization, overt prejudice, and stereotyping, leading to subtle forms of differential treatment (Campbell, 2012). Experiencing racial discrimination is isolating and, unfortunately, may lead to self-blame and can increase self-hate. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) underscored the importance of understanding that people of color have distinct and unique experiences as they navigate life, offering the opportunity for members of the dominant group to exercise empathy.

Critical race theory has an activist dimension, stressing the importance for marginalized people to strongly advocate for justice (Trevino et al., 2008). While it seeks to understand social stratification, it equally attempts to change it by examining how society defines itself along racial lines and hierarchical structures. By radically addressing and eliminating racial oppression those who use the theory work toward the goal of ending all forms of oppression (Harper et al., 2011). An aggressive approach to social transformation creates two unique viewpoints that philosophically conflict with one another: nationalism and assimilation.

Critical race theory intercepts the tension between nationalism and assimilation. Nationalists identify strongly with one nation, ethnic group, or religion. According to Blake (1969), Black Nationalists were considered militant because during the movement’s inception, proponents strongly advocated the notion of separatism and the building of separate communities. They believed that through unity and self-determination, the Black community
could be independent from White society (Blake, 1969). They were often viewed as isolationists who resented the dominant group.

Over time, Black Nationalism evolved, focusing on developing economic strength and emphasizing racial solidarity via Black consciousness. Black Nationalists believed strongly in ethnocentrism and it has been influential in the development of Afrocentricity. Their aggressive approach to social transformation conflicts with the notion of assimilation, perceiving it to be cultural genocide.

Assimilation is the gradual adaptation of customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture. It is the blending and fusion of groups with the dominant society, and their absorption into a monolithic culture (Alba & Nee, 1997). Full assimilation is complete when new members become undistinguishable from members of the other group (Callan, 2005). The idea that underrepresented groups should attempt to assimilate and to blend into mainstream society is common amongst students that actively seek cross-racial membership. This study builds from the assumption that assimilation is necessary in order to receive full acceptance.

Their Black peers could view black students, who join historically White fraternities and sororities, as having assimilated in order to be treated as full members. They are often criticized and ostracized by their own racial group, which could cause them to question their Black consciousness. They must find ways to authentically demonstrate that they belong through their voluntary association (Hughey, 2010). How does that sentiment affect their day-to-day experience in their organization and shape their unique experience? Critical race theory provides a lens to identify the irony that exists between victims of discrimination who then become victimizers of those that they perceived to be racially subordinate.

To transform colleges and universities, critical race theory can be used to identify racial
inequities and social hierarchies. It is imperative for university administrators to understand how race facilitates these inequities and the complexity surrounding cross-racial memberships and associations. Critical race theory attempts to move beyond the individual-focus by minimizing and reducing the prevalent power structures. It illuminates the institutional environment that, unfortunately, does not provide a safe and comfortable place for students of color and can be potentially marginalizing (Patton et al., 2007).

Critical race theory uses the term ‘people of color’ to include Asian, Latino and Native Americans, but it is often noted that there is a Black-White binary that exists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). While Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans may join historically White fraternities and sororities, the framework used to discuss race often reflects this black-white binary, emphasizing the paradigm in which Black is the prototype minority. Due to the assumed Black-White binary, racial progress is often viewed as linear so therefore, this study will only focus on Black students that join historically White fraternities and sororities. Acknowledging the contributions and inherent struggles of all individuals who view themselves outside of the dominant culture, this study limits its scope to Black students who join White Greek organizations to focus on their experiences.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis guides the work and provides a framework to look at perceptions and meaning-making experiences. The literature review summarizes and synthesizes the background of historically White fraternities and sororities, cross-racial membership, and volunteer associations, and recounts the racial progression in these areas. The combination of the theoretical framework and methodological approach provide opportunities to complete a critical examination that should allow university administrators to better understand
the importance of race and the racial reality that exists for Black students who join historically White fraternities and sororities.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Black students that join racial and/or ethnic organizations develop a strong sense of purpose and identity enhancement and an increased sense of racial identity, which leads to greater social involvement and sense of belonging in the university community (Gillard, 1996; Harper & Quaye 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Sidanius, Van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2007). Yet, despite a strong tradition examining the traits developing by Black students who join historically Black organizations, there is less empirical research about students who join fraternal organizations outside of their own self-identified race.

An integrative literature review reviews, critiques, and synthesizes the information in a way to provide a new framework and perspective on a topical matter (Toracco & Hoover, 2005). This chapter attempts to meet this call to present information relevant to understanding the experience of Black students who join historically White fraternities and sororities. It provides the reader with the opportunity to see broader themes and issues and develop an in-depth understanding of the topic. It delves deeply into criticisms and attempt to gather a deeper understanding of the intersections between three streams of literature: (1) a historical perspective of fraternities and sororities, specifically the historical development of discrimination clauses, (2) the literature surrounding cross-racial membership, and (3) Black identity development.

This chapter provides context and perspectives on membership in social fraternities and the benefits and challenges of cross-racial membership. In order to conduct the literature review,
the researcher used a variety of information sources including books, professional journals, and dissertations.

**Historical Overview of Fraternities and Sororities**

Phi Beta Kappa, founded in 1776 on the campus of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, was the first fraternal organization at an American institution of higher education (Sidanius et al., 2007; Thelin, 2004). Most fraternities were not founded with racial discrimination polices, but the rise in college accessibility for Black Americans provoked White fraternity men to create exclusionary clauses that were located in their chartering documents (Shelnutt, 2012). During this time, the privilege of higher education was limited to wealthy White males, and student enrollment was completely different than it is today. With the enrollment of women and dramatic increases of students of color, policies that explicitly excluded racial and ethnic minorities for membership within fraternities as well as women began surfacing (Rendon & Hope, 1996; Shelnutt, 2012; Torbenson & Parks, 2009). The exclusion of women from the popular social clubs resulted in the formation of fraternities for women, with Kappa Alpha Theta as the first in 1870.

While fraternal organizations were always considered exclusionary in terms of race, gender, and socio economic status, it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that explicit discrimination entrance requirements existed (Sidanius et al., 2007). With the increase enrollment of students of color, many organizations created exclusionary clauses in their membership policies because they believed their organization were created to be a brotherhood, and that “a White Protestant male could not be compatible with someone from a different religion or race” (Shelnutt, 2012, p. 200). They wanted to maintain a status quo and created
exclusionary clauses that banned membership of non-whites and non-Christians (Shelnutt, 2012; Torbenson & Parks, 2009).

While institutions were adamant that the chapters cease participating in discriminatory behavior, it is well documented that national offices would suspend chapters that violated their organizations constitutional clauses “Higher education institutions demanded that chapters cease their discriminatory behavior, but national organizations retaliated by suspending the chapters who did not enforce their constitutional clauses, including the discriminatory membership clauses (Lee, 1955).”

In 1953, Phi Delta Theta national fraternity suspended their chapters at Amherst and Williams for such violations, insisting that they limit membership to persons of “full Aryan blood” (Lee, 1955). Lee (1955) described how colleges and universities instituted strict guidelines to force fraternities to comply with bans on discriminatory membership policies. For example, he wrote about how the University of Connecticut forced four chapters to sever their ties to their national offices because their nationals did not want them to comply with the existing university ban. In the spring of 1953, Knox College expelled Phi Sigma Kappa because they discriminated against football standout Bill Hall, a Black student (Lee, 1955). The undergraduates wanted to extend a bid for membership to Hall, but were advised by their national fraternity that it would be a violation of their membership policies (Lee, 1955).

The fight between college administrators and the national fraternities was extremely taxing on undergraduate students, producing division as some student leaders felt that the colleges needed to take a stronger stand to make the necessary changes. Some criticized universities for not forcibly challenging the status quo of fraternity membership (Lord, 1987). On the other hand, chapters unwilling to conform to university policies rallied large groups of
alumni to further their cause of continuing the discrimination (Lee, 1955; Sidanius et al., 2007; Syrett, 2009).

In 2006, Oscar Rogers, a lifetime member of Phi Delta Kappa, recounted how the ‘White clause’ was finally eliminated from his fraternity’s policies. He shared that a vote was taken at the national convention, asking simply, “Do you believe that only members of the White race shall be eligible for membership in Phi Delta Kappa?” The vote lifted a ban that finally allowed men from all races to seek membership (Rogers, 2006).

The goal of eradication of discriminatory practices caused college educators and community leaders to join forces and form the National Committee on Fraternities in Education. The National Committee on Fraternities in Education was formed to explore the importance of ending all discriminatory practices within social organizations on college campuses and the importance that the organizations looked more like a microcosm of democratic American society. This began the ‘Anti-Discrimination Movement’ that universities desperately wanted (Lee, 1955).

By the end of the 1970s, American universities saw the disappearance of the exclusionary entrance requirements (Lord, 1987; Sidanius et al., 2007). While formal discriminatory clauses were removed, the practice had not fully ceased, resulting in a lack of full integration that is still visible. Some organizations did not fully abolish their discriminatory clauses. Instead, national organizations granted waivers to specific chapters that requested them. Historically White fraternities and sororities across the country still have a very small number of Black students in their membership numbers. Despite the removal of explicitly discriminatory practices, a generalized prejudice remains associated with the Greek community (Hughey 2007; Lord, 1987; Sidanius, 2004; Syrett, 2009). In 1987, University of Michigan faculty highlighted the
discrimination Black students faced, specifically verbal abuse the students felt when walking the university-sanctioned fraternity row (Lord, 1987).

The intersection between race and class was highlighted for the first time in Levine and Sussman’s (1960) study. They effectively demonstrated that while there were no authorized policies excluding Black students from joining historically White fraternities and sororities, that the appearance, handshake and their gregariousness became the official measure of a potential new member (Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 2000; Levine & Sussman, 1960; Shelnutt, 2012). Kincheloe et al. (2000) provided more evidence, demonstrating the racial and class divide, findings that students who were brought up in upper-class surroundings and had parents that were involved in elite social clubs were even more likely to join historically White fraternities and sororities. These students seemed more aware of networking and professional opportunities associated with being involved in the Greek community (Syrett, 2009).

Researchers have linked academic success, higher retention rates, positive relationships with faculty, strong sense of belonging, and moral development of college students to their involvement in community and leadership organizations, such as fraternities and sororities (Abrahamowicz, 1988; Astin, 1999; Matheson, 2005; Shelnutt, 2012). In short, these researchers have found participation to be a significant contribution to their overall satisfaction with their college experience. The social opportunities that these organizations provide are integral in aiding many students in the transitional issues surrounding the college experience (Harper et al., 2011; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Historically White fraternities and sororities have been criticized for their highly selective membership practices that include extremely high membership and initiation fees and housing requirements that ensure that their organization-owned houses are filled to capacity (Muir, 1991).
These barriers continue to contribute to the issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of a racially and socioeconomically diverse membership, adding to the negative perception of many outside of the Greek community.

Hughey (2007) contended that the racial segregation occurring today on college campuses is a product of history and personal preferences, creating a different campus experience for students. White students that belonged to fraternity and sororities were negatively impacted by their membership in that they were not as open to diversity (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996; Shelnutt, 2012). Muir’s (1991) study at the University of Alabama highlighted that the sorority and fraternity members held the majority of negative stereotypes toward Black students in larger numbers than their peers. Muir also found that racism prevalent in the Greek community was sustained by the recruitment of prejudiced students who then support the existing culture. Similarly, Hughey (2007) found that fraternity members at the University of Pennsylvania were considerably less interested in issues surrounding social change and justice and that this behavior created openly practiced racial discrimination. Historically White fraternities and sororities have had frequent incidents that suggest that traditional racism still exists in the Greek community (Muir, 1991). Unfortunately these racially motivated incidents can ultimately deter students of color from joining because they give a meager impression of the students in the organization, yet oftentimes do not accurately represent the individual attitudes towards diversity and multiculturalism.

Scholars, practitioners, and students alike share concerns, even after a half-century after the historic Brown v. Board of Education ruling, that racial segregation is still visible and prevalent on college campuses (Hughey, 2007; Shelnutt, 2012). This has led researchers to focus on the resilience of Black Americans and the strength and courage displayed by many on college
campuses (Banks, 1993; Cross, 1971, 1991; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998). Despite, issues surrounding racial discrimination and incidents that are racially insensitive, the dominant nature of the Greek community continues to draw all students.

For underrepresented students and first generation college students that do not enter with the same amount of social capital as their peers, they view joining student organizations specifically historically White fraternities and sororities as a way to gain access to social status and social mobility that are available to those with higher socioeconomic status (Shelnutt, 2012). Gupta and Ferguson (1992) found that Black students’ social life and networking opportunities are often strongly associated with their racial background. Hughey (2007) asserted that the dominant influence of Greek organizations and the potential for cross-racial memberships can provide individuals with opportunities to be a part of an organization creating racial boundary-breaking experiences. Attempts to increase racial tolerance while encouraging the understanding for social justice and change are possible.

When it comes to the historical perspective of discrimination clauses, the primary issue has been that once openly practiced discriminatory behavior received scrutiny by university faculty and administrators, many organizations were forced to end such practices. While there were some students that disagreed strongly discriminatory practices and wanted to end the practice, there were others who received pressure from alumni to continue. The evolution of discriminatory clauses and the impact that larger number of students of color attending colleges and university had on the composition of fraternities and sororities has been quite evident. Critics have argued that the forced elimination of these restrictive clauses from the historically White fraternities and sororities by-laws which are their governing documents seem to have had a significantly small effect on diversifying their membership. Understanding the historical
perspective of discrimination clauses allows us to better understand the systemic racial oppression that exists in historically White fraternities and sororities and how deep rooted it is.

**Cross Racial Membership**

The ethnic and racial segregation occurring on college campuses has not only been linked to historically White fraternities and sororities, but has also been associated with the prevalent number of racial and/or ethnic organizations. The increasing numbers of organizations suggests that these groups serve as a safe space and support system for students of color at Predominantly White Institutions, and involvement in these organizations has been credited with providing greater social involvement and social interactions (Gillard, 1996; Harper, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Sidanius et al., 2007; Trevenio, 1992). In contrast, others believe that ethnic and racial organizations are damaging to the creation of a united campus community, isolating and separating underrepresented students (Chavez, 1982; D’Souza, 1991; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Fisher & Hartman, 1995; Harper, 2007; Hughey, 1992; Sidanius et al., 2007).

