

**STOMPING THE YARD IN BLACK AND WHITE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF THE PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF BLACK GREEK LIFE AT
HISTORICALLY BLACK AND PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS**

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore how membership in Black fraternities and sororities shapes the college experiences and perceptions of its members. This research examines how Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness" and Collins' "outsider within" status come into play on college campuses for Black undergraduates affiliated with Black Greek letter organizations. Focus groups consisting of five to seven participants explored how Black Greek culture shapes college experiences, revealing how membership in Black Greek organizations mediates the perceived racial climate at historically Black and predominantly white institutions. Findings indicated that campus racial climate influenced the experiences of Black Greeks in a variety of ways including: social life, academics, networking opportunities, post-college preparation and sense of on-campus support.

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INTRODUCTION

Black fraternities and sororities arose in the early 1900's during a time in American history when African Americans were socially abused and oppressed. With the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision legalizing racial segregation in public facilities, "The turn of the century was rapidly becoming a period of racial inequality and social disadvantage for African Americans" (Ross 2000:5). Blacks in America found themselves separated from white communities in many aspects of their lives. On college campuses, Ross (2000) notes that "African American students were isolated and segregated from the general student population" (p. 6) which compelled them to create student organizations for themselves, ultimately resulting in the establishment of the Black Greek system known as the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC). According to Ross (2000),

Secret societies such as fraternities and sororities also provided students with housing, study groups, and a social environment in which students could grow with others. However, since African American students were excluded from these historically white organizations, there was literally nowhere for these African American students to turn except inward for solutions (p. 6).

On December 4, 1906 seven young Black men who were enrolled at Cornell University founded the first Black collegiate fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. (Ross 2000; Kimbrough 2003). Over the next 60 years increasing numbers of Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLO) were established: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (1908); Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. (1911); Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. (1911); Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (1913); Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. (1914); Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. (1920); Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. (1922) and Iota Phi Theta

Fraternity, Inc. (1963). These nine organizations are often referred to as the “Divine Nine” and comprise the NPHC. The establishment of these organizations occurred at Black and white institutions as “Black students on both historically Black campuses and predominately white campuses founded fraternal organizations to enhance their college experiences and to deal with political and social issues facing the Black community” (McClure 2006:1039). McClure (2006:1036) asserts that a “structural and normative change in the college environment since predominantly white institutions [PWI] began admitting African American students” has yet to occur. For Black students, white ideals encouraging assimilation to white culture persist both on college campuses and in American society resulting in the continued need for Black Greek letter organizations (BGLO).

Today, having existed for over a century, Black fraternities and sororities create an elite social group within the Black community. These organizations are responsible for producing some of the nation’s most prominent Black leaders (Ross 2000) and the most influential students on college campuses (Kimbrough and Hutcheson 1998). Yet, the influences of BGLOs on the collegiate experience are not well researched. Most of the existing literature and popular media emphasize negative aspects of Black Greek life such as their rigorous pledging and hazing rituals. Although “Black fraternal organizations are a ‘jewel’ to many African Americans who revere their heritage, character, history and values” (Nuwer 1999:180) the pledge process/hazing rituals over time have drawn significant negative media attention. Unfortunately, this pledge process has become a stereotypical defining characteristic of Black Greek life. Evidence of these type of rituals

dates as far back as 1920, while the more positive features of these organizations has not been well publicized by the media (Nuwer 1999:178; Kimbrough and Hutcheson 1998: 97).

Walter Kimbrough, author of *Black Greek 101* and one of the leading contributors to Black Greek literature notes that “very little has been written that provides new knowledge on the Black Greek experience” (Kimbrough 2003:15). The primary purpose of this research is to investigate the influence of Black Greek affiliation on the collegiate experience and how it prepares members for graduation. Historically Black fraternities and sororities have created a unique culture for their collegiate members, yet their impact on negotiating the perceived racial climate on college campuses has yet to be adequately explored. Through this project, I wish to shed light on new aspects of Black Greek life in hopes of obtaining a better understanding of the effects of BGLO affiliation on its members. A number of prominent Black American leaders are members of Divine Nine organizations including Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (Alpha Phi Alpha), Shirley Chisholm (Delta Sigma Theta), Rev. Al Sharpton (Phi Beta Sigma) and Zora Neal Hurston (Zeta Phi Beta) to name a few. More knowledge about how BGLO affiliation impacts its members will be beneficial as it can help to explain how leadership skills are reinforced among new generations of Black Greeks and in what ways minority-focused organizational structures like Black fraternities and sororities can help to facilitate the success of Black college students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Campus Racial Climate and Composition

Previous research has focused on Blacks on both historically Black and predominantly white campuses. Variations have been found in the collegiate experience depending on the campus racial composition. Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) are institutions created prior to 1964 for the sole purpose of providing post-secondary education to Black Americans (Brown II and Davis 2001). Currently a college or university has to have a student population of greater than 50 percent Black to be classified as an HBCU (Brown II and Davis 2001). Education at HBCUs has been described by some as "mediocre" (Allen, Epps, and Haniff 1991) possibly explaining higher overall grade point averages among these students relative to their counterparts at predominantly white institutions. Socially, Black campuses may assist Black students in adjusting to collegiate life by providing supportive Black organizations for them to join (Allen, Epps, and Haniff 1991; Kimbrough 1995; Kimbrough and Hutcheson 1998). Similarly, attending a Black college or university has been found to contribute to the development of positive self-image and self-esteem of Black students. According to Oates (2004), the fact that the faculty and staff at HBCUs have been reported to be more attentive to students' needs is no doubt a contributing factor. Along these same lines, some studies have found that students perceived Black campuses as more resourceful than white campuses because of the availability of social networks (Allen, Epps, and Haniff 1991; Brown II and Davis 2001). Brown II and Davis (2001) argue that the most significant difference between historically Black and predominantly white institutions is

the emphasis on each student's roles and expectations for the future. HBCUs prioritize fostering competent leaders who will serve their communities upon graduation (p. 33). Furthermore, they pride themselves on better preparing Black students for membership in the broader society (p. 44).

According to D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) Black college students have a very different experience on predominantly white campuses as compared with Black campuses. Socially they have a harder time adjusting to the campus community. This stems from the fact that they know few, if any, people on campus prior to attending (D'Augelli and Hershberger 1993). Cureton's (2003) study showed that Black students in predominantly white settings are forced to adapt culturally and feel pressured to assimilate into the mainstream white environment. Additionally, Black students often suffer from identity problems (Allen, Epps and Haniff 1991) as a result of anti-black sentiments that still exist on white campuses and in the wider society (Oates 2004). Undoubtedly, as a result of these issues, "Black students on predominately white campuses often report high levels of alienation and social isolation as well as pressure to conform to the white ideal" (McClure 2006:1036). Alienation also stems from the tense racial climate that often exists on PWI campuses. "This climate of prejudice and discrimination creates disincentives for the minority student to interact with non-minority students" resulting in the desire to segregate themselves (Cabrera et al. 1999:136). Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) found that racial micro-aggression or "unconscious and subtle forms of racism" stemming from attitudes of white superiority are common

practices at many PWIs (p. 60). “Like other stressors, experiences of prejudice and discrimination are associated with psychological distress that can lead to maladjustment of students” on predominantly white campuses (Cabrera et al. 1999:135).

The low numbers of Blacks at PWIs contributes to a feeling of powerlessness in the Black student population (D’Augelli and Hershberger 1993). This ultimately affects their academic performance resulting in lower grade point averages. Black students on white campuses may therefore seek to combat the feelings of powerlessness by participating in predominantly Black extra-curricular activities. Tillar (1974:212) notes that “Black students tend to gravitate toward Black social organizations where more intimate social contacts involve students of their own race.” Indeed, Black students often over-dedicate themselves to these activities, given that they provide them with a comfortable atmosphere, situated within the campus Black community. Kimbrough (1995), for example, found that the energy Black students devote to the few Black-centered organizations on campus at predominantly white schools posed a major distraction from academic work.

Another problem often encountered by Black students is that social interaction between men and women on white campuses can sometimes be awkward because of the imbalance in the sex ratio, as women students typically outnumber men students by a ratio of two to one (Frazier and Rhoden 2011:234). D’Augelli and Hershberger (1993), in their study on the well-being of Black students on white campuses, found that the disproportionate sex ratio of African American students contributed to dissatisfaction with collegiate life as fostering social relationships was difficult (p. 78). Black males have been found to experience greater social isolation and higher college attrition rates

than females (McClure 2006:1036). Contributing to a sense of isolation and lack of support for Black students on white campuses is the scarcity of Black faculty and staff (D'Augelli and Hershberger 1993; Kimbrough 1995; Cureton 2003; Harper and Hurtado 2007). Allen's (1985) study on correlates of success for Black students on white campuses found that "student participation in Black student organizations, relations with faculty, perception of campus race relations, and evaluation of campus support services" were all indicative of whether a student had a positive collegiate experience (p. 139). Black students reported a better experience when they are more involved on campus. On historically Black campuses, "Black students have more opportunities to become integrated into campus," thus tend to fare better than Black students on white campuses before and after graduation (Allen, Epps, and Haniff 1991).

It is evident, based on past research, that campus racial composition affects collegiate experience by influencing the campus racial climate. However, no studies have been conducted on how Black Greek affiliation may impact the undergraduate experience differently depending on the campus racial climate. Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) note that a positive campus racial climate is characterized by the inclusion of administrators, faculty and students of color, the utilization of a curriculum reflecting the experiences of racial minorities, and the existence of programs targeted towards the support of students of color (p. 62). Since these things are prioritized differently at HBCUs and PWIs, I expect that Black Greek life will also manifest itself differently on these campuses. This research project aims to explore how the socio-cultural aspects of Black Greek life may influence, mediate, and alter the effects of the perceived campus racial climate in the collegiate experiences of its members.

Double Consciousness and the Outsider Within: Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Collegiate Black Greek Experience

The conflicting social statuses of being simultaneously Black and American make it difficult for African Americans to create an identity for themselves. Du Bois (1903:3) stated that “The negro is . . . born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness.” His metaphoric use of the veil denotes “a clear separation, or barrier, between African Americans and whites” (Ritzer 2008:205) symbolizing the idea that Blacks and whites exist together in American society yet are segregated from each other. Du Bois labeled this lifestyle of living with a veil as “double-consciousness” and defined it as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (Du Bois 1903:3). For Du Bois, Black Americans have two at-odds identities: being Black and being American. These two identities contradict each other as Blacks often find themselves denied the same rights and privileges of white Americans simply because of the color of their skin. Despite this reality, Blacks continue to identify themselves as American and often attempt to find a balance or resolution between their conflicting racial and nationality identities. Du Bois used the term “strife” to describe this constant struggle of attempting to merge the two identities into one.

I expect that in today’s society, double- consciousness and the resulting strife experienced by Black Americans contributes to the desire to pursue Black Greek membership. As Blacks struggle with creating a self-consciousness that encompasses both aspects of their identity, they surround themselves with others in similar positions as their own in hopes of creating a sense of community. Hughey (2007) notes that Black

college students are unlikely to “engage in social activities with non-minority students” (p. 58) because these alternative predominantly Black, on-campus communities provide a space where they can be both Black and American without any struggle, thus relieving Black students from the identity crisis they face when experiencing predominantly white campus spaces or operating in the greater American society. Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000:70) agreed when noting how social “counter-spaces serve as sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained.”