In the 1970s, Black men who attended predominately White institutions chose to develop their leadership skills within the Black community and were not heavily involved in mainstream organizations (Harper, 1975; Harper, 2007; Sutton & Terrell, 1997). Instead, by developing Black organizations, the Black voice could be heard and could serve as a vehicle for advocacy. The strong desire to have social interactions with the smaller group of Black students on campus led them to engage in these organizations (Fisher & Hartman, 1995; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). However, Mitchell and Dell (1992) found that there was no conclusive evidence surrounding the expression of Black identity with engagement in racial and/or ethnic organizations. They found that students did not have a more intensified view of their racial identity. However, contemporary scholars have written at length about the increases in racial identity associated
with joining racial and/or ethic organizations, leading to greater desires to participate in cross-cultural interactions that can ultimately provide a greater sense of belonging and integration into broader campus life (Fisher & Hartman, 1995; Gillard, 1996; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Sidanius et al., 2007).

While developing a greater sense of belonging with the university community is an important by-product of cross-cultural interactions, the development of cross-cultural communication is also achieved. Harper & Quaye (2007) reported that Black males who engaged in cross-racial memberships commented that they successfully learned how to work with people that were different, recognizing the importance of building these relationships. They understood the importance of stretching outside of their cultural comfort zones, becoming ambassadors of social change not just for Black students, but all underrepresented groups. The participants highlighted their genuine interest in meeting students through their involvement in organizations and activities, wanting to engage with students who were different from them in terms of race or ethnicity, as well as in socioeconomic status or religion.

Participating in organizations with diverse populations provided a greater sense of appreciation of difference, enabling Black students to positively share their unique stories, backgrounds, and Black culture with a wider community (Fisher & Hartman, 1995; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hughey, 2007, 2010). Integrative and unifying experiences strengthen and intensify Black students persistence and foster other areas of attainment while still allowing them to maintain a cultural identity that does not focus on negative, disparaging events (Harper 2007; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Sue, 2001). Cross-racial membership facilitates involvement in diverse organizations, allowing students to be more professionally competitive by developing and encouraging a more diverse work environment
because of an increased awareness of cultural differences and backgrounds (Boschini & Thompson, 1998; Shelnutt, 2012).

While some Black students recognize the importance of developing strong cross-cultural communications within the unique setting of college campuses, many do not engage in the structured opportunities and avoid facilitated initiatives because of the possibility of being seen as a ‘sellout’ (Fisher & Hartman, 1995; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Harper, 2007; Hughey 2007). Gupta and Ferguson (1992) asserted that Black students have a tendency to experience difficulty acclimating racially, negatively impacting their racial self-concept (Fisher & Hartman, 1995; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). While cross-racial Greek membership has the potential to promote greater racial understanding, the number of students making the choice continue to be small, and highlight tokenism by providing a level of social capital for the organization but not necessarily for the Black student involved. Black students involved in White fraternities and sororities are often be criticized, perceived as not being a full member, and in turn, there is a deep-rooted desire to appear authentic (Hughey, 2007; Peterson & Behfar, 2003; Thompson, 2000). Some students experience ethnic victimization, lack of common identity, and social inclusiveness (Hughey, 2007, 2010; Sidanius et al., 2007). Conversely, there are scholars that argue that those on college campuses no longer experience the racism of the past and that there is no longer a contentious social environment for students of color (Dalton, 1995; Helms, 1990; Hughey 2007; Siggelkow, 1991).

Hughey (2010), he found that the deep desire for Black students to obtain leadership roles in the organization outweighed the negative same-race peer response and the directly expressed injustice. The strong historical perspective surrounding the Greek community continue to make it an instrumental force on campus climate. In order for Greek organizations to remain viable,
racial diversity is a necessary component, and must be highly encouraged (Boschini & Thompson, 1998; Shelnutt, 2012). Thompson (2000) asserted that organizations that want to diversify their membership must have existing organizational diversity, must encourage diversity, and, most importantly, must create an environment that is comfortable for all members.

When negative inter-group attitudes exist, they can be transformed by the prevalence and increase of racial and/or ethnic diversity (Hughey 2007; Sidanius et al., 2007). If racial diversity is imperative to the ongoing growth of historically White fraternities and sororities, how aware are current members, national offices, and university administrators of the experiences of their Black members?

The literature implies a great disparity in the benefits and challenges of cross-racial membership. Surprisingly, while some Black students openly participate in organizations with students that are different than them and clearly can articulate the benefits, there is an equal number of Black students that feel that past treatment serves as a reminder of the inability for the organizations to achieve social justice and unity. Cross-racial membership provides a level of exposure that surpasses the confines of one’s racial composition and begins to break down barriers between the in-group and out-group.

Emphasis has been placed on the Black student’s struggle with outside perceptions, but what is absent from the literature is an understanding of how membership in each organization impacts their internal significance and meaning of race. This leads to the question of the definition of Blackness and how it is manifested in their day-to-day life.

**Black Identity Development**

Sidanius et al. (2007) posited that involvement in racial and/or ethnic student organizations resulted in an increased desire to celebrate one’s own ethnic identity. With the
introduction of Cross’s (1971) model of Black identity development, the implication of identity progression became integral in working with Black students. Cross’s model attempted to depict the process by which Black identity was fully realized. It defined, in stages, the way that becoming Black was fully embraced and to reach the final stage of self-actualization. The original model was eventually expanded to address philosophical concerns regarding its simplicity to highlight the complexity of defining racial identity, but it does not negate the importance of a model of Black Identity Development (Cross, 1971, 1991). Cross’s model and other identity models have contributed to the understanding of the individuality of Black students (Chavez & Guido-Di Brito, 1999; Lott, 2008; White, 2006). Racial identity has been highly researched because of the significance and meaning placed on race in America. (Cross, 1971, 1991; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley & Chavous, 1998). The Black experience has differed significantly from other ethnic groups that have also faced discrimination and oppression.

American society’s racial divide has been extremely problematic (DuBois, 1903; Rowley et al., 1998). Race plays a significant role in the daily lives of many Black people. Black Americans experiencing racial oppression impacts the development of self-concept and it is assumed that negative views are often been internalized (Porter & Washington, 1979; Rowley et al., 1998; Sellers et al., 1998). In the early 1900s DuBois (1903) suggested that despite the stigma surrounding being Black in society, a strong self-concept could be achieved (DuBois, 1903, Horowitz, 1987; Rowley et al., 1998; Sellers et al., 1998). Conversely, there are some Black individuals that do not view their racial membership as a defining characteristic, nor relevant to defining their self-concept. Individual life experiences determine an individual’s attitude regarding their Blackness and how they evolve through the developmental stages of
identity development. Positive and negative socialization significantly contribute to one’s sense of Black identity (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009).

Identity development differs when one is exposed to what is considered a nurturing social and cultural environment (Cross, 1971, 1991; Helms, 1990; Lott, 2008; Parham, 1989; Sellers et al., 1998). For example, a Black person may believe that congregating with other Black people is the true definition of Blackness (nationalist) while another might believe that integration with Whites (assimilation) is critical to defining their Black identity. Inevitably, some will require a strong Black identity in order to attempt to have an integrated identity (Cross, 1991; Sellers et al., 1998). The experiences of Black Americans are not homogenous and there are a variety of perspectives as to the definition of Blackness, despite the assumption that Black Americans have a negative self-image and negative racial identity (Cross, 1991; Rowley et al., 1998).

Critical race theorists define race as a socially constructed concept and are concerned with how race is manifested in society. Race is often manifested by the triggering of two often contrary influences (Chavez & DiBrito, 1999). Researchers have utilized two distinct approaches to defining Black racial identity: mainstream or underground. While there is a small amount of overlap, the approaches differ in methodologies and actual results reported (Sellers et al., 1998).

The mainstream approach contributes a framework to conceptualize the various identities an individual may possess with a focus on the versatility of the identities that comprise Black racial identity. It focuses on the broad landscape surrounding group identity (Rains, 1998; Sellers et al., 1998). In contrast, the underground approach examines the cultural and experiential significance of race, with an emphasis on the unique historical impact (Sellers et al.,
The emphasis on historical factors often creates tension between the definition of Blackness in the broader White society.

The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity is an amalgamation of the strengths of the two approaches and attempts to highlights the positives of both notions (Sellers et al., 1998). It is a model of Black racial identity that provides a clear distinction of how one personally identifies, rather than others’ perception of an individual’s identity. It allows the exploration of each dimension of identity independently and examines how it interacts with the notion of self-concept.

The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) uniquely attempts to provide a description that accurately depicts and characterizes what it means to be Black. It affirms that group identities are most powerful when an individual has the opportunity to define themselves (Rowley et al., 1998). The MMRI accomplishes this by attempting to address two simple questions (1) How important is race in the individuals’ perception of self? And, (2) what does it mean to be a member of a racial group? The model defines racial identity as the importance placed on the individuals’ definition of racial membership (Sellers et al., 1998). The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI), a research instrument, measures and analyzes individualistic perspectives and beliefs that are associated with membership in the Black race (Fisher & Hartman, 1995; Sellers et al., 1998). It measures racial centrality, ideology, and regard.

The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity is composed of four assumptions: (1) identity is often situational influenced, (2) individuals’ identities are hierarchically ordered, (3) individual perception of their identity is the most valid indicator of their valid identity, and (4) concerned with the status of individuals racial identity and not its development (Sellers et al.,
These four assumptions underpin four dimensions of racial identity that focus on the meaning of race as a self-concept. The four dimensions of the Multidimensional Model for Racial Identity are racial salience, racial centrality, racial regard, and racial ideology (Fisher & Hartmann, 1995; Rowley et al., 1998; Sellers et al., 1998).

Racial salience is how important race is to an individuals’ self-concept at a given moment and is concerned with the situation and contextual information. Racial ideology focuses on the individual’s attitudes and beliefs about how an individual believes their race should behave and represents an individual’s personal philosophy. While racial regard is steeped in the notion of collective self-esteem, it refers to a persons’ emotional judgment of their race. There is a public and private component to this dimension: what individuals privately feel about their membership in the racial group and what they publicly feel. They intercepts when outside perceptions shape and influence the individuals’ perceptions. Racial centrality is defined as the individual’s core identification and how important race is as a defining characteristic (Horowitz, 1987; Rowley, 1998; Seller et al., 1998; White & Burke, 1987). Rowley (1998) found that strong identification with a racial group did not necessarily create affirmative feelings about one’s self-concept. Personal hatred was also not an outcome of one’s inability to identify with their racial group. A phenomenology approach builds from this exploration of racial identity and emphasizes the complexity and personal nature of the topic. The assumption that individual’s identity is important is common. Furthermore, research models need to integrate the multidimensionality and concepts that measure self-concept and racial identity.

The significance that individuals place on race when describing themselves is referred to as ‘racial salience and centrality.’ Likewise, the individuals’ perception of what it means to be Black is labeled ‘racial regard and ideology.’ This is relevant when it comes to understanding
Black racial identity of Black students who join historically White fraternities and sororities because the notion of Blackness can be studied and measured. Students are able to conceptualize the importance of this identity and interpret their ethnic group membership within the larger society. Shingle (2012) explored the experiences of White students who were involved in multicultural associations and examined the students’ notion of Whiteness and development of White identity. Shingle found that White students had a heightened racial identity when involved in ethnic and/or racial organizations. They had a greater sense of belonging and were more aware of their White racial identity in their overall day-to-day experiences.

Identity development is multidimensional and requires an understanding of one’s present, past, and future (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Black Identity Development Theory defines and interprets the sense of belonging Black Americans have as individuals, collectively within the Black race, and their awareness and impressions of other racial groups. Black Identity Development as a theory analyzes historical and cultural forces. It exposes critical influences, such as social and economic evolution, to emphasize the importance of culture in the development of a positive sense of self.

The social aspect of race is most influential in developing one’s identity and is symbolically used to interpret variables (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Helms, 1990; Horowitz, 1987). Black Identity Development highlights the overall complexity that exists in defining Black Identity and provides a source for shared racial experiences. Researchers adamantly believe that experiences of Black students must be collected via their personal and instinctive contextual perspective (Delpit, 2008; DeCuir-Gunby, 2009).

Conclusion

Based on the extant literature, it can be assumed that White college students are
socialized to avoid stereotyping Blacks and to emphasize racial differences. Black college students are taught to emphasizing racial group membership and to notice differences between themselves and Whites. This study attempted to address the gap in the literature surrounding Black identity in regards to self-concept and cross-racial organization involvement. It reflects the essence of the experiences of Black students who join historically White fraternities and sororities. A combination that inferences and culminates on the researchers understanding and contributes to the study’s conceptual framework. Does the involvement in historically White fraternities and sororities hinder Black students racial development?

In order to better understand the experiences of Black students who join historically White fraternities and sororities a phenomenological study was conducted. The research approach allowed for the participants’ voices to emerge through open-ended interview questions. The approach assures that the ‘what’ of the experience is accurately captured and explicit meaning can be interpreted. The use of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity instrument provided insights into the individuals’ perception of Blackness.
Chapter Three: Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Black students that join historically White fraternities and sororities to better understand the experiences of students that engage in cross-racial membership. This chapter presents the research approach used to address two research questions:

1. How do Black students perceive their membership in historically White fraternities and sororities?

2. What are the unique experiences of Black students who join historically White fraternities and sororities?

**Social Constructivism (Interpretivism)**

Several theoretical perspectives attempt to explain the mechanism surrounding social interactions. A social constructivist framework in conjunction with interpretive methods guided the study. Social interactions guide individuals to develop and sharpen reasoning and learning skills (Daniels, 2012). Social constructivists attempt to explain the meaning that individuals make about the world and suggest that unique personal, cultural and historic perspective shape their interpretation (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006). They believe that individuals seek significance surrounding their lived experiences and develop personal interpretative meaning. The complexities surrounding the individual’s experience are multifold, guiding the researcher to create multiple themes and categories (Merriam, 2009).

Researchers must rely significantly on the participant’s perspective or interpretation of the phenomenon being study, listening intensely to what is being said. Researchers must recognize their subjectivity as individuals seek meaning and negotiate the social and historical
context (Crotty, 1998). The cultural norms that individuals operate from and their interaction with others undeniably shapes their perspective.