Patricia Hill Collins’ (2000) concept of “outsider-within locations” similarly helps us understand the significance of “counter-spaces” for Black college students. When an individual’s ties to an “outsider” group conflicts with their choosing full insider status, they become an outsider-within. Black fraternity and sorority members are outsiders-within on both historically Black and predominantly white campuses as their interests in predominantly Black organizations and institutions often signifies their rejection or resistance to full assimilation into mainstream white culture and as a result conflicts with more general American values. Members of the BGLOs develop significant ties to the Black community by sponsoring and participating in local events such as community service projects (Hughey 2007), adult, youth and children's auxiliary programs (Ross 2000), and entertainment activities such as step shows (Fine 1991). The prioritization of philanthropic efforts like giving back to the Black community may conflict with broader American values like upward mobility, achieving wealth, accessing power, and obtaining prestige. Most non-Blacks and “many white students are not aware of the tradition or even existence of BGLOs” (Hughey 2007:17). Consequently non-Blacks may view them

“through a lens that results in stereotypical and reductive conclusions” ultimately undermining their founding purpose and significance within the Black community (Hughey 2007:17). In this way, “counter-spaces” and “outsider-within locations” are necessary for Black Greeks “to nurture a supportive environment wherein their experiences are validated and viewed as important” (Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso 2000:70).

Since all nine NPHC organizations are non-profit and community-service based, they can be considered voluntary associations. Voluntary associations are organized groups in which the members are not paid for their participation (McClure 2006:1040). Although members do not receive financial rewards, there are other benefits to being affiliated with these types of organizations. McClure (2006) notes that the social structure of Black Greek life yields several benefits such as helping to improve students’ institutional connections, building stronger ties to the on-campus community, lowering perceptions of isolation, and aiding students in establishing and maintaining social networks. There is a relationship between an organization's social structure and its culture. Social structure refers to the “institutional regulation of permissible and required procedures for attaining” cultural goals (Merton 1968:187). Cultural goals are the aspirations individuals have that reflect the norms and values of their particular culture. Culture, then, is defined as the “organized set of normative values governing behavior which is common to members of a designated society or group” (Ritzer 2008:256).

Black Greek life has its own subculture with a unique set of values, attitudes, beliefs, norms, customs, practices and language (Fine 1991). I expect that this culture manifests itself differently depending on the campus racial composition. The research

suggests that at Black colleges and universities BGLO membership strengthens ties to the campus community as well as aids in solidifying career goals as Black role models are readily accessible. At PWIs on the other hand, membership in BGLOs will help students overcome some of the negative campus experiences of isolation and micro-aggressions by providing a sense of belonging (Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso 2000; Ballantine and Hammack 2009). Ultimately, Black Greek letter organizations serve as “counter-spaces” for mediating the “double-consciousness” and outsider-within situations Black Greek students often face. This research will explore to what extent members of BGLOs believe this is the case and the extent to which college experiences and support for career goals may reflect differences in campus racial climate on historically Black versus predominantly white campuses.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions and Design

A qualitative analysis of this topic is needed to fill the gap in the current literature. According to Berg (2009) qualitative procedures are appropriate when the researcher is interested in 1) accessing unquantifiable facts about a target population, 2) discovering how a population understands and perceives their daily lives, and 3) evaluating how a population or group makes sense of themselves and others. The primary research questions this project seeks to investigate are:

1. How do students describe the campus racial climate at historically Black and predominantly white campuses?

2. How do students perceive that Black Greek affiliation affects their collegiate experience, academic and career aspirations, and sense of support on campus?
3. How do these experiences vary depending on campus racial composition?

Focus groups were conducted to obtain the rich detailed data needed on respondent's perceptions about their collegiate experiences. "The focus group is an interview style designed for small groups of unrelated individuals" (Berg 2009:158). Focus groups effectively allow, through discussion, the unveiling of socio-cultural characteristics of the target group. A focus group design was the best qualitative method for this project on the perceptions of Black Greek life and campus racial climate as it allowed me to observe the respondents interactions with each other. A benefit of focus groups is that as members interact with one another they are able to elicit themes based on common knowledge, expertise and experience with a particular phenomenon.

Although I share with the participants' knowledge of Black Greek life, my experience is limited. One-on-one interviews would be less likely to yield data on the general perceptions of a group as compared to the information gained through group dialogue and interaction. I conducted four focus groups: two with Black Greeks attending historically Black colleges and universities (one private and one public) and two with Black Greeks attending predominantly white universities (one private and one public).

Recruitment and Data Collection

My target population included currently enrolled undergraduate students who are members of one of the nine historically Black Greek letter organizations. There are over 500 Black Greeks attending college in the Middle Tennessee area. I used snowball/referral sampling, beginning with my personal network of Black Greeks, to

recruit respondents. As participants were recruited I asked each to recommend additional people who might be willing to participate in the study. As people were identified I sorted them into groups by school type, ensuring the representation of a variety of Black Greek letter organizations. Overall, I conducted four focus groups with 25 Black Greeks (nine women/ sixteen men) of traditional college age, representing eight NPHC organizations.

The first focus group was conducted with the students at a public PWI. Six students (three women/ three men) participated representing six Black Greek letter organizations (three fraternities/ three sororities). The focus group session lasted for an hour and a half and took place on campus at the student union building. The second focus group session with students attending a public HBCU lasted two and a half hours. The session took place at a local community center near the university's campus. Eight students (three women/ five men) participated, representing three NPHC organizations (ones sorority/ two fraternities). The third focus group was conducted with students from a private HBCU and took place on campus in the lounge of a dormitory. It lasted two hours and included five students (one woman/ four men), representing three BGLOs (one sorority/ two fraternities). A final focus group session lasted for two hours and included students attending a private PWI. This session also took place in the lounge of an on-campus dormitory and consisted of six students (two women/ four men) representing three organizations (one sorority/ two fraternities).

An oral consent agreement and interview guide was created for this research. The interview guide included several open-ended questions regarding the collegiate experience of Black Greeks (see Appendices A and B). I asked questions and then allowed participants to discuss among themselves, probing when needed as shown in the

interview guide. As facilitator, I attempted to allow adequate time for respondents to sufficiently discuss each question, while moving the group along to ensure ample time to cover all topics.

In order to ensure confidentiality of the focus group participants, prior to starting the session I stressed the importance of confidentiality with the desire to create a comfortable space for respondents to share openly. Each person was asked to read a consent agreement and to provide oral consent at the beginning of the discussion. Respondents were assured that they did not have to answer any questions that they were uncomfortable with and that if at any time they wished to leave the focus group session they could do so without penalty. None, however, exercised this option. Participants were informed that the focus group interaction would be recorded and transcribed for data analysis and that no personal identities would be used in written reports.

Data Analysis

The first step in analyzing data was to transcribe “each question asked by the moderator and each answer given by the focus group participants” (Berg 2009:180). Second, I read through each transcription for a general understanding of the nature and tone of the conversation. Next I analyzed the transcriptions to locate and identify patterns and trends. Patterns were noted in “similarly used words, themes, or answers to questions” (Berg 2009:181). Patterns were identified and cross-checked for consistency within each focus group as well as between the historically Black institutions and predominantly white institutions. When common and divergent themes were identified in

the data these were coded into the following response categories: Academics, Social Life, Campus Resources/Support, Networking Opportunities, and Career Development/Perceived Post-Graduation Preparation.

Because of financial and travel restrictions, my sample was limited to the middle Tennessee area. As a result this study does not take into consideration geographical/regional variations in Black Greek life, thus limiting the generalizability of findings. In addition, this study does not account for variations that may exist within each Black Greek letter organization as “the data obtained from focus group interviews are not identical to individual interview data” yet are “group data which reflects the collective notions shared and negotiated by the group” (Berg 2009:178). These data are subject to “the focus group effect” when “participants with seemingly unpopular or minority points of view might not feel empowered to offer divergent perspectives and subsequently may decide against reporting something different or controversial” (Harper and Hurtado 2007:15). Considering some historically Black organizations are larger and more prominent than others, the experiences of these collegiate members might vary from members of the smaller organizations resulting in the latter's reluctance to speak out thus limiting the study's findings. Finally, my sorority membership, as the researcher, may impact my ability to recruit participants as well as the quality of data collected. I have to be able to “bracket my personal views” while collecting data and attempt to observe impartially. Off-setting this consideration, however, it is also likely that my six-year experience in a Black sorority provides me with insights and understandings that helped me to build rapport and trust with the participants.

FINDINGS

My research revealed how students perceive the campus racial climate at historically Black and predominantly white institutions. Additionally, when discussing how Black Greek affiliation impacts the collegiate experience, five themes emerged: social life, academics, networking opportunities, post-college preparation, and campus support. In the following sections I elaborate on these and discuss how the collegiate experience of Black fraternity and sorority members varies depending on the campus racial climate.

HBCU Climate

Historically Black colleges and universities are perceived as inherently Black by members of Black Greek letter organizations. Participants reported enjoying the Afrocentric aspects of their campuses and university communities. When asked to describe the campus racial climate a female student at the private HBCU, which is 99% Black, elatedly responded with, “Black! Super Black! Black people everywhere!” A male student at the public HBCU, which is 71% Black and 21% white, had a similar response when describing the campus with pride as: “Black! It’s completely Black!” However, I found variations in perceptions of the campus racial climate of the historically Black universities when discussing diversity on campus. The Black Greek students at the private HBCU mentioned how having international students added to the Black-conscious atmosphere. One male student said “We are super diverse but we are so Black! Every single shade of it!” Another student supported his comment by stating “We do have like international students but they’re Black ‘cause they’re either African, or

Jamaican, or Caribbean or something of that nature.” Diversity looked different on the campus of the public HBCU. This school has two campuses: a main one and a downtown location. The respondents from this school mentioned seeing students of Saudi Arabian, Kurdish and African descent but noted that these other ethnicities were typically concentrated in the majors that hold classes at the downtown campus. A female student described this segregation when saying: “Yeah, the downtown campus, a lot of people don’t utilize that but that’s where the majority of the other races are.” Another student agreed when stating: “If you’re in like sciences and business and stuff like that I feel like you’re going to get a more diverse experience because I don’t want to stereotype them but more outside of the African American community, you see the Kurdish, you see the white people doing Biology and Chemistry and Nuclear Medicine ... The Foreign people are in the harder programs ... So if you want to get that diversity you have to major in science and stuff like that.”

Although the students at the private HBCU noted that everyone on campus appeared Black externally, they nonetheless reported experiencing a culture gap with the international students. A male student noted: “We still have this whole division between international students whether we want to admit it or not. There is a divide sometimes.” In attempting to explain this division another student mentioned: “It’s certain things that are okay and are acceptable to us that aren’t okay to them. And there are things that are okay to them that are not okay to us!” Supporting that comment a student stated: “They band together. Like, the international students, they’re all a unit and ... we don’t necessarily always have a particular reason to interact with them. It’s that cultural divide because you know they look at us like ‘well why do you do that?’ And we look at them

like ‘why do you do that? Why don’t you do this instead?’ But we don’t actually have the conversation.” A female student clarified the partition between Blacks and international students when saying: “It’s not like American students versus international students. It’s not like that at all. It’s a small divide that comes from cultural stuff and ... if something was to be wrong with them, I would care.”

My research indicates that variations exist within the campus racial climate of historically Black colleges and universities. Although initially described as solely Black by both the private and public HBCU students, further discussion revealed that each campus has unique aspects to their racial climates. The public university students are segregated by race/ethnicity as a majority of the racial minorities (in this case, non-Black students) major in programs that hold their classes at the downtown campus, a completely different physical location from the predominantly Black main campus. This results in the diversity of students’ collegiate experiences being dependent upon the major they choose. The racial climate at the private HBCU, on the other hand, involved a slight separation between American Black students and international students. This separation stemmed from cultural differences and misunderstandings.