**Strategy of Inquiry**

The study employed a qualitative method of research, specifically, interpretative phenomenological analysis. Interpretive phenomenological analysis is focused on understanding and examining the details of a particular phenomenon. (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Using interpretative phenomenological analysis allowed the researcher to better understand how Black students make sense of their membership in historically White fraternities and sororities. The ability to capture Black students’ interpretation of their experience and the significance it plays in their everyday life makes this research method most appropriate. While Black students are immersed in their experiences and are often unable to critically assess their racialized experience, the researcher attempted to understand what additional meaning underlying their experiences, accentuating the importance of reflection by engaging participants to share and recall. By sharing and recalling their experiences, participants made connections that guided them to discover common meaning. Providing the physical space for reflection and meaning making can provide a person a better understanding of the significance (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It allowed for Black students to share the reasons for making the decision to join a historically White fraternity or sorority and the importance of the decision.

**Qualitative Approach: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**

According to Maxwell (2005), qualitative research questions are framed as to not focus on differences. Therefore, my research will have limited variance questions. He states that “qualitative researchers should focus on three areas (a) meaning of events and activities (b) influence of the physical and social context and (c) process by which events and activities occur”
Phenomenology is considered strong qualitative research methodology because it is pre-reflective and it allows for the participant to share their experience without it being formulated by the researcher (van Manen & Adams, 2009).

Phenomenology investigates the unique significance of any human experience or phenomenon by illuminating the conditions in their natural state. It can reveal the general patterns of how people make sense of their world experiences (Srubar, 1998). Phenomenological studies offer an alternative to influential ways of understanding knowledge. These studies often lead to a more ethically and experientially sensitive dialogue. A phenomenological approach illuminates the phenomena of Black students who join historically White fraternities and sororities. The researcher sought to describe rather than explain and individual interviews allowed the researcher to better understand their experiences and unique perspectives of their lived experiences.

Phenomenological research methods have several strengths, including an ability to identify the phenomena, gather rich description and perceptions, broaden the researcher’s perspectives, gain insight into individuals’ experience, and allow voices to be heard. The advantage of qualitative inquiry is the ability to ask open-ended questions that fully engage the participants in the subject matter. The ability to talk one-on-one with students during data collection and to share their experience provided the researcher with a deeper sense of purpose. Phenomenology’s value is that it prioritizes how a person experiences the world.

Interpretive phenomenological analyses (IPA) focuses on the comprehensive observation of lived experiences and how meaning is made (Smith, 2011(a)). The researcher must engage and then interpret the experiences utilizing a hermeneutic perspective, appreciating the emergence of various patterns and categories. IPA requires a comprehensive analysis of the
qualitative data collected. The richness of data collected created with an interpretive phenomenological analyses allows for a smaller sample size as the process is distinctly is committed to the extensive analysis of individual cases (Smith, 2011 (b)).

**Research Site**

The research site was a private, elite 4-year institution of higher learning located in the southeast. The university has an enrollment of about 6,500 undergraduates. Demographically, it consists of 51% female and 49% male, with a diverse population with 47% self-identifying as White, 21% Asian, 10% African American, 6% Latino, 8% international, and 8% as other/unknown, as shown in Figure 1.

![University Racial Demographics](image)

Figure 1. Study site racial demographics.

**Research Sample**

The research site has a rich history and is a highly ranked research university. Its fraternity and sorority community was established in 1871. Currently, over 34% (about 2400 students) are members of fraternities and sororities. The community consists of 42 chapters, of
which 28 are historically White fraternities and sororities. Of the 2200 students that are members of the historically White fraternities and sororities, 75 students self-identity as Black. These 75 students were identified as potential participants in the research study. The purposeful selection of these research participants required they met inclusion criteria, specifically that they had experienced the phenomenon being studied. A criterion-based sampling was employed to ensure that data collected was not generalized to another population.

**Relationship to Participants**

The researcher was employed by the site location as the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life. While there was an obvious relationship to the students who participated in the study, the researcher was explicit in disclosures that she was a doctoral student and that participating or choosing not to participate in the study would not impact their organization nor their individual affiliation. All participants received informed consent disclosures and information about the purpose of the study in a timely fashion, giving them the opportunity to ask any question prior to participating. These documents are included as Appendices A and B. The researcher emphasized the voluntary nature of participation and that all information collected was to remain anonymous.

**Data Collection**

Phenomenological studies use a small number of participants to ensure the researcher can capture the details surrounding their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The qualitative data was collected via individual interviews that consisted of open-ended questions. Some of the questions came from the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity to elicit a more in-depth interview experience.

The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) (included as Appendix C) is an
instrument that investigates the role that racial identity plays in the life experiences of Black Americans. It is an instrument that is based on the constructs within the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity. The model considers the various identities that Black Americans possess, of which one is race. It further highlights the diversity within the various identities, noting that no single behavior defines Black identity.

The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity focuses on the significance race plays on self-definition and the meaning surrounding their racial group identity. The model’s phenomenological approach gives each individual the ability to define his or her Black identity (Sellers et al., 1997). Similarly, the MIBI is multifaceted, underscoring its dependence of the theory of Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity. In this study, the MIBI is both a tool to guide questions during data collection, but the underlying theory also provides insight as to how students identify themselves. For example, a high nationalist score would indicate that the student is highly associating with Black students (Sellers et al., 1999).

**Interviews**

The most common form of qualitative data collection is done via interviewing. In this study, interviews allowed the researcher to understand the experiences of Black student that joined historically White fraternities and sororities. The three-interview schedule model was utilized. (Smith et al., 2009). A preliminary interview was conducted to determine which participants would like to join the study. This was a brief but important process, which then lead to the second interview. The second interview lasted between 30-45 minutes and it was conducted to elicit collect in-depth information. The final interview was conducted after the initial analysis of the previous data collection and provided the participants with an opportunity
to review all information gathered and to ensure the its’ accuracy and if their of their story stories’ were portrayed appropriately.

While there were structured questions, there was some flexibility within the interview protocol to allow for the participants to feel free to share their unique lived experience. This allowed for a deeper engagement of the participant and ensured that every effort was made to create a space where they could share their experience without feeling restricted to by the researcher’s questions. During the one on-one interviews, the researcher did not take notes, but did audio record the actual interview, which was later transcribed and coded. The participants received a list of the open-ended questions upon arrival for their interview (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis

Maxwell’s (2005) statement stated about that qualitative research being an is an ongoing process is extremely accurate. He states that “it does not begin from a predetermined starting point or proceed through a fixed sequence of steps, but involves interconnection and interaction among the different design components” (p. 3). Analysis began with the determination of themes through deep analysis. Once themes were determined, a deeper analysis of the information began. The interpretations of the emergent themes are presented with supporting verbatim narratives that will detail per verbatim the information shared by the participants in Chapter 4 (Smith et al., 2009).

In interpretive phenomenological analysis approach does not confine the researcher, there is not to a single means identified for doing data of analysis analyzing data. Instead, the researcher attempted to focus on the participants’ descriptive approach narratives and meaning making. This further allowed the researcher to explore and investigate the participants’ point of
view and on how they made sense of a particular experience in that context (Smith et al., 2009). While data analysis has been described as monotonous, interpretive phenomenological analysis challenges that notion by developing effective strategies. Some of these strategies included a close examination of the participants’ shared experiences, identifying developing patterns and themes, and encouraging dialogue to achieve a more in depth account of the experience (Smith et al., 2009).

Questions:

Tell me why you chose to join your fraternity or sorority.

How would you describe your experience as a member of your fraternity and sorority?

Do you feel that your racial identity is relevant in your membership in said organization?

How do you feel same race peers that are not members of historically White fraternities and sororities view you?

How do you feel same race peers that are members of historically White fraternities and sororities view you?

Why didn’t you join an historically Black fraternity or sorority?
Questions from the MIBI:

In general, is being Black an important part of your self-image?

Do you believe that Black and White people have more commonality then differences?

Do you believe that people regardless of their race have strengths and limitations?

Do you agree with the statement that being an individual is more important than identifying as Black?

What are you thoughts surrounding the statement that the racism Blacks have experienced is similar to that of other minority groups?

Is being Black a major factor in your social relationships?

Is there anything else you would like to mention?

Acceptable probes:
Can you tell me more about that?

Tell me about a time when....

Can you share an example?

Coding

During the coding process, the researcher was able to organize, group, and reflect on the data collected. Six steps to interpretative data analysis were used (1) reading and re-reading, (2) initial noting, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) searching for connections across emergent themes, (5) moving to the next case, and (6) looking for patterns across cases (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The process included reading and re-reading the data while attempting to make connections. The re-reading of data allowed the researcher to become fully engaged with the material. The next step was more detailed and labor intensive, as it required the researcher to note and comment on the data collected. This included reviewing the type of language used and overall perceptions of the participants’ lived experiences. Next, connections in the data and emergent themes were identified. This process was intense because of the level complexity when determining patterns and connections. Once the patterns were established, the researcher linked themes via charts and mapping. Once this was complete, the researcher determined when it was time to move to the next set of transcripts and begin the whole process again. It was important to the researcher to analyze the new data without referencing the previous data. The last step was to compare all patterns across participants and making the necessary connections (Smith et al., 2009).

Data Storage and Destruction
All data was anonymized and will not be used without consent of the participants. Audio recordings were destroyed after accuracy of the transcripts was assured. During the study, research materials were accessible only to the researcher and every effort was made to maintain the confidentiality of the research participants. The researcher will retain all materials within the time limits set forth by the institutional research review board.

**Validity**

Creswell (2009) described triangulation as a means to assure validity. The process is done by providing a detailed description of individual interviews, providing information from participants based on criteria set. Validity established with the MIBI is via the interrelationship that exists with the multidimensional model of racial identity and the past uses of the instrument in various studies (Sellers et al., 1997). The MIBI has been validated in other studies and gains greater validity through its theoretical foundation.

**Limitations**

While the research study contributes to the literature on cross-racial membership it was limited in a few respects. The participants are students that attended a highly selective private institution; therefore the findings should not be generalized to all college students. The study included Black students who joined historically White fraternities and sororities, but it should be noted that Asian, Latino, and Native Americans students are also members. Therefore the perspectives of other students of color are outside the scope of this study. The researcher’s professional role may have limited the information shared by the participants, despite the assurances that the information shared would remain anonymous and confidential.

**Protection of Human Subjects**
The researcher provided a comfortable atmosphere and environment, which allowed the participants to voluntarily share their lived experience. The study was approved by the Northeastern University and Duke University Institutional Review Board and ascribed to best practices in qualitative research. There were no vulnerable populations and all participants were over the age of 18. All subjects consented to the research procedures outlines in the informed consent documents and were able to withdraw from the study at any time. While there was a chance that the topics discussed could bring intense emotions, there were no risks of more than minimal discomfort to the participants.
Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Black students that joined historically White fraternities and sororities at an elite institution in the southeast. It is a continued effort to make meaning of the lived experiences of students that engage in cross-racial membership. The purpose of this chapter is to present and expound on the findings of data collected by the researcher to describe and interpret the experiences of Black students who join historically White fraternities and sororities. It will provide details and verbatim evidence surrounding their perception of their membership and their unique experience. First, this chapter describes the participants and data collection.

Participants

By using a criterion based sampling approach, 75 students within the Greek community at the research site were identified as potential participants. The primary inclusion criteria were that the participants self-identified as Black and were current members of a historically White fraternity or sorority. An initial email was sent explaining the study and emphasizing the voluntary nature and that all information collected would remain unidentifiable. After a short preliminary interview with students that responded, five students agreed to participate in the study. According Smith (2011 b), a smaller sample size is appropriate when using interpretive phenomenological analysis.

All students who agreed to participate were given consent forms to sign and each were assigned a number to protect their identity. The second interview was the longest as it ranged from 35-45 minutes and was the most in depth as each participant were asked open-ended questions, which provided flexibility for them to share their unique lived experience. The participants consisted of three women and two men that were current juniors in college who had
joined their respective organization their spring semester of freshman year. They were not Greek legacies, meaning their parents were not members of Greek organizations. Table 1 summarizes the participant pool.

Table 1

Summary of Research Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Greek Legacy</th>
<th>Home State</th>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Jr</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>Interviews 1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Jr</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Interviews 1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Jr</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Interviews 1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Jr</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Interviews 1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Jr</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>Interviews 1-3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To better understand the participants identity and the lens by which they interpret their unique lived experience and construct their beliefs it was important to examine the complexity of their meaning making (Smith, 2007). This section will provide a participant profile, a description of the data analysis and the emergence of themes.

Participant 1.

Participant 1 was a junior in college from northern New Jersey. Her parents are immigrants from Jamaica, but she was born and raised in the United States. She grew up in suburbia and went to predominately White schools. In her family, she was always considered ‘the White one’ and thus did not always fit in with her cousins. While she acknowledged racial barriers exist, she firmly believed that race should not limit you and should not be the only reason why you cannot do something.
Upon receiving her admission letter, she was invited to attend the Black Student Weekend during her senior year in high school, but her father was adamant that she not attend. Her parents did not want her to participate in anything that was solely Black race identified. She attended a pre-orientation program the summer before starting college and established a close group of friends.

Participant 1 is not a Greek legacy, and her decision to participate in Greek recruitment was because everyone she knew seemed to be going through the process. She had no idea what a sorority was and was completely open throughout the recruitment process about this. She joined her sorority her spring semester of freshman year and has enjoyed her experience overall. She has had a few leadership positions and now serves on the PanHellenic Council.

Participant 2.

Participant 2 was a junior in college from Georgia. Her parents are immigrants from Belize but she was born and raised in the United States. She attended schools where she was always one of the only Black students and had many different friend circles independent of racial makeup. She revealed that growing up she was always called ‘the White Black girl’ and while it did not bother her to be called that then, today she would correct anyone who might call her that.

Her knowledge of Greek Life stemmed from her southern roots and she mentioned how intense it is there. She noted that everyone she knew was participating in recruitment and decided to do so as well. While she knew about historically Black sororities, she felt uncomfortable being a part of something that could possibly limit her diverse circle of friends. While she identified as a Black women, she did not feel like she needed to only advocate for Black people. Participant 2 has had an excellent experience in her organization and has taken on many leadership positions. She believed that in order for her experience to be meaningful, she
must give it as much as it gives her.

**Participant 3.**

Participant 3 was a junior in college from Louisiana who had a great deal of knowledge of Greek life prior to attending college, specifically Black fraternities. He decided to join his fraternity the spring semester of freshman year, but was very weary going through the recruitment process. He did not want to be ‘a token Black guy’ and shared that if he felt that at any time, he would lose interest in that group.