PWI Climate

Black students at predominantly white institutions described a different experience on campus than their peers at HBCUs. Students at the public PWI, which is 18% Black and 70% white, described their campus racial climate as “white” and “segregated.” One female student noted that “It’s self-segregated, not like forced.” Another female student explained that “people like to hang with people that look like them.” A male student agreed when stating, “I just think people feel more comfortable

around people of the same skin tone as them[selves].” One student even attributed the racial segregation on campus to the state’s history of racism and oppression of Blacks. Fearing the legacy of prejudice and discrimination had been passed down to current generations one female student stated, “people have stereotypes, so you know [white] people may think Black people are one way but they’re really not. That could be why they separate themselves.”

Students at the private PWI, which is only 7% Black and 62% white, initially described their experience on campus as “stressful.” One student explained, “It’s like going to two completely different schools.” Through discussion the students realized how they are partly responsible for this separation. One student noted, “I feel like in a sense we’ve closed ourselves off.” Another student agreed: “Yeah, we’re comfortable [around Blacks].” I found that the students at the private PWI were particularly frustrated with the white privilege on campus. When discussing how the campus is split racially one female student said, “There’s a really big culture gap. They [white people] don’t care ... and I feel like...in order to survive here we have to learn about theirs [culture]. You have to learn the “other school’s” culture and you have to understand it and with them it’s [racial assimilation] optional.” In addition to their dissatisfaction with the ambivalence or ignorance among whites on their campus, students at the private PWI also mentioned a divide between Black Greeks and other racial minorities. When asked to describe race relations between Blacks and other racial/ethnic groups they responded, “That’s an even different culture gap.” A male student attempted to explain how there is a general lack of knowledge of each groups culture when stating, “I feel like they don’t learn about us.

Like for us, we learn about our [history] and we learn about like the white people's. And I feel like they have to learn about theirs and white people's too ... [but] they don't necessarily have to learn about Black people."

It is evident that segregation between Black students and the broader "white" campus continues to exist at predominantly white institutions. At some PWIs this divide is not just present with whites but with other racial/ethnic minority groups as well. At both PWIs and HBCUs segregation was found to be self-initiated indicating that the racial dynamics prevalent throughout American society, resulting from the anti-Black sentiments Oates (2004) described, are being internalized and reproduced on college campuses. Black fraternity and sorority membership was often sought to combat Black students' feelings of isolation on PWI campuses as well as add to their blossoming identities as future Black leaders which are fostered on HBCU campuses. In the following sections I will detail the perceived benefits of Black Greek affiliation in the lives of its members at both types of institutions.

Social Life

The greatest impact being affiliated with a Black Greek letter organization had on its members is on their social life. At the public HBCU being a member of a Black fraternity or sorority was equated to being a celebrity on campus. After joining, members mentioned the immediate attention they received on social media and the invitations to exclusive social events they were offered. Aside from the marching band, Black Greek life is the most prominent extra-curricular activity on historically Black campuses and as a result is often admired by non-Greeks.

The students at the public HBCU described being a Black Greek on their campus as being in a constant mode of competition. A male student stated, “Everything you do is a competition. You’re always trying to get the most popular people. And of course step shows you’re always trying to win. Strolling too, it’s just everything is a competition now. I mean you have some people in the organization who know that the competition is just fun and games but a lot of ... people go crazy now.” Black Greeks find themselves competing for the ultimate title of “Who Runs the Yard” which is typically attributed to size of chapter, accolades from step and stroll competitions, as well as rapport of the organization amongst the campus community.

It was also reported that Black Greek affiliation affects friendships and romantic relationships. Because Black Greek life is such a coveted activity at HBCUs, many members find themselves questioning people’s motives after joining. One fraternity member retold a story about how he was used by a friend because of his Greek affiliation: “I’ve gained a few friends [since joining] and they actually told me the truth. Actually one of my neos! I thought [he was] genuinely helping me move out of my room. But he told me, ‘I only helped you because you were a Sigma and I was trying to get down.’ And so to me, that kind of like really hurt me ... I’ve been genuine to you all this time and now you’re saying the only reason why you was cool with me was because of Sigma? ... I was kind of offended and that did kind of mess up our friendship just a little bit.”

A sorority member outlined the difficulties of dating a non-Greek: “some places I go, he can’t go with me cause he’ll feel out of place ... He’s not Greek ... And if we go to events, if they start strolling, of course I wanna stroll too ... I can’t help it. So it’s like you have to pick and choose your battles because we can’t always be together anymore

and we used to be attached at the hip ... I see why people date other Greeks or don't date outside the Greek world once you get into it." According to participants, the experience of Black Greeks varies so much from an average, non-Greek student at an HBCU that it feels as if the NPHC members operate in a different world than the rest of campus. Just as Fine described in her 1991 study, this world has its own unique culture and non-Greeks who are unfamiliar with their language and practices feel out of place. Students attending the private HBCU could relate to the same increased popularity as their public HBCU counterparts. One sorority member stated, "I noticed that people pay more attention to the minute details of my life. Like, anything as simple as who I study with to where I'm going or anything! ... People just pay attention to the really small details and I feel as though I'm like a normal person but people tend to talk me up to be something more than what I am. And rumors about me are more permanent ... If something comes up about me or if something comes up about the people in my organization, like, people want to talk about it."

Greek life also impacted friendships and relationships at the private HBCU. One student explained why some members experience an increase in attention they receive after joining: "When it comes to relationships and being Greek, you know you have those people who are like groupies 'cause of the stereotypes that are associated with the love lives of the different sororities and fraternities." Another student elaborated on how this negatively affects romantic relationships: "It makes it hard to have a relationship sometimes because it's like you have this notoriety now affiliated with your letters. And so the person that you may end up with who may be non-Greek may not completely, you

know, understand the dynamics of it and they become insecure because you have these people who are the groupies and they're all in your face or are all over you ... It makes it kind of difficult to have a genuine relationship."

Oftentimes old friends don't understand the dimensions of relationships with new fraternity brothers and sorority sisters once a member has joined a Black Greek letter organization. One student discussed how he balanced the two: "With me being a neo ... I'm new to everything. I have friends that are Sigmas and some friends that aren't Greek affiliated. Whenever I'm like okay I'm going to go hang out with some frat or some of the sorors real quick some of my friends might be like 'oh he just hangs out with [them].'" No! It's like, I'm still trying to work the whole social aspect out." Students from both HBCUs acknowledged that a social hierarchy exists on campus. If a non-Greek student was interested in pursuing Black Greek membership they should start off by joining a social club. Then they should seek membership in non-NPHC Greek letter organizations like Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity or Alpha Kappa Psi business fraternity. Lastly one of the Divine Nine organizations should be pursued. Although there are exceptions to the rule, this is the route that most of the participants followed.

My research revealed that being a member of a Black fraternity or sorority required the maintenance of a social presence on campus. Members described the obligation to attend social events as important for recruitment purposes. One fraternity member noted, "you want to make sure that like your organization is present at campus events because you want to give the people something to say they want to be a part of. If you're not visible, then how could anybody say 'oh, I want to be like that?' ... So yeah it's definitely like an obligation. Sometimes you have to suck it up and be like man I

really don't want to go but let me go put my social face on and socialize with people.” Despite the competitive nature of Black Greek life, members of Black sororities and fraternities stressed the significance of supporting other organizations to ensure they would have successful events and programs. One female student at the private HBCU said, “You want people to support you, so you have to support them. You want the Alphas to come to your event, the Zetas have to be at their event smiling and laughing and dancing and having a good time.”

At the predominantly white institutions students reported that joining a Black Greek letter organization exposed them to new groups of people and made them more sociable by teaching them social skills and requiring them to attend social events. One student at the public PWI said, “I've met many a different people from all over the area, all over campus. I think becoming Greek expanded my range of people. It made it more diverse instead of just staying in the little group of friends that you initially have. It makes you open up and become a little bit more sociable.” A member of a sorority at the same university agreed when stating, “Becoming a member of a Black Greek [organization] has made me stronger as a person because I tend to be by myself and more quiet. And now I'm more open and mingle more with people and depend more on people rather than being more to myself.”

In addition to helping some of its members break out of their shell, Black Greek life at PWIs was also responsible for restricting certain actions of its members. A female student provided an example of how some of her actions were limited after joining her organization: “People are watching us and we can't say the things that we want to say because of the letters that we have. So if I want to cuss you out I can't do it because you

know ... that's going to make my whole chapter look bad. That's going to put a bad look on my entire organization. So yeah, it [Black Greek affiliation] has impeded my social life ... I can't say what I want to say. I'll get my letters snatched because I did have an experience where ... somebody turned in my tweets [to the Greek Life Office] and I was nationally suspended from my organization. So yeah you cannot do everything you want to do." Members of Black fraternities and sororities did not appreciate losing a portion of their individuality but recognized it came with the popularity. Because the athletic programs at the public PWI were not significant, Black Greeks received an even bigger spotlight on campus. One fraternity member said, "Once you become Greek you're kind of placed on a pedestal and you're always being watched. So no matter what you do, good or bad, people are always going to find something to talk about with you or with your organization."

PWI Greek students experienced a change in the dynamics of their friendships and personal relationships after joining their organizations as well. A male student explained this change when stating, "Before you go Greek you usually have a certain group of friends that you've been kickin' it with. And once you go Greek you develop line brothers and line sisters and that type of stuff and your friendships with these [old] people are on a completely different level than your line brothers and line sisters as in what you went through to join your organization. So there are certain things that you can't talk about around your old friends that you would talk about all day with your line brothers and line sisters ... It does oftentimes affect personal lives and past friendships." BGLO members gain new friends and have new loyalties and commitments, after joining, that their old friends or partners who are not Greek do not understand. The secretive

nature of Black Greek life restricts them from being able to discuss certain things with people outside of their organization, resulting in damaged friendships and relationships.

Black Greeks at the private PWI acknowledged that they were also encouraged to attend social events. One female student noted, “I think that before I was Greek I didn’t feel the need to always be out and about or attend certain events, attend certain parties. But as a way to kind of shed positive light on your sorority, going out and fellowshiping with other Greeks and going to parties and strolling will put a big kind of responsibility on making sure that you are out on the social scene. And I think it enhanced my college experience because I probably wouldn’t have been at the party. I probably would have been somewhere studying.” She further explained the importance of having a social presence at a school where Black students are a minority: “at a PWI it’s not a given that everybody understands Black Greek life. When I got here I didn’t even understand, I didn’t even know what it meant. I thought there was one sorority. It was stressful. I didn’t know there were any frats ... So you want to make sure that you’re again not lost in the shuffle because people don’t even know that you exist.” So unlike students at HBCUs who come to college familiar with Black Greek letter organizations and their traditions, many Black students attending PWIs are completely unaware of their existence.

Private PWI students also became skeptical of people's motives to befriend or date them after joining their organizations. A member of a fraternity mentioned, “You never know if somebody is trying to be your friend ‘cause they just want to be your friend or if they are trying to join your organization or so and so told them, ‘yo you need to talk to this person if you want a chance to make line.’ Or if it’s a significant other or

somebody that you are interested in, you don't know if they are interested in you because they think you are a great person or if they are just chasing the letters. And that's real. You just always have to be wary. And it can sometimes make you cynical. You may assume the worst even when somebody hasn't done anything to really make you think that way."