He had an overall positive experience and coined the term “black gravity” during his interview. He mentioned the importance of having other Black men in the organization and how that shaped his experience. As a member, he is highly involved in the recruitment process and is proud of his involvement in many groups on campus.

**Participant 4.**

Participant 4 was a junior in college from New York. She grew up in an all-Black neighborhood and had the opportunity to attend boarding school for high school, citing it as a life-changing experience. She credited her resident assistant her freshmen year for encouraging her to go through the recruitment process and join a sorority.

She has had a great experience in her organization and mentioned that she is responsible for the entire financial burden of the organization. She talked about the importance of getting her ‘money’s worth’ and that her overall experience has been positive. She shared that her organization has become her support system in college and her closest friends are also her sorority sisters.

**Participant 5.**

Participant 5 was a junior in college and from Maryland. He had no preconceived notion
of Greek life, knowing only what he knew from movies. He did not want to be a part of ‘Animal House’ and was not interested if he would not succeed academically. He attending a pre-orientation program and became close to a few upperclassmen that happened to be members of fraternities. This changed his whole perception and he decided to go through the recruitment process. He has been involved with his fraternity and believed that he is viewed as a very competent person by all of his brothers. He enthusiastically shared that he had been elected President for the upcoming year.

**Data Analysis Process**

Through the six steps recommended during the interpretative data analysis the researcher read and reread the transcripts, created initial notes, looked for emergent themes, searched for connections across themes, and identified emergent patterns. The researcher focused on the participants’ descriptive approach and meaning making by closely examining the participants’ shared experience, identifying patterns and themes (Smith, Flowers & Larkins, 2009). Each transcript was analyzed for converging themes. By prioritizing the data, the themes to focus on became apparent (Smith, 2007). Throughout the coding process many themes and patterns emerged. The preliminary lists of themes were grouped together as shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial socialization</th>
<th>Not a Greek legacy</th>
<th>Recruitment experience</th>
<th>Needing connection</th>
<th>Friendship groups</th>
<th>Not a spokesperson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black racial identity</td>
<td>Viewed by other Black students</td>
<td>Leadership positions within organization</td>
<td>Social relationship</td>
<td>Strengths and limitations of race</td>
<td>Oppressed minority ideology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect of race on membership</td>
<td>Positive and negative experiences</td>
<td>Systemic oppression</td>
<td>Self-actualization</td>
<td>Code switching</td>
<td>Black gravity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emergent Themes

Through analysis of the transcripts, five superordinate themes and three corresponding sub-themes emerged: (1) Racial/Cultural Socialization, (2) Salience of their Racial Identity, (3) Lack of Exposure to Greek Life and its sub-theme Recruitment Experience, (4) Perception of Historically Black Fraternities and Sororities, and (5) Leadership Opportunities and Personal Connections with its two sub-themes, Negative membership experience and Black gravity. Commonalities materialized that provided insight about the Black students’ perceptions and unique experiences of joining historically White fraternities and sororities. These themes were identified because, in most cases they were relevant in four of the participants interviewed as shown in Table 3.

Table 3.

Identification of Recurring Themes by Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-Ordinate Themes Subthemes</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Racial/Cultural Socialization</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Salience of Racial Identity</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lack of Exposure to Greek Life</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Recruitment Experience</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Perception of Historically Black Fraternities and Sororities</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Leadership Opportunities and Personal Connections</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Negative Membership Experiences</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Black Gravity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Theme 1: Racial/Cultural Socialization**

Racial/cultural socialization became the most salient and influential theme in the participants’ decisions to join historically White fraternities and sororities. The participants shared how they were socialized and inherited their thoughts about race, and most importantly how this shaped and influenced their behavior. They shared examples of how they became conscious of their race and shared stories of their unique differences. Their parents were extremely instrumental in shaping their Black identity and were strict about their expectations on their behavior, especially if they were going to be the only Black child in the room.

Participant #2 shared that her whole life, she had grown up being the only Black student in the room, and that she was always surrounded by upper-middle-class White kids at school. She stated:

I grew up in suburbia and my parents were always down my throat not to do anything that was remotely off the straight-and-narrow. You need to make sure that you are always doing what is right because if anybody’s is going to get in trouble, it’s going to be you. You need to make sure you do nothing wrong and that you can’t prove that it wasn’t you.

Participant #5 indicated a similar experience of growing up in a predominately White community and shared a story from his freshman year in college, when one of his White female floor mates was transported to the hospital due to alcohol intoxication and her parents’ reaction.

I grew up in a White community, and most of my friends from high school are White. I can still sometimes pinpoint differences in how my friends were raised versus how I was. I sometimes feel like my parents would be so angry if I did some of the things that these White students do. An example that comes to mind for me is a girl on my floor got
transported due to alcohol intoxication and her parents sent her flowers saying ‘Get Well.’

Similarly, Participant #1 shared, “All my life I have gone to school with White students and it isn’t anything new to me, my parents prepared me for that.”

It seems clear that the strict parental guidance and expectations about how to behave had a significant impact on the participants’ racial/cultural socialization. High expectations about how others would perceive them for being the “only Black person in the room” coupled with their personal understanding of societal norms guided the participants’ overall behavior.

While the interview protocol did not include a direct question asking the participants to elaborate on their respective upbringings, they all felt the need to share stories as a way to lay the foundation for their overall comfort and ability to socialize and identify with White students. Three participants grew up in predominately White upper-class communities and were among the only Black students in their schools, while two grew up in predominately Black lower-class communities. One of the two that grew up in the predominately Black community was awarded a full scholarship to attend a prestigious boarding school, which she noted drastically changed her social influences. Participant #4 stated:

Even though I grew up in a predominately Black community, I equate White with rich and preppy and really nice. That is like my identifier of White culture because I hadn’t experienced anything else. I try to rectify that in what I feel about Black and White culture and remember that Black people come in a wider spectrum just not socio-economically.

Despite not being raised in a White community and only experiencing White friends in boarding school, she was socialized to believe that White culture was something that Black culture was
not. While sharing stories about their families and upbringings, participants unconsciously said things that could be viewed as negative about Black culture and inadvertently highlighted stereotypes of Black people.

Participant #2 said:

I am not a very good representative of my ethnicity at all because I grew up in a very upper-middle-class, White, Italian and Jewish area. I probably saw five Black students in my entire high school but I was the only one who was academically focused, so I just had a different upbringing.

Participant #5 “didn’t think about race as a big issue [when growing up] because I feel that I have established myself as a strong and competent Black man.”

Regardless of where or how they grew up, the parental expectations surrounding their behavior were extremely clear. This dynamic had a large influence in their socialization and on their pursuit of social relationships. Their racial/cultural socialization helped develop and shape their own racial identity and its salience. The participants described great pressure from parents to not participate in organizations or programs that were viewed as race/ethnicity-based. There seemed to be an overall sense of White culture being better and something to strive for.

**Theme 2: Salience of Their Racial Identity**

Understanding the foundation of the participants’ racial and cultural socialization provided insight into how salient their own racial identity was to them. It seems that their racial identity was shaped by various environmental factors and participants shared their lived experiences. Participants’ level of Black consciousness emerged as they shared their historical perspectives on race. Participants were well versed in Black history and all agreed that the history of Black Americans has caused systemic oppression that Black people continue to face.
Participant #4 shared that “the scope of how Blacks were treated throughout 200 years+ directly affects us today.” Participant #5 added, “I think that, with the Black race, particularly in this country, there is a greater context of racism because we know who the perpetrator is.”

Participant #2 reflected on the first time in school in the 3rd grade when she was taught about slavery and the “social hierarchy” that existed while learning about Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King. Additionally Participant #3 explained, “It is hard for me to sometimes grapple and digest what is life like for another race.” Participant #1 shared:

I feel like in the Black community, you are able to identify with like having a struggle almost. There has been oppression in your life, or in your parents life that they had to fight against, or that you are currently fighting against whether it’d be like the race thing or I don’t know, a financial thing or family thing.

Even though the participants were well versed in Black history and understood the magnitude of history and reality that once existed, they all mentioned that they did not view their race as a barrier or limitation. Participant #5 stated:

I take pride in that fact that I am Black, I go to an elite institution and I am doing well here. I think there are a lot of negative stereotypes associated with the Black race. I like to think that being Black is a strong part of my identity because I am overcoming those stereotypes and showing them that they aren’t true.

Participants did, however, affirm that even though they did not see their race as a barrier or limitation that they do not believe that people are color blind. Participant #3 explained, “When people say to me that they are color blind it really pisses me off.” Participant #2 further acknowledged:
I’m a firm believer that you are not separate from your entity or from your race, but that should not necessarily always be a hindrance. I don’t believe when people say we live in a post-racial world or we live in a world where race isn’t important anymore.

When asked how important being Black was to their self-image, participants’ responses varied. Participant #2 said it was something that she was aware of and it was important to her, but then instantly shared “it is not a limitation.” Similarly Participant #1 said, “Yes, it’s important but not in a sense where I feel compelled to just identify as Black or feel like I need to advocate all the time for Black students.” Participants #3 and #4 were adamant about how important being Black was to them and shared, “I am always Black and you always know it,” referring to their darker complexion.

While each of the participants had a unique level of self-awareness, Participant #3 was particularly poignant in his description:

I am very much aware when I walk into a room that I am the Black guy walking into a room and I have learned to play up what people want my first impression to probably be. People want a safe-enough Black guy, but they want me to be Black. No one wants a White Black guy, that’s weird and that’s not cool. They want one who’s Black--just enough Black-- not too much Black. I see that all the time, I don’t just hear that with like White people in fraternities, but all over.

Participant #1 shared how she struggled with being called “a White Black girl” in high school because she did not hang out with a lot of Black people. It bothered her when she was called a White Black girl. “I am a Black women. I remember in high school, people would say ‘oh, but you’re so White, like a White Black girl.’” This is an example of the struggle that exists
between perception and stereotypes and how the participants navigated the notion that Participant #2 called “acting Black.”

Participant #2 asserted “stereotypes surrounding Black culture is [sic] thrown at you from various sources, especially the media. So there is an expectation that you will act Black and if you don’t then you are not Black enough.” For Participant #1, this has been a life-long struggle. She always strived to define her Blackness for herself and come in to it just as she is. The perceptions that the participants were not ‘Black enough’ or were ‘acting White’ were referenced often and connected with their decision to join a historically White fraternity and sorority, though they did not connect it with their individual racial saliency.

All of the participants felt a level of Black pride, but did not want to be the spokesperson for the entire Black race, or feel as though they were advocating about Black issues. Participant #2 expressed her frustration about being considered the spokesperson for the entire Black race:

I am not the representative of my ethnicity and people seem to think that you are the spokesperson but I am not the Queen of Black people. I try to work my hardest to do things well, and I don’t think it’s ever because of race. I think that’s why maybe in a sense it’s a combination of people’s different attributes that do facilitate their limitations.

Our limitations are the fact that we are human. We can’t be perfect.

She also shared a story from her childhood, demonstrating how early in her life she recalled being considered the spokesperson for her race. As a first grader, her teacher was sharing holiday traditions and turned to her and asked her to talk about Kwanzaa. She remembers thinking “Are you kidding? I’ve never heard this word in my life!”

Participants felt that being Black was not the only identity that defined them, and it was not the thing that would hold them back from achieving success. They all commented that their
hard work and dedication would help them overcome the perceived racial barriers and they would not be limited. They all felt confident that their White peers perceived them as intelligent, articulate, and competent.

**Theme 3: Lack of Exposure to Greek Life**

The participants were consistent in their lack of substantive knowledge about fraternities and sororities. They all acknowledged very limited exposure to the Greek community and many had negative stereotypes. The participants did not begin their college careers able to articulate the benefits of joining a fraternity or sorority, and many were afraid that joining would negatively affect their academic pursuits. Participant #2 said, “I guess I just didn’t know what a sorority was, the idea of tradition or anything like that.” Participant #1’s knowledge came from a summer she spent at the University of Georgia and a brief encounter with a Panhellenic group. She described Greek life in the south as “super intense.” Some were exposed to Greek life via social media; describing some of the stereotypes they had prior to joining and were unaware of and unable to articulate the benefits of membership. Participant #5 disclosed, “I had my preconceived notions. I definitely felt like ‘oh, Greek life is not for me, I am not interested in just being rowdy all the time. I want to get my degree.’”

The participants were not Greek legacies; their parents were not members of Greek organizations in college. Participant #4 revealed, “My parents aren’t Greek-affiliated in any way and I grew up in a neighborhood where sororities and fraternities weren’t a thing at all.” Participant #2 highlighted the fact that even to this day, her parents literally have no idea what they are paying for. “They know I live in an apartment in school, but they don’t know why [laughing]”.
The participants’ lack of exposure to Greek organizations allowed them to remain open- minded during the recruitment experience. All of the participants shared that their established social circles guided them toward the PanHellenic Association and Inter-Fraternity Council, the umbrella councils that host the 26 historically White fraternities and sororities. Participants #1 and #2 both shared that everyone they knew was going through recruitment so they decided why not? Participant #4 credited her Resident Assistant (RA) for getting her interested in going through the recruitment process. She said:

Before meeting my RA in the fall, I had no idea. And I fell in love with everything that she was talking about, and also the girls she introduced me to. I went into the recruitment experience blind and just kind of became attached to this person.

Participant #5 credited his pre-orientation leader who was Greek and introduced him to many of his brothers.

Consistently, the guys I was meeting through my pre-orientation leader seemed like great guys and so I decided to go through recruitment because people that I saw who were in Greek organizations were successful on campus.

While they had limited knowledge of fraternities and sororities, each of the participants made a decision to go through the recruitment process, and all acknowledged that their social circles were instrumental in steering them to this choice. Particular classmates who happen to be part of the Greek community, serving as significant influences in their desire to join a fraternity or sorority, enamored each of them. These students were role models and recounted the advantages of joining these organizations.