Because the private PWI had a sports program that was a part of a major collegiate athletic conference, the students acknowledged that athletes were held in the highest esteem within the Black community on campus. A fraternity member explained the hierarchy of extra-curricular activities for Blacks at their school: "I would put football at the top but like Greek is the one that pretty much anybody can make it to. Like there's plenty of people that probably won't ever have the physical prowess to be able to be on the football team. But being Greek, all you need is like the right exposure to join the right organization. So I feel like it's the one that's sought after most readily." A sorority member agreed: "They are like two different tiers. Like football, I don't feel bad 'cause I'm not a football player ... But I can try to be Greek and that is something that is attainable even if I don't get it. So I do think ... it has the most, after football, it has the most social power."

Academics

Each of the nine historically Black fraternities and sororities has a principle pertaining to academics and scholarship. Despite this fact, in my research I found variations in how Black Greeks on each campus prioritized their schoolwork. At the public HBCU I found that the social aspect of Black Greek life was seemingly emphasized more than academics. A fraternity member noted, "I think the number one

thing that we as Black Greek letter organizations here at a historically Black institution ... fail to remember is the scholarship aspect of being in a fraternity or sorority because we get so caught up in the social life and the social aspect that we forget to hold our brothers and sisters accountable for their G.P.A.s, their grades, their tests, their midterms. And being in college, you're going to choose a party. The average, typical, college student will choose a party over studying for a final."

While the public HBCU students attributed their lack of concern for academics to the general American college culture, the private HBCU students faulted not being able to balance the time demands from their organizations with their course load. One student stated, "They [prophytes] said that Kappa costs. I just didn't realize that it would cost so much in time. Because it's a lot and it adds up! You think it's not a big deal like at first you think you're good because you have your set schedule and you know when you're going to study and you know when you're going to go to this class. And then you look up at the end of the week and you were going to study here but you ended up going to that last minute meeting and you were going to go to this but somebody called you because we just *have* to have someone speak at this event and you said you would. You were going to study at this but the guy that's coming to speak is a Nupe [Kappa] and he was going to help out with the chapter and loan a little money so somebody has to go sit through what he has to say and it just, it adds up."

These students also believed that their small chapter size, resulting from the small campus population at the private HBCU, also impacted how much time they were expected to designate to their organizations. A fraternity member explained, "When you have such a small group it is more taxing because it's like I could either sacrifice my

chapter or I could sacrifice a little time and just push a little harder in my schoolwork. So you definitely have that conflict.” Black Greek members of small chapters or smaller organizations are often faced with the reality that things will not get done if they don’t do them. This typically results in the sacrificing of their personal time, time that could be used to study.

Similar to the students at the public HBCU, the public PWI students indicated that various aspects of their Black Greek experience were prioritized over academics. One sorority member shared her experience: “When I joined, my grades, they suffered due to intake ... It was just because the class was really difficult. It was a math class and I didn’t care about math. I just cared about memorizing [sorority] history so I can pass the tests, so I can become a member of my organization.” They also acknowledged the difficulties in falling back into an academic mindset after joining. One student stated, “When I initially joined the organization my mind wasn’t on necessarily ‘let me do my work.’ It was more ‘hey, I’m finally done [with the intake process]! I’m about to shake campus!’”

The students at the public PWI revealed how each individual member’s G.P.A. can potentially affect their entire chapter. A sorority member explained how this process worked: “You have a responsibility to your chapter because your grades affect what you can do and what you can’t do. So let’s say you know I failed a class or I get a ‘D’ in a class that brings my whole chapter down. And since I have a smaller chapter, one ‘D’ kills everything. So that’s why you have to, you know, always be aware of what you’re doing because you affect everyone else. So it puts a weight on your shoulders.” In addition to being accountable to your chapter, individual members can be disciplined for bad grades. A student clarified that “when your G.P.A. falls below a 2.7, you go inactive.

You can't participate in events or chapter meetings." Despite the measures set in place to keep Black Greeks focused on their grades, organizational commitments often deter them from their scholastic endeavors.

At the private PWI, which is known for its academic rigor, the students mentioned the importance of finding balance in their schedules. A sorority member shared her experience balancing academics with Greek life: "My sophomore year was really rough. But ... I don't necessarily think it was just because I was Greek. I think it had a lot to do with like my first year I always really focused on my academics and my second year I tried to fit like social stuff in it. And I think it took a year of like calibrating all of that to get used to it and I really thank my Greek experience for it because I don't really think that the rate I was going which was just intensely studying every day, all of the time, was productive to being in college and really enjoying it." A fraternity member stated, "My grades have fluctuated because of extenuating circumstances but I would say like being Greek alone did not cause me to do exceptionally better or worse. But I would say that the fact that I'm doing relatively the same as I did before and I'm still taking on this huge, huge load does to me show like its [Black Greek life] helping me get better managing big responsibilities and working real closely with a lot of other people while still having to go through the academic rigor and stuff of my course load."

Networking Opportunities and Post-College Preparation

One of the assumed benefits of joining a Black fraternity or sorority is gaining access to an immense network of Black professionals and to potential career opportunities. In my research I sought to determine whether members actually experience this. Findings from the public HBCU indicated that Black Greek affiliation both prepared

students for life after graduation as well as exposed them to networking opportunities. One fraternity member explained how the business aspect of his fraternity helped prepare him to graduate: “I stuck with my job at FedEx ... and let them know, ‘Hey, this degree is coming up. Is there any opportunities for me?’ And with that, right then and there, they were like ‘we’ll put you in management training.’ I will tell you that my fraternity is very much so a great help at that because the fraternity is like a business. And because we have small numbers there is a lot of different things you have to do as one person ... You learn how to talk to people, you learn how to be business savvy ... through the fraternity ‘cause it’s just like a business. So yeah it definitely helped.”