Sub-theme 3.1: Recruitment experience.
Each of the participants described the recruitment process as extremely unique and a one-of-a-kind experience. Participants openly discussed their initial anxiety about going through the process. They shared stories of having to meet and connect with hundreds of students and having to sell themselves. Their race became salient to them during the process. Participant #2 shared vivid stories of girls crying hysterically, some even flying back home, because they were not selected to move to the next round during the Greek selection process. She said there were times that she would think, “Oh my God, this is a horrible process!” Participant #5 shared:

I was a little wary, especially at the beginning. Recruitment can be a deceiving process because it is all these organizations throwing parties. It was a little overwhelming at first meeting so many people, but every time I would met someone new it would make me more and more excited about the possibility of joining a fraternity. Throughout the process, the members begin to share more about their organizations and you know that there is a lot of substance and just not about going out everything.

Yet, the overall recruitment process was a positive one and participants remained open to the experience. Participant #4 explained:

I didn’t have any pre-conceived notions of what it was going to be so I wanted to just go and see if I would fit right with any of them and ultimately with the organization that I chose to join.

Participant #5 “went through the recruitment process pretty open minded and not dead set about joining and specific group.” Participant #2 shared the same sentiment:

I had neither negative emotions tied to recruitment nor any organizations. Anywhere that I didn’t get asked back to wasn’t somewhere that I would really see myself at. I like the organization I got and everything has been fine here.
All the participants disclosed their perception that being Black was a factor in how they were treated by the organizations during the recruitment process and influenced how experienced the recruitment process. Participant #2 proclaimed that she was “always aware of people thinking that minorities get things because they are minorities and not because they truly deserve it.” Participant #1 stated, “As a freshman you think that they have to take a token Black person so you think its affirmative action.” Participant #3 adamantly expressed:

I was not going to be anyone’s token Black guy and I can sense that off in a second.

People in the rooms would talk to me only about rap and dancing and I was like

“OKAY!” There was one group that I asked them to remove my name from their list because I felt like the token Black kid. Only Black kids were talking to me and people were saying did you meet the Black kid? I was thinking…I could talk to other people; I am totally cool with other races.

Participants noted that current Black members of the organizations were used to recruit them and were asked to facilitate the potential new member process. They described looking for Black faces when they entered rooms and their presence was a factor in maintaining their interest. Participant #1 surprised herself, realizing “it took me a while to notice it, but there were few African-American women in Panhel [PanHelenic Council] sororities and it was pretty eye opening, the stark contrast.” Participant #4 affirmed by saying:

I remember I was talking to someone and they said that when they walked into recruitment they would always scan the room and see if there were any other people of color and I realized that I did that also. I just think it is like a natural kind of instincts.

For some would remove their name from the list and lose interest in the organization if they felt that they would be ‘the token Black person.’ Yet, overall, the participants reported no pressure
while going through the process. Each felt that the organization that they eventually joined was the right “fit.”

The interview protocol did not address the participants’ feeling as active members of the organizations during the recruitment process. Yet, the participants shared their experiences since they were on the other side of the recruitment process, about their self-actualizations process or how they have managed other Black potential members. Participant #4 had strong feelings about her organization’s process:

No one is targeted for their race and that during recruitment we do not pair people up because of race. If a Black girl is going through recruitment I don’t have to talk to her. I could but it is not necessary that I talk to her. I do however, feel a responsibility that if someone of color is going into the recruitment process, that I should be an open person to talk to and share my own experiences.

In stark contrast, Participant #2 shared the story of a Black student who was a potential new member who asked about her experiences as a Black woman during recruitment. She confided:

It was an extremely rude question coming from a potential new member to a member, and it was very rude and funny at the same time. I think she was trying to find common ground with me, but it’s funny because I am not very representative of my ethnicity at all.

Participant #3 found being on the other side of recruitment was an entirely different experience for. He said he had to “watch my own prejudice thoughts against all types of different people, because it is easy to assimilate even when you don’t want to.” He shared a story from the first round of recruitment, when students are released from the process. He noticed that most of the students that were released were of students of color. He had to speak
up and say something because it just did not make sense to him. “I realized that there was only one White kid released and then everyone else was Asian and Indian. How was this possible?”

Participants experienced recruitment through their racialized lens and their experiences and self-actualizations continued to define the saliency of their race as individuals. They navigated the intense recruitment process while trying to make meaning of their own “fit.” Participants described entering the process not wanting to be spotlighted or be considered a token, but they made sure there were other Black faces in the room if they were to continue the process with a given organization. Race became salient during the recruitment process, but even more so after they had joined the organization and were involved in the recruitment of new members. They made the effort to reach out to other Black students who were going through the process and made them feel comfortable.

**Theme 4: Perception of Historically Black Fraternities and Sororities**

Only one participant was familiar with historically Black fraternities and sororities before arriving at college. Thomas reflected:

For me, I was very specific about deciding between the groups. For me, IFC was more appealing because it was like, if this doesn’t work out, it won’t work out, and I can leave or after college is done… so I saw it as more of a temporary thing for me.

He mentioned that the lifetime commitment and sense of permanence of the racial/ethnic fraternities was overwhelming to him.

The other participants had no idea prior to college that historically Black organizations existed. Participant #2 declared, “I didn’t even know that Black sororities existed. That wasn’t something I even knew. To this day, I wish I knew more about them, I just feel like it is something I should know more about.” Participant #5 added, “I had no experience with Black
fraternities and no real knowledge of it. It was never a consideration for me, but that was just because of the lack of information.”

While they all expressed their individualized sense of Black pride, they felt that these organizations’ mission of uplifting and empowerment of the Black community was isolating and would hinder their connection to other students. They believed that to participate in these groups required a strong racial identity and willingness to advocate daily for Black issues, and the thought of being seen as a Black activist was overwhelming. Participant #1 voiced her concerns by saying, “I realized that the Black community is really tight-knit here. That was something that I wasn’t sure if I would like or feel comfortable doing because I was doing the floating thing around so much in high school.”

All the participants acknowledged that other Black students have asked them why they did not join a historically Black fraternity or sorority. Participant #2 shared her thoughts:

I didn’t even know that Black sororities existed till after I joined my sorority. That wasn’t something that I knew. The few girls that I knew that were interested in joining those groups said it was very intense and that they girls were very bitchy. Black students ask me why I didn’t join a Black sorority and I just think it’s rude.

Participant #2 went on to say that she did not care how she was viewed by Black students who are in the Black organizations because she is not that connected to that community and she only cares “about the people that you’re most constantly around.”

When Participant #1 was asked, she said it was a natural progression for her to join a historically White sorority because it “felt like the next thing to do or I guess the next like step.” She prides herself in having a lot of friends in the Black community and in the Black fraternities
and sororities. “We hang out,” she explained. “We have great times together, and are we are still friends, so I don’t feel rejected or expelled from the community.”

Participant #3 has only had positive reactions to his membership choices and stated: I have never had anyone in front of my face show any distaste or any negative opinion about my choice of being in a historically White fraternity. Black students are way more accepting of you especially after attending a social event that my fraternity hosts. They realize that we can all have fun together.

Participant #5 believed that there is a level of judgment about his choice, and has been asked, “Why would you join a historically White fraternity when there are Black fraternities?”

Each of the participants described the secretive nature of the Black groups during the recruitment process, and how it made it difficult to get to know membership would be an option. The intensity of the new member education process was also viewed as a deterrent. Participant #2 recounted stories of the new member process that one of her friends shared. “They made her walk around a dark room blindfolded or something. She’s now a member, but that is crazy and that is not me at all, so I would never really given that [sort of organization] much thought.”

Only one participant mentioned that if he had known more about the historically Black organizations that he might have considered joining one of them. Participant #5 declared, “While I am very happy with where I ended up, now that I know more about them, I would have considered it.”

While they appear to have shared a lack of knowledge of historically Black fraternities and sororities, the participants felt that there was a level of racial advocacy that existed in those groups that did not interest them. They did not want to be solely connected to a group that was race-based, believing it would limit their interactions with other students. They perceived the
tightness of the Black community as negative, and did not see themselves as a part of that community.

Theme 5: Leadership Opportunities and Personal Connections

There were two main benefits to joining their organizations that the participants cited: the leadership opportunities available to them and personal connections they made. These benefits helped the participants maintain their desire to remain active and financially invested. They shared their desire to be leaders in their organizations in order to develop necessary skills to aid them in their pursuits after college. Participants fondly reminisced about the importance of their relationship with their brothers and sisters. Participant #4 eloquently stated, “Why you join a sorority and why you stay in a sorority are completely different reasons.” She said that she reflected on her overall experiences because of the financial obligations, in part, stating, “now that I am a member, why keep paying if I already have made the connections?” She further explained that her decision to join her sorority was centered on the “leadership opportunities that would become open for me, which was very exciting, and also just being within the network of girls who are really leaders on campus as well.” Her exuberance was apparent.

I love the fact that I get the opportunity to be a leader on campus and to be involved in something bigger than myself and to have a sisterhood that I can be proud of. I feel like that’s worth it, definitely.

All of the participants have served and continued to serve in leadership positions on their organizations’ executive boards. The positions varied from social chair, chaplain, new member educator, vice president for recruitment, secretary, and one was just elected Chapter President. Participant #5 asserted, “I have, in general, loved my experience and when the opportunity came to run for President, I did. This has been a great organization to grow in.” Participant #1
affirmed the positive nature of her leadership positions and felt it significantly enhanced her membership experience:

> I have jumped into leadership roles. I started with smaller roles like social chair and moved up to the executive board, and have been new member educator for the past two years. I feel like I’ve really had a lot of say in what goes on in the sorority, and a lot of I guess almost sway and that is important to me. I’ve taken a lot of ownership of my sorority. I almost feel like I have a duty to my sorority because I’m on the executive board and [the sorority] serves me as much I need to serve it.

Beyond the leadership opportunities, the participants all described personal connections that provided them with a substantive and fulfilling experience. They fondly shared stories about the spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood that existed within their organizations. Participant #4 shared, “I have a sisterhood that I am so proud of. It is, to me, a support system that holds my closest friends. I know that my sister will always have my back in all situations.” Participant #3 added, “I have been to [my fraternity brothers’] homes and met family members and they have been to mine and have met my family.” Participant #5 declared, “My brothers are full of substance and our connections are genuine and authentic.”

**Sub-theme 5.1: Negative membership experiences.**

While the participants reported overall satisfaction with the leadership opportunities available within their organization, as well as the personal connections they had made, a few noted groups within the group that had formed. For example, Participant #2 said, “We do have a group that is self-selecting within our organization, and it bothers me a little bit and they exclude a lot of us.” Participants described their feelings surrounding their racialized experience; specifically how they felt they needed to speak up in times of perceived injustice. Yet, they
admitted that they felt comfortable sharing things that were bothering them with their brothers or sisters and felt that issues were always resolved appropriately. Some shared examples of times where there were issues surrounding the racial climate. Participant #5’s story surrounding the confederate flag was revealing:

Our chapter knows that if something is bothering me that I would definitely speak up. It makes our White brothers more aware of smaller things that can become bigger issues. I remember we use to have a beer pong table that had a confederate flag on it and it was very minimal but I noticed it and brought it up to the brothers. At first they were like, “Does it actually bother you?” and then eventually they realized that if it bothered us then they needed to get rid of it. This was a learning process involved for the members of the fraternity as a whole.

Participants described navigating their various identities while still trying to connect. Participant #3 shared his approach:

I am being very candid, and it’s been a big thing trying to navigate that world. I am always aware that when I walk into a room that I am ‘the Black guy’ walking into a room. I sometimes feel like I need a title to be in the group and to be friends with these people and that is real. But I also sit and think about the change that I am bringing to their lives, and how much I, too, judge them, and I work on that too.

Some participants felt a natural connection with the environment, while others has moments when they struggled and felt uncomfortable. Those that struggled felt it was important to get comfortable because helped them navigate a diverse world.

Sub-theme 5.2: Black gravity.
One of the participants used the term “Black Gravity” to describe a phenomenon that occurs within his organization, reflecting a theme that emerged from the majority of the participants’ narratives. “Black Gravity,” as defined by Participant #3, is the notion that all of the Black people in the room will somehow end up in the same area. “They attract one another.” It seemed as though while the members were did not want to be viewed only as Black, were adamant that race was not their most salient identity, they found solace in having other Black members in their organization. Participant #3 explained:

“Black gravity”-- I really think is a scientific thing to look into. You are in a room and somehow all the Black people in the room are in the same area. In my fraternity is where I find my community of same-race individuals. I think that there is a lot of understanding that goes on between us. You just can’t walk up to any fraternity brother and ask them, “Can we go get a haircut together?” … So that really does bond the black members together.

Participant #5 noted, “My organization is very diverse, but I can tell you that there are six Black members. All the black members in my chapter are in a group text and we chat all day.” Each of the participants mentioned that the ways in which Black people connect and interact are different. For example, how it is culturally expected to acknowledge another Black person in a space. Participant #5 elaborated, “There is some sort of thing that connects us that’s different, but it’s not necessarily something we are conscious of, it’s just natural.”

Four of the five participants credited a relationship with another member who was also Black as one of the reason for their high level of satisfaction with their organization. Same-race peers were a source of support, linking students that had the same experience. Participant #4 explained, “You can go to a ‘White’ party or a ‘Black’ party but you can’t go to both because the
same people won’t be there. Just having another sorority sister who is Black is someone that helps me navigate both worlds.”

Participants were keenly aware of the number of Black students that go through recruitment and how many join their respective organization. Amanda reported:

Our organization is fairly diverse, for a PanHel (PanHellenic Council) organization. I was one of two Black members in my pledge class my freshman year. We also have two more this year, which I thought was actually very nice and refreshing, going through recruitment this year, was seeing that there were a lot more minorities going through recruitment this year. I was happy about that.

The notion of “Black Gravity” emphasized the students’ racial saliency was more important than they could originally articulate. The importance and significance of having same-race peers in their organization provided a level of comfort and assistance while navigating the color lines.

Summary of Findings

This research study examined the experiences of Black students who join historically White fraternities and sororities. In this chapter, the narratives of the participants were explored through verbatim evidence derived from the participant interviews. The emergent themes included: Racial/Cultural Socialization, Salience of their Racial Identity, Lack of Exposure of Greek Life, Perception of Historically Black Fraternities and Sororities, and Leadership Opportunities and Personal Connections.

The interviews provided a comprehensive description of the participants’ personal journey in the development of their racial identity and provided background on their racial and cultural socialization. Parental expectations for behavior and concerns about negative stereotypes surrounding their race were evident. The data revealed their lack of knowledge of
fraternities and sororities and the importance of personal connections in ultimately guiding their decision to participate in recruitment and eventually join their respective organizations. All participants credited a White upper classmen student for encouraging them to participate in recruitment and to ultimately join their respective organization. The stories highlighted their unique membership experiences and positive leadership opportunities. Each has held leadership positions and has found fulfillment in their ability to develop meaningful relationships with their brothers and sisters.

The notion of “Black Gravity” was introduced, underscoring the importance of having same-race peers involved in the organization in order to connect with those experiencing similar levels of participation. This finding revealed that racial saliency may be more prominent to the individual then they are able to articulate.

The following chapter connects the findings to the current literature and interprets the findings through the guiding theoretical framework. Chapter 5 discusses implications for higher education administrators that work with fraternities and sororities and those that work with students that participate in cross-racial membership organizations.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this research study was to examine the unique experiences of Black students who joined historically White fraternities and sororities at an elite college in the southeastern United States. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allowed the researcher to examine and interpret the participants’ unique lived experiences. According to Hughey (2010), the literature lacks the perspectives of non-White members who gain entry into historically White fraternities and sororities. This makes the findings instrumental to current and future research. The participants shared their experiences and provided their personal narratives about their racial and cultural socialization. Through these stories create an opportunity to demystify assumptions and gain a clearer perspective of their racial integration into their respective organizations.

Five superordinate themes and three corresponding sub-themes emerged: 1) Racial/Cultural Socialization, 2) Salience of their Racial Identity, 3) Lack of Exposure to Greek Life, with the sub-theme 3.1: Recruitment Experience, 4) Perception of Historically Black Fraternities and Sororities, 5) Leadership Opportunities and Personal Connections, with sub-theme 5.1: Negative membership experience and sub-theme 5.2: Black gravity. How these themes align with the current literature on cross-racial membership will be discussed in this chapter. Additionally, the implications of this study could augment and direct the efforts of university administrators who work with fraternities and sororities are introduced. This chapter ends with recommendations for future research on cross-racial membership and its overall effect on campus racial climate, particularly issues surrounding inclusivity and connectedness.

Racial/Cultural Socialization

The study was grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT established a societal
definition of racial barriers and has a concurrent fundamental aspiration for active
transformation. The majority of participants grew up in areas where they were “the only Black
person in the room.” Unsurprisingly, upon entering college, their social circle was reflective of
their past experiences. This mirrors the composition of historically White fraternities and
sororities as they are majority, or almost completely, White environments (Chang & DeAngelo,

The participants’ cultural socialization created a level of comfort with White students that
was natural. It also influenced how they navigated the color line. Harper (2011) introduced the
term “Onlyness,” which he defined as “the psycho-emotional burden of having to strategically
navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from
one’s same racial or ethnic group” (p. 190). The participants chose to embrace their “onlyness,”
and the phenomenon was manifested in two ways (a) stereotype threat and (b) Black gravity.

**Stereotype threat.**

Steele (1997) coined the term “stereotype threat,” defining it as an “internalized fear of
confirming negative stereotype about one’s racial group which consequently creates anxiety” (as
cited by Harper, 2011). The participants in this study shared stories about their racial and
cultural socialization and their parental expectations surrounding their behavior especially if they
were the “only.” Participants were adamant that they did not want to be the spokesperson for
their race and were mindful that their relationships with White students could positively or
negatively impact and shape the White students’ thoughts about Black students. These facts
combined to instill in them an inherent level of responsibility to serve as a bridge between
different communities. Among the benefits of interracial friendships and cross-racial
membership is the ability to be in a space where one can empathize with other racial/ethic
groups, create positive racial attitudes, and significantly decrease preconceived prejudices (Antonio, 2001; Park & Kim, 2013; McClelland & Linnander, 2006; Powers & Ellison, 1995; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Participants provided safe spaces for their fraternity brothers and sorority sisters to explore questions surrounding race and often addressed issues that might have been viewed by other Black peers as racially insensitive. They were often commended for providing insight in a manner in which the current members did not feel judged or ostracized for seeking a level of insight into the Black community.

Black gravity.

“Black Gravity” was a term coined by a participant as he described a phenomenon within his own organization. In short, he observed that the Black people in a room will somehow end up in the same area, providing examples from his experiences. The majority of the participants described close relationships with other Black students in their organizations. They created special bonds with same-race peers, ultimately crediting their overall positive satisfaction with their organization to these relationships. Beverly Tatum’s (1997) iconic book titled “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: A Psychologist Explains the Development of Racial Identity,” brought this phenomenon to light, explaining the need for the naturally-created social bonds between Black students. Similar to Participant #3’s “black gravity” is the term ‘homophily,’ or the idea that ‘like attracts like’ or ‘similarity breeds attraction.’ The concept highlights the need for individuals who share the same racial and/or ethnic background to form social bonds, allowing them to navigate their current racial environment (Park & Kim, 2013; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 1987).

In this study, Black Gravity represents a subtly different idea. Black students who joined racially homogenous, historically White fraternities and sororities created a subculture with
same-race peers. Rather than seeking out Black organizations, they credited their positive experience and personal connections within a predominantly White organization to having same-race individuals in the chapter. While this research study sought to provide a better understanding of the racial climate and issues surrounding inclusivity and connectedness, this was an unexpected insight. The participants’ racial socialization impacted their views and significantly influenced their attitudes towards the benefits and challenges of cross-racial membership. The majority of participants’ upbringing in predominantly White environments and elevated socio-economic status may have limited their ability to challenge notions of race and class. Further researcher is needed to explore the role of Black Gravity subculture in order to better understand the complexity of cross-racial memberships and to further explore patterns of cross-racial interactions.

Salience of their Racial Identity

Recent events involving historically White fraternities and sororities suggest that traditional racism still exists in the Greek community. Several studies on Greek life have found that cross-racial interaction has negatively impacted members of fraternities and sororities (Antonio, 2001; Park & Kim, 2013; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2009; Sáenz, Ngai & Hurtado, 2007). While participants expressed that joining their organization was an overall positive experience, this study aligns with the current literature regarding participants’ recruitment experiences. Each of the participants felt that their race played a major role in their interactions with the current members and their ability to connect during recruitment. They shared a strong desire to not be viewed as a token member or a part of any affirmative action quota, which many thought existed. However, once participants became members, their experiences in the area of personal connections created contradicts the literature. While some participants addressed
racially insensitive issues, many felt that, once addressed, there was a level of comfort and their overall interactions were extremely positive. Because of these positive experiences, many participants worked hard to bridge the gap between other Black students on campus, improving their interactions with their fraternity and sorority. Participants shared stories on how they invited other Black students to events in order for them to get a better idea of the membership and to create a larger sense of community.

Critical race theory’s basic tenet is that racism exists and it is a prevalent, daily experience for most people of color, and that only blatant forms of discrimination are typically confronted (Trevino et al., 2008). The participants shared examples how issues surrounding the racial climate of their organization were manifested. Their self-actualization surrounding the saliency of their racial identity was recounted. Many felt that their Black identity was not their primary identity on a daily basis, but they were well versed in Black history and racial systemic oppression. Many shared experiences of how they learned about Black history in America and each was extremely articulate when discussing slavery, its lasting effects in this country, and how it affects them. They compared their race to other races, and were clear that they were not viewed as the ‘model minority’ (Lee, 1996). They felt that they had to work hard to break down the many stereotypes that exist surrounding Black culture.

While being proud of being Black, the participants felt that being Black was not the only identity that defined them. They were adamant about the fact that their race would not hold them back from achieving success. Each commented that their hard work and dedication helped them surmount perceived racial barriers, and each was confident that they would not be limited by them. This finding is not consistent with the literature surrounding racial barriers and student success. According to Solorzana, Ceja and Yosso (2000), in college environments, racial micro-
aggressions exist in both the academic and social arenas and have a negative effect on students’ ability to succeed. Participants shared stories of micro-aggressions in the academic setting, but there were few examples of negative experiences in their social circle, particularly not in their fraternities or sororities. Critical race theory asks if racism is a product of ignorance or a lack of experiences and encounters. The participants were concerned about blatant racial issues, but seemed less concerned about micro-aggressions as it related to their peers.

One area addressed by all participants was the misconception that they believe color blindness exists, simply because they are Black students who chose to join historically White fraternities and sororities. The participants were all in agreement that color blindness does not exist, and that there are still racist structures and practices. The notion of color blindness asserts that race does not matter; often highlighting a lack of awareness that racial privilege exists (Toracco & Hoover, 2005). According to Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton (2008), many Whites attempt to strategically avoid talking about race during social interactions and try not to acknowledge racial differences in an attempt to appear as though they are not racist. While the participants did not view their race as a societal barrier that would hinder their success, they were very aware of race and the role it played in their interactions with others. Tatum (1997) encapsulated this notion by stating that race is salient to someone because it is salient to others. Race was significant to the participants while they were going through the recruitment process.

While sharing stories about their families and upbringings, some participants unconsciously said things that could be viewed as negative about Black culture, inevitably highlighted some of stereotypes that exist about Black people. They used terms such as ‘competent,’ ‘easy going,’ and ‘not a true representative of their race’ to describe themselves. The perception that the participants’ were not ‘Black enough’ or were ‘acting White’ were often
referenced and were connected with their decision to join a historically White fraternity or sorority. These perceptions made Black students feel as though they did not connect with their individual racial saliency.

While the literature states that some Black students recognize the importance of developing strong cross-cultural communications, particularly in the unique setting of college campuses, many do not engage in structured opportunities or avoid facilitated initiatives because of the possibility of being seen as a ‘sellout’ (Fisher & Hartman, 1995; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Harper et al., 2007; Hughey, 2007). The study’s findings did not support the literature in this area because the participants did not reference to this idea and generally felt that their racial identity was salient, but not dominate. The participants demonstrated a strong sense of Black pride but did not want to serve as advocates for Black rights on a daily basis.

**Lack of Exposure to Greek Life**

The participants were consistent in their lack of substantial knowledge of fraternities and sororities. Some had exposure to Greek Life via social media or popular movies and identified Greek stereotypes, but overall they said that prior to them joining they were unaware and unable to articulate the benefits. Many university administrators struggle with the value of the Greek experience and question whether it creates socially responsible leaders, particularly in light of past practices of discrimination and exclusivity (Martin et al., 2012; Muir, 1991). None of the participants had parents who were members of Greek organizations in college. Yet each of the participants credited their desire to participate in the recruitment process and ultimately become members of their organizations because of their prior social relationships with White students. While the literature describes a level of exclusivity in the Greek community and discusses past
practices of discrimination, each of the participants were invited by a White peer to participate in recruitment.

According to Harper (2011), Black students’ sense of belonging at predominately White institutions is largely based on their interactions with students that are from different racial and ethnic groups. Consistent with the literature stated, all of the participants were guided toward Panhellenic Association or Inter-Fraternity Council hosted organizations by their pre-established social circles that consisted of White students. These umbrella councils host the 26 historically White fraternities and sororities.

The national trends of racially homogenous Greek organizations have limited previous studies on cross-racial interaction and cross-racial membership, making the identification of patterns of cross-racial interactions challenging (Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; Park & Kim, 2013; Sáenz et al., 2007; Stearns, Buchmann, & Bonneau, 2009). The patterns that emerged within this study were based on the composition and racial makeup of participants’ high schools, their racial/cultural socialization prior to going to college, and their social circle immediately entering college. All but one of the participants grew up in predominately White neighborhoods and attended schools where they were often “the only Black student in their class.” These patterns shaped the creation of their social circles and their natural connection to White students upon entering college.

**Recruitment Experience**

Participants openly discussed their anxiety while going through the initial recruitment process. They used terms such as “affirmative action,” “tokenism,” and “spotlighting” to describe their recruitment experiences. Campbell (2012) stated that systemic preconceptions can lead to racial discrimination due to generalization, overt prejudice, and stereotyping. It can lead
to subtle forms of differential treatment. Participants candidly shared stories of when they felt that references to Black TV shows or music were used to connect with their organization’s current members, particularly while going through recruitment.

The participants believed that being Black was a major factor as to how they were treated by the organizations through the recruitment process and how they experienced the recruitment process. In an effort to not seem racist, individuals often struggle with how to socially interact and manage interpersonal relationships with people from difference races (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). Participants experienced this phenomenon when some of the current members struggled with small talk and seemed hesitant about bringing up topics for fear of being misunderstood.

In an effort to lessen the social anxiety of seemingly negative interracial interaction between White members and the participants, the current members who were Black were often used to recruit them and were asked to facilitate their potential new member process. Similarly, the participants described looking for Black faces when they entered rooms, noting that it was a factor in maintaining their interests. The participants found it important to have students that looked like them already in the organization in order to make them comfortable and maintain interest in the organization.

While not directly asked about their experiences once they were on the other side of the recruitment process, each participant shared their self-actualizations about how they had managed other Black potential new members. Some described being on the other side of recruitment as difficult, recognizing the power dynamics at play. Critical race theory illuminates the irony that exists between victims of discrimination who then become victimizers of those that they perceive to be in racially subordinate positions. Participants seemed to become very aware of conversations during selection process and aware of their own bias.
Perception of Historically Black Fraternities and Sororities

Only one participant was familiar with historically Black fraternities and sororities before arriving at college. While all the participants felt a level of Black pride, no one wanted to be considered a spokesperson for the entire Black race, nor an advocate for Black issues. While they may have lacked exposure to historically Black fraternities and sororities, they viewed them as another race and/or ethnic based student organization where the advocacy of Black issues was dominant. The participants believed these organizations’ missions centered on empowering the Black community could be isolating and would hinder their connection to other students.

Their perceptions matched the extant literature that suggests that ethnic organizations are damaging to the creation of a united campus community and often isolate and separate underrepresented students (Chavez, 1982; D’Souza, 1991; Fisher & Hartman, 1995; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Harper, 2007; Hughey, 1992; Sidanius et al., 2007). The participants shared a strong desire to not isolate themselves from the larger community. This sentiment underscores their choice not to seek membership in predominately Black organizations on campus.

Black students who join historically White fraternities and sororities are often criticized and ostracized by their Black peers, in large part because others believe that they have assimilated in order to be treated as full members (Hughey, 2010). Hughey (2010) further explained that Black students must engage in ways that effectively show their peers that they authentically belong in the organization. Critical race theory proposes that these tensions exist between the notion of being a nationalist and assimilating (Albaba & Nee, 1997). The participants felt strongly that their same-race peers outside of their organizations were curious about their decision to join historically White fraternities and sororities, but they never felt publically condemned or uncomfortable. Their friendships with Black students who joined
historically Black fraternities and sororities were discussed, and participants shared examples of how they had created opportunities for collaboration between organizations. The data contradicts the literature surrounding critical race theory and the activist dimension that implies that marginalized people need to advocate strongly for justice (Trevino, Harris & Wallace, 2008). Participants seemed to believe that underrepresented groups should attempt to assimilate and to blend into mainstream society, which is commonly-supported notion among students that actively seek cross-racial membership (Alba & Nee, 1997).

**Leadership Opportunities and Personal Connections**

By providing opportunities for students to become involved in leadership development positions and campus activities, student organizations play a critical role in campus life. They serve as the primary vehicle for students to develop meaningful relationships and lifelong friendships that are sustained outside of the classroom (Park & Kim, 2013). Leadership opportunities and personal connections made were the two main benefits of their respective organizations participants cited and were largely what maintained their desire to remain active and financially invested.

A major stream in the literature highlights the history of fraternities and sororities, the strong sense of belonging, and the social mobility encountered by their members. The participants all shared that they had experienced the many benefits that are hallmarks of joining a fraternity and sorority, consistent with current literature that highlights academic success, positive relationships with faculty, strong sense of belonging, and the social opportunities integral to the overall experience. Participants credited their membership with aiding them with the many transitional issues surrounding the college experience. According to Park and Kim
(2013), student organizations provide the relationships needed to ensure out-of-classroom connections and ultimately serve as a way to retain students in the collegiate environment.

Outside-of-classroom connections are a positive attribute connected with joining student organizations. The specific benefits of cross-racial membership include involvement in diverse organizations, allowing students to be more professionally competitive, developing and encouraging a more diverse work environment, and greater awareness of cultural differences and backgrounds (Boschini & Thompson, 1998; Shelnutt, 2012). The personal connections described by the participants provided them with a more substantive and fulfilling experience. They described the spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. The students’ experiences are congruent with the literature; particularly their relationships with diverse students within their organizations provide them a fuller experience that they expect to carry with them post-graduation.

**Negative Membership Experience**

Recent incidents surrounding racial and cultural insensitivity displayed by historically White fraternities and sororities continue to challenge the notion of inclusivity and proper social integration of their Black members. Even after describing the many benefits of membership, a few participants honestly reflect about some in-group dynamics that exists. Hughey (2010), found that the deep desire for Black students to obtain leadership roles in the organization outweighed the negative same-race peer responses and the directly-expressed injustice. While the participants had a level of comfort within a homogenous racial environment, they described navigating their various identities and still trying to connect. They shared specific issues surrounding race and how they confronted their brothers and sisters.

**Implications for Practice**
Increased knowledge about this phenomenon advances the overall development of professional practice. Although there are no remaining legal barriers or restraints against Black membership in White fraternal organizations, the racial makeup of historically White fraternities and sororities continues to be largely comprised of White students (Hughey, 2010). This study provided an opportunity for Black students who had joined historically White fraternities and sororities to share their unique experiences. Based on the findings, a few recommendations are included to assist stakeholders who desire to provide a comfortable and inclusive environment for students who engage in cross-racial membership.

Black students’ engagement in out-of-class activities provides a unique opportunity to acquire social status as they access resources and join exclusive networks (Harper et al., 2011). The participants shared an overall satisfaction with their experiences and should have platforms to share their experiences with others. This is important for two reasons. First, in order for Greek organizations to remain viable, racial diversity is a necessary component and must be highly encouraged so that other Black students can learn first-hand about the positive experiences of their same-race peers (Boschini & Thompson, 1998; Shelnutt, 2012). Second, Black students who join historically White fraternities and sororities are often ostracized by same-race peers who do not believe that they are fully integrated in the membership (Hughey, 2010). If racial diversity is imperative to the ongoing growth of historically White fraternities and sororities, current members, national offices, and university administrators need to be aware of the experiences of their Black members.

The participants used terms such as “affirmative action,” “tokenism,” and “spotlighting” to describe their recruitment experiences. They also shared their perceptions that being Black played a factor in both how they were treated by the organizations throughout the recruitment
process and how they experienced the recruitment process. As these groups become more and more diverse, the level of cultural competency must rise. Current members, national offices, and university administrators should be well versed in intercultural skills and have the ability and skill sets to effectively interact with people from different cultures and races. The development of these skills aids equips stakeholders to create mutual levels of respect and trust that can serve as a bridge to the barriers of difference (Hogan, 2011).

Strengthening diversity and competence development can enhance the benefits of cross-racial membership, providing members with a rich experience that is mutually beneficial. This will allow historically White fraternities and sororities the ability to develop in the area of social justice and self-awareness. Benefits of interracial friendships and cross-racial membership include the ability to empathize with other racial/ethnic groups and create positive racial attitudes while significantly decreasing preconceived prejudices (Antonio, 2001; Park & Kim, 2013; McClelland & Linnander, 2006; Powers & Ellison, 1995; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005).

The participants credited their social circles for introducing them to the idea of going through recruitment. Three participants mentioned attending pre-orientation programs that consisted of a majority of White students. As universities become more diverse, it is critical for institutions to better understand the racial climate and issues surrounding inclusivity and connectedness. Programs that do not mirror the diversity of the student population or have barriers that hinder inclusive attendance, they must be re-evaluated. There is a richness gained from a diverse campus. Programs viewed as entrees to university life must be more representative of what the students will encounter upon arrival. A lack of structural diversity negatively impacts the development of interracial friendships during college and the creation of sub-cultures has a significant influence on the lack of forming those bonds (Park & Kim, 2013).
All participants in general mentioned the overall lack of knowledge of fraternity and sorority life. Joining a fraternity or sorority has many remarkable benefits, and on many campuses Greeks are a dominant force. Researchers have linked academic success, higher retention rates, positive relationships with faculty, strong sense of belonging, and moral development of college students to their involvement in community and leadership organizations, such as fraternities and sororities (Abrahamowicz, 1988; Astin, 1999; Matheson, 2005; Shelnutt, 2012). Institutions must find creative ways to provide information about their Greek community to all incoming students and provide a guide that highlights the benefits of the whole community. Administrators should encourage opportunities to introduce the differences between councils or organizations and allow current students to share their lived experiences.

**Recommendation for Future Research**

Additional research is recommended to better understand non-White students who join historically White fraternities and sororities, providing an even greater understanding of the phenomenon. While Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans join historically White fraternities and sororities, the framework used to discuss race often reflects a Black-White binary (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This Black-White binary and the necessity to delimit the study led to the inclusion of only Black students, but in order to gain a deeper understanding, further research must include other non-White members.

Black students that join racial and/or ethnic organizations develop a strong sense of purpose and identity enhancement; they develop an increase sense of racial identity, which leads to greater social involvement and sense of belonging in the university community (Gillard, 1996; Harper 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Sidanius et al., 2007). The literature suggested that Black students that join racial and/or ethnic organizations have a stronger sense of racial identity.
Research is lacking on how racially conscious those that join historically Black fraternities and sororities are. While all of the participants felt that those that joined historically Black fraternities and sororities had a strong racial saliency, further research in this area would provide a better understanding.

According to Fine, Weis, Powell, & Wong (1997), the engaging in cross-racial membership and experiencing interracial friendships provides students with unique social capital that transcends various networks and communities. Future research in this area may provide evidence to assist students in the decision making process about whether to engage in cross-racial membership. Specific research questions include: How have Black students who have joined historically White fraternities and sororities specifically benefit beyond the college experience?

Finally, there is a necessity to closely examine the role of the subculture that is created by *Black Gravity* in order to better understand the complexity of cross-racial memberships and to further explore patterns that are shaped in cross-racial interactions.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of Black students who had joined historically White fraternities and sororities. With the founding of historically White fraternities and sororities came discriminatory clauses, so it is significant to understand the experiences are of Black students who join them today. Racial/cultural socialization and parental expectations of the participants shaped their social friendships and ultimately guided their participation in cross-racial membership. Their overall lack of knowledge of the Greek community, coupled with their perception of historically Black fraternities and sororities, also directed them to historically White fraternities and sororities. Their same-race peers seemed
curious rather than judgmental about their decision to join historically White fraternities and sororities. They felt that they had great relationships with other Black students that served as a bridge for the various communities.

The participants had a sense of racial saliency and strong sense of Black identity but were socialized to not see race as a barrier and did not make the race their strongest identifier. They were well versed about racial systemic oppression and understood that that people are not color blind and that their race can be an issue for others. They did not want to be the spokesperson of their race and often sought ways to be viewed by their level of competence and intelligence rather than their race.

Their overall experiences in Greek organizations were positive and they credited them for their personal connections and leadership opportunities. The close bonds made with sisters and brothers were of particular importance. The term “Black Gravity” was coined by one of the participants describing Black members of his organization who created a sub-group to shape their experience. This phenomenon was acknowledge by the other participants who believed close relationship with another Black member of their organization was instrumental in making their experience positive. Park and Kim (2013) suggested that in order to have a healthy campus community, students need to have the ability to develop meaningful relationships and that student organizations play a significant role in providing the space for those interactions. They are instrumental in creating and shaping the cross-racial interaction and ultimately defining the racial climate.


Zita-Bennett, A. (2011, February). Brothers before enemies: Phi kappa sigma in the American civil war. Presented at the Seventh Annual Graduate History Symposium (AGHS), University of Toronto.
October 15, 2013

Dear Participants,

My name is Clarybel Peguero and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. As the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life at Duke University, I believe you will be a significant participant in my research study. I am investigating the racial diversity within the historically White fraternities and sororities at Duke University.

Selected participants will engage in a one audio-recorded interview, approximately sixty minutes in length and a second interview may be conducted in order to get more in-depth answers to information shared during the first interview. Your identity will be kept completely confidential. Participation in the study is voluntary and will not affect your status at the university nor in your fraternity or sorority. If you decide to participate you can withdraw at any time during the interview process. After the interviews are conducted participants will be able to review the findings for accuracy. The findings of the interview will be published without identify information. Every participant will sign an informed consent form.

If you are comfortable with the nature and purpose of this study and would like to participate please contact by email peguero.cl@husky.neu.edu.

Thank you in advance!

Clarybel Peguero
919-423-0785
peguero.cl@husky.neu.edu
Appendix B: Informed Consent

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Education Department
Clarybel Peguero

“The re-conceptualization of historically White fraternities and sororities”

Dear Participant,

I am inviting you to take part in a research study that will be directed by my doctoral dissertation advisor, Dr. Joseph McNabb. Thank you for your consideration in participating in this study. If you decide to participate in the study I will ask you to sign this statement and will provide you with a copy to keep.

You are being asked to participate in the study because you have self-identified as a Black student who has joined a historically White fraternity or sorority. There are about 75 students that have also identified as such and may participate in this study.

I am investigating the racial diversity within the historically White fraternities and sororities at Duke University.

Selected participants will engage by participating in a one audio-recorded interview, approximately sixty minutes and may be asked to participate in a second interview if more in depth information is needed. Your identity will be kept completely confidential. Participation in the study is voluntary and will not affect your status at the college nor in your fraternity or sorority. If you decide to participate you can withdraw at any time during the interview process. After the interviews are conducted participants will be able to review the findings for accuracy. The findings of the interview will be published without identify information. Every participant will sign an informed consent form.

While I do not see any foreseeable risks in the involvement in the study, I would like for you to decide if this is a study you are willing to voluntarily participate in. Your identity will always be confidential and only this researcher will know your identity. I will remove from the interview all identifying information, including other names of individuals. I will replace all names with code names. Only certified personal from the Northeastern University Review Board will be able to assess information.

No compensation or payment will be given to any participant. Your participation in the study is totally voluntary; you do not have to participate if you do not want to. During the process if you decide to not participate you will not lose any standing with your organization nor your ability to work with the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life.
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 919-423-0785, or via email at peguero.cl@husky.neu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617-373-4588, Email: irb@neu.edu.

I agree to take part in this research.

________________________________________________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part            Date

________________________________________________________________________
Printed name of person above

________________________________________________________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent            Date
Appendix C: Questionnaire: Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity

SCORING INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL INVENTORY OF BLACK IDENTITY (MIBI)

Reverse score all items that have a (R) next to them by subtracting 8 from each individuals’ score on the item. Next, average the scores for each of the items within a particular subscale. DO NOT CREATE A SUM SCORE FOR THE ENTIRE SCALE. Because the MIBI is based on multidimensional conceptualization of racial identity, a composite score from the entire scale is inappropriate.

CENTRALITY ITEMS (8): 1(R), 6, 9, 13 (R), 19, 33, 48, 51 (R)
PRIVATE REGARD ITEMS (6): 4, 7, 8, 24 (R), 54, 55
PUBLIC REGARD ITEMS (6): 5, 15, 17 (R), 52 (R), 53, 56
ASSIMILATION ITEMS (9): 10, 18, 37, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 46
HUMANIST ITEMS (9): 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 35
MINORITY ITEMS (9): 20, 34, 36, 38, 42, 45, 47, 49, 50
NATIONALIST ITEMS (9): 2, 3, 11, 12, 14, 16, 21, 22, 25

### Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Overall, being Black has very little to do with how I feel about myself.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is important for Black people to surround their children with Black art, music and literature.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Black people should not marry interracially.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I feel good about Black people.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Overall, Blacks are considered good by others.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. In general, being Black is an important part of my self-image.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. I am happy that I am Black.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. I feel that Blacks have made major accomplishments and advancements.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. My destiny is tied to the destiny of other Black people.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Blacks who espouse separatism are as racist as White people who also espouse separatism.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Blacks would be better off if they adopted Afrocentric values.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Black students are better off going to schools that are controlled and organized by Blacks.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Being Black is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Black people must organize themselves into a separate Black political force.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. In general, others respect Black people.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Whenever possible, Blacks should buy from other Black businesses.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Most people consider Blacks, on the average, to be more ineffective than other racial groups.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. A sign of progress is that Blacks are in the mainstream of America more than ever before.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. I have a strong sense of belonging to Black people.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. The same forces which have led to the oppression of Blacks have also led to the oppression of other groups.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. A thorough knowledge of Black history is very important for Blacks today.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. Blacks and Whites can never live in true harmony because of racial differences.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Black values should not be inconsistent with human values.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. I often regret that I am Black.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. White people can never be trusted where Blacks are concerned.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. Blacks should have the choice to marry interracially.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>27. Blacks and Whites have more commonalities than differences.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. Black people should not consider race when buying art or selecting a book to read.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>29. Blacks would be better off if they were more concerned with the problems facing all people than just focusing on Black issues.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>30. Being an individual is more important than identifying oneself as Black.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. We are all children of a higher being, therefore, we should love people of all races.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Blacks should judge Whites as individuals and not as members of the White race.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. I have a strong attachment to other Black people.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. The struggle for Black liberation in America should be closely related to the struggle of other oppressed groups.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. People regardless of their race have strengths and limitations.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Blacks should learn about the oppression of other groups.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Because America is predominantly white, it is important that Blacks go to White schools so that they can gain experience interacting with Whites.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Black people should treat other oppressed people as allies.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Blacks should strive to be full members of the American political system.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Blacks should try to work within the system to achieve their political and economic goals.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>41. Blacks should strive to integrate all institutions which are segregated.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. The racism Blacks have experienced is similar to that of other minority groups.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Blacks should feel free to interact socially with White people.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Blacks should view themselves as being Americans first and foremost.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. There are other people who experience racial injustice and indignities similar to Black Americans.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. The plight of Blacks in America will improve only when Blacks are in important positions within the system.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. Blacks will be more successful in achieving their goals if they form coalitions with other oppressed groups.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. Being Black is an important reflection of who I am.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. Blacks should try to become friends with people from other oppressed groups.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>50. The dominant society devalues anything not White male oriented.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51. Being Black is not a major factor in my social relationships.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52. Blacks are not respected by the broader society.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53. In general, other groups view Blacks in a positive manner.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54. I am proud to be Black.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55. I feel that the Black community has made valuable contributions to this society.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56. Society views Black people as an asset.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scales and Subscales of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI)

**Centrality Scale**
1. Overall, being Black has very little to do with how I feel about myself. (R)
2. In general, being Black is an important part of my self-image.
3. My destiny is tied to the destiny of other Black people.
4. Being Black is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am. (R)
5. I have a strong sense of belonging to Black people.
6. I have a strong attachment to other Black people.
7. Being Black is an important reflection of who I am.
8. Being Black is not a major factor in my social relationships. (R)

**Regard Scale**

*Private Regard Subscale*

1. I feel good about Black people.
2. I am happy that I am Black.
3. I feel that Blacks have made major accomplishments and advancements.
4. I often regret that I am Black. (R)
5. I am proud to be Black.
6. I feel that the Black community has made valuable contributions to this society

*Public Regard Subscale*

1. Overall, Blacks are considered good by others.
2. In general, others respect Black people.
3. Most people consider Blacks, on the average, to be more ineffective than other racial groups. (R)
4. Blacks are not respected by the broader society. (R)
5. In general, other groups view Blacks in a positive manner.

(R) *items should be reverse coded.*
Ideology Scale

**Assimilation Subscale**
1. Blacks who espouse separatism are as racist as White people who also espouse separatism.
2. A sign of progress is that Blacks are in the mainstream of America more than ever before.
3. Because America is predominantly white, it is important that Blacks go to White schools so that they can gain experience interacting with Whites.
4. Blacks should strive to be full members of the American political system.
5. Blacks should try to work within the system to achieve their political and economic goals.
6. Blacks should strive to integrate all institutions which are segregated.
7. Blacks should feel free to interact socially with White people.
8. Blacks should view themselves as being Americans first and foremost.
9. The plight of Blacks in America will improve only when Blacks are in important positions within the system.

**Humanist Subscale**
1. Black values should not be inconsistent with human values.
2. Blacks should have the choice to marry interracially.
3. Blacks and Whites have more commonalities than differences.
4. Black people should not consider race when buying art or selecting a book to read.
5. Blacks would be better off if they were more concerned with the problems facing all people than just focusing on Black issues.
6. Being an individual is more important than identifying oneself as Black.
7. We are all children of a higher being, therefore, we should love people of all races.
8. Blacks should judge Whites as individuals and not as members of the White race.
9. People regardless of their race have strengths and limitations.
Ideology Scale (Continued)

**Oppressed Minority Subscale**

1. The same forces which have led to the oppression of Blacks have also led to the oppression of other groups.
2. The struggle for Black liberation in America should be closely related to the struggle of other oppressed groups.
3. Blacks should learn about the oppression of other groups.
4. Black people should treat other oppressed people as allies.
5. The racism Blacks have experienced is similar to that of other minority groups.
6. There are other people who experience racial injustice and indignities similar to Black Americans.
7. Blacks will be more successful in achieving their goals if they form coalitions with other oppressed groups.
8. Blacks should try to become friends with people from other oppressed groups.
9. The dominant society devalues anything not White male oriented.

**Nationalist Subscale**

1. It is important for Black people to surround their children with Black art, music and literature.
2. Black people should not marry interracially.
3. Blacks would be better off if they adopted Afrocentric values.
4. Black students are better off going to schools that are controlled and organized by Blacks.
5. Black people must organize themselves into a separate Black political force.
6. Whenever possible, Blacks should buy from other Black businesses.
7. A thorough knowledge of Black history is very important for Blacks today.
8. Blacks and Whites can never live in true harmony because of racial differences.
9. White people can never be trusted where Blacks are concerned.
Appendix D: Interview Guide for Student Participants

Participant Information

Pseudonym:

Organization:

Year:

Gender: Male  Female

Tell me why you chose to join your fraternity or sorority.

How would you describe your experience as a member of your fraternity and sorority?

Do you feel that your racial identity is relevant in your membership in said organization?

How do you feel you are viewed by same race peers that are not members of historically White fraternities and sororities?

How do you feel you are viewed by same race peers that are members of historically White fraternities and sororities?

In general, is being Black an important part of your self-image?

Do you believe that Black and White people have more commonality then differences?

Do you believe that people regardless of their race have strengths and limitations?

Do you agree with the statement that being an individual is more important than identifying as Black?

What are you thoughts surrounding the statement that the racism Blacks have experienced is similar to that of other minority groups?

Is being Black a major factor in your social relationships?

Is there anything else you would like to mention?

Acceptable probes:
Can you tell me more about that?
Tell me about a time when….
Can you share an example?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>Participant 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why did you choose to join a fraternity or sorority?</td>
<td>I’m from northern New Jersey. Nobody really does Greek life there, because it’s a very different place, in general. My parents are both immigrants from Jamaica, so they have no idea what it is that I’m in right now. They just know they pay some big check every semester. (laughs) I kind of just figured it’d be something I’d do. I’d grown up in America my whole life. It was something to do in college. I figured it’d be cool to try, at least. If I liked it, I liked it. If I didn’t, I didn’t. I would know once I got there. I was the only one out of my group of friends that did it. All of my friends are independent or in the multicultural … not multicultural … service fraternity, APL. None of my friends went Greek. Only one other girl I knew or really knew well was going through recruitment with me. I was like, “I don’t know, I’ll see what happens.” I just figured I’d do it until it didn’t work for me.</td>
<td>I guess to be honest, I think it was a thing that everyone was doing. I only knew about penthouse sororities. It was a bandwagon thing. I am from Georgia. I went in high school in Georgia. Greek life in the South is super intense. When I came here, I made up my mind that I wasn’t going to even join a sorority; but then, it was</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants:
- not a Greek legacy
- first generation American
- just something to do
- social relationships
- social connections
- why not NPHC?
- Racial Salience
just like, “Well, everyone else is doing it. Let me at least see what the hype is all about, and I don't have anything to lose.” That’s why I decided to go through with recruitment.

Participant 3:
I think a lot of the ... honestly I kind of went into it a little sort of naive to everything in terms of maybe like which fraternity was which. For me, the first thing I thought was do I want to be in a fraternity in general in college. I came already from a high school seven years of active training. Duke was already on college. Totally against anything else I applied to. It was a new world for me. I was like, yes, let's do that. Then for me, I was very specific between deciding IFC versus NPHC.

I think I was a little unsure of the fraternity experience in general. Fact for me I knew just from family relations and just historically that NPHC was a lot more of a life-time commitment and a lot more of your whole self commitment which was ... I don't know if I was ready for that. For me IFC was more appealing because I was like if this doesn't work out it won't work out and I can either leave or after college is done so I've seen more of a temporary kind of thing for me to enjoy here.

That was really why I decided that I went into it. But I went into it totally fine with not joining the fraternity. I went to IFC and I did not think I mentioned these people. I was not going to join anything. I had no problem of being like, "not for me." During the rush process I was like, “Not for me, definitely not for me.” It
was just kind of like going through ... you know navigating through.

Participant 4:

I joined my sorority mainly because of the individuals that I knew in that sorority. I wanted ... I was really close with my RA who was a part of that sorority so we ... She kind of introduced me to the idea and I fell in love with everything that she was talking about and also the girls that she introduced me to. That was about fall of freshman year that kind of interaction happened. Before that I didn't know anything about sororities at all.

My parents aren't Greek-affiliated in any way and I grew up in a neighborhood where sororities, fraternities weren't a thing at all. I kind of went in blind and I just kind of became attached to this person. Also, when I went through the recruiting process, I really enjoyed the other conversations that I had and everyone else that I was interacting with with the organization.

Participant 5:

Honestly, coming to [here], I had no idea about what Greek life was like and what it meant. I also didn't realize what a significant population of students it was here. Coming in with your preconceived notions, I definitely felt like "Oh, Greek life is not for me. I'm not interested in just being rowdy all the time. I want to have the Duke experience." Then I felt like when I came to Duke, I realized by the people that I saw who were in Greek
organizations that they actually meant something here and that you can succeed on this campus, while also being someone in a Greek organization. I went through the rush process still pretty much having a very open mind, not dead set on joining a fraternity at that point but going through meeting the people and of like talking to people. I still want to remain active on campus, and I do want a group of people that will support me. Finally, I felt it was totally a possibility in a fraternity. It ended up being the reason why I joined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In general is being Black an important part of your self-image?</th>
<th>Participant 1:</th>
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<td>I think that it’s something I’m more aware of that is important to me. I think that … I don’t know. My mom always made it seem like it was a limitation of sorts. A limitation was something you fought against, whereas it was like, “Well, you need to make sure that you’re always doing the right thing, because if anybody’s going to get in trouble, it’s going to be you. So you need to make sure that you do nothing wrong and that you can prove that.”</td>
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<td>That was always kind of difficult because … I was the kind of kid that never really does anything wrong to begin with, but it always made me take an extra step of, “Is this okay?” So I am the least spontaneous person you’ll ever meet (laughs), just because I’m always constantly trying to think forward of, “How could shit hit the fan?” That’s really what I’m just trying to look for at all times. I don’t think that academically, with colleges or anything, it was ever an</td>
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-racial salience
-racial socialization
-thoughts on being black
-black gravity
-tokenism
-affirmative action
-strengths and limitations
issue. I was very smart for my high school. I was 17th in my graduating class. For me, that was an accomplishment because I knew that I was very smart. For my high school, I was very smart.

I think the only thing that ever bothered me was when I would get college acceptances, but they would come from the multicultural office. It was never only that, but I got, like everybody gets, all of the emails and flyers from every state school that wants you to come, and they’ll pay you to go because you’re top of the class. They’ll literally pay you to go to their school. They’ll take someone else’s tuition and give it to you.

Participant 2:

I would say yes, but not in a sense where I feel compelled to just identify as black or where I feel like I have to … I don’t know. I guess like advocate all the time for black students. Yes, that is. I am a black woman. I remember in high school, people would say, “Oh, but you’re so White like you’re a White black girl.” What’s funny is that, that never bothered me until I got to college because in high school, I was like, “Well, I don’t hang out with a lot of black people.” I understand where they’re getting that, but now I realized that I am a black woman, and I’m not White. That is who I am, and so it bothers me now to hear that. Without being said though, I feel like it is who I am, but may be less of my identity if that make sense like I’m not very heavily involved with BSA, or any black advocacy groups on campus, or anything like that. I guess much so
like I’m a woman. I’m not necessarily a feminist. In the same way, I’m a black woman, but I’m not necessarily advocating for black awareness or black rights or anything like that, but it’s still something that I identify with or who I am and still feel connected to.

Participant 3:

Yes absolutely. I tell people being gay to me is like being right handed if you ask I’ll tell you. You’ll notice sometimes because I might pick up a pen in a certain way to be right handed. Being black doesn’t work out that way. Being black, I’m always black and you always know. Yeah in general it is an identity marker to me that in out through and through I have always been aware as a child. Especially as I got older the way I dress now and it depends on who I’m talking to, the way I speak is often like reminded that I’m black too.

Participant 4:

Um ... I ... It's very different for me because I have a very skewed idea of black culture as in all the black people I know ... I grew up in a 100% black neighborhood in Brooklyn, like a lower middle class income neighborhood. That's my black culture.

My image of black culture ... I didn't have ... and then my image of White culture was ... I made my first White friend when I went to boarding school in 9th grade. My image of White culture was probably, very like upper middle class to wealthy families so I see ... I kind of equate White with rich and preppy and really nice. That is like
my identifier of White culture because I hadn't really experienced anything else.

Then my black culture would be lower middle class like me and like families living in the northeast. Those are two actually opposite sides of the spectrum and I always try to rectify that in what I feel about black and White culture and remember that black people come in a wider spectrum just socio-economically as well and White people come in a broader spectrum, but I haven't experienced that spectrum personally.

Participant 5:

Yeah, I definitely think that. I like to think of myself and especially a lot of my peers going to Duke as successful black people, especially given an environment in which lots of stereotypes exist about different races. There's a lot of negative stereotypes associated with the black race as well. I like to consider that a strong part of my identity because I'm overcoming those stereotypes and showing them that they aren't true.

I guess in general, sometimes if I'm at home or something and someone will go, "Oh, where do you go to school?" and I'm like, "Oh, I go to Duke," you can tell that there's an element of surprise. Do you know what I mean? "Oh, wow, you do?" I wonder if someone who was White told that they were going to Duke. Why are you acting surprised that I go to Duke? If someone's like, "Do you play sports there?" I'm like, "No. Would you ask that of someone who is White and going to Duke?" I take pride in the
fact. I'm black, I go to Duke, and I'm doing really well there. That's what I mean.