Personality and social media also contributed to effective networking for the students at the public HBCU. One student believed, “it’s really about being social ... ‘Cause it’s a lot of my bruhs who don’t know how to talk. Who just don’t use the other bruhs to their advantage so it really depends on what type of person you are. I think I’ve experienced success as far as networking and things of that nature because I am a very social person. And then you’ve got things like Facebook and LinkedIn and all of these other things.” Black Greek affiliation also provided its members communication skills that are beneficial in the work place. A student explained: “I have to be willing to speak whenever I am asked to speak. In front of a large crowd, small crowd, thousands...of people. And being a part of my fraternity, being in stepshows, performing in front of thousands of people, chanting and all of this great stuff, it has helped.”

The students at the private HBCU also were exposed to networking opportunities and credited their Black Greek affiliation for access to them. They also reported gaining social skills from membership in their organizations. A female student shared: “I am

more of an academic person and I think being a part of D9 has kind of cracked me out of my shell 'cause I was more of a book person ... I've learned through being in college and through being in a Greek organization that it's good to be well rounded. Like just being good on paper, that's good or whatever but if somebody came up and tried to have a social conversation with you and try and get a feel for you as a person, you don't want to be stiff cause I feel like that's what I was. When I was a freshman I came in real stiff ... but I had to unpeel myself and be more social and be able to speak to people ... I feel like being in a Greek organization brought that out of me, whereas before I was a bore."

In addition to enhancing interpersonal skills, Divine Nine affiliation influenced occupational goals. One fraternity member credited his organization for solidifying his career aspirations. He said, "I did a lot more mentorship than I would have. In part I was wanting to give back because I remember what it was like being in high school and being in Kappa League and going and hanging out with bruhs and chillin' with them and the lessons they taught me and the things that they did to help. And so when I was given those opportunities by my prophytes to give back, I did, and I realized how much I enjoyed it and how fulfilling it is."

Several students at the private HBCU shared their experiences of networking with graduate members of their organizations. A fraternity member noted, "A lot of our organizations have people who have gone on to do very important things. From politically to just like running businesses or owning their own business and things like that. Some may even be in the field that you want to be in. Like before we were even done, one of my prophytes was telling me that he wanted to introduce me to somebody who was a part of the music aspect ... and you know get me networked with that ... So

that's definitely like one of the best benefits right there cause a lot of times it's hard to break into any field without experience. And when you don't have experience they are telling you no. So it's like unless you have a good recommendation or a way in, you're going to continuously get turned down."

The students at the predominantly white universities also perceived experiencing networking opportunities as a benefit of their affiliation with a Black Greek letter organization. At the public PWI all of the students agreed that being able to network with Black professionals was something they gained from joining a fraternity and sorority. When discussing how they were being prepared for life after college, I found that no direct help was being provided. One student explained, "I feel like a majority of the stuff I learned, I had to learn on my own or I had to go out and seek help ... I've noticed in my field in particular there are very few people who will extend a hand to you to help you versus you going to them or going somewhere else and trying to help yourself or trying to get it for yourself." Another student agreed when stating, "As a student you need to go find some mentorship and that's really going to help you after graduation ... They are the ones that help me, not the University itself but the professors and you know the relationships I've formed."

At the private PWI, students felt that Black Greek affiliation made it easier to access certain resources. One student shared, "The [Alpha] in the graduate school, I talked to him to and he's been really helping me like try and like get my stuff together with grad school and he's trying to help me like get grants and fellowships and stuff. And when we went to a National Society of Black Engineers conference ... I sat down with him, he gave me a list of names like 'go talk to this and this person ... he's also an

engineer and he's an Alpha.' So it's definitely been a lot of good resources that have helped me." These students also explained how networking is not just limited to their own organizations but stretches across the entire NPHC. A sorority member explained, "a lot of the Zetas that I have met have not been in my field...I've actually had a lot of help from people in other sororities ... I just had an SGRho call me a week ago and tell me the ins and outs of nursing and how to finagle getting scholarships and I'd definitely say that I think that has a lot to do with the way in which I navigated my Greek experience. I just made a whole lot of connections. But I definitely think in the Greek world as a whole, people ... are reaching out to help."

Despite reporting how advantageous the Black Greek network was, the students at the private PWI did not feel their university was as helpful. A sorority member stated, "I always had to hustle my way into a situation and I feel like I'm going to have to do that [after graduation] ... [When you're] Black at a predominantly white school, you have to state your case, you have to make the most loud, resounding, sophisticated noise ... you have to stand out, you have to meet the right people, you have to talk, you have to maneuver. [The university] kind of just sets you out there amongst wolves ... There wasn't a lot of handouts. You made it or you didn't and there's some of us that didn't make it to senior year and didn't make it, they had to transfer, they dropped out ... As Blacks we don't have as many resources so I do think you have to do a little bit more finagling and you have to really, really want it. And I feel like that's the only way to survive after graduation. You have to really, really want it and you have to hustle your way in." Black Greek life additionally enhanced the student's social skills. One student noted, "I feel like Greek life is preparing me for life after graduation. I think because our

organizations are so small, you step into leadership positions very fast so you have to learn how to deal with a bunch of different things, especially people and personalities. Sometimes you're placed in situations with people that you ... wouldn't necessarily be around or get along with and you have to learn how to manage with that and I think that's something that we need to learn for the real world."

Campus Support

When discussing the support systems on campus, my research indicated that Black Greek life is often misunderstood by university faculty and administration, limiting the amount of support Greek members experience on campus. One student at the public HBCU said, "The National Pan-Hellenic Council has been played tough. There are limitations on things that we can do ... It's just a bunch of craziness and you know it's not fair ... We don't have the level of clout that we should have as Divine Nine organizations because Divine Nine ... is what brings the campus morale outside of the Band. And so that love that we get, we don't get [from administration] ... because faculty don't respect it unless they are a part of a Greek organization ... At the end of the day they are trying to find every excuse to get rid of us." When asked if they experienced any prejudicial treatment one student responded, "I mean we are all Black. Unless you want to do the light skin, dark skin thing, I don't think so." Although they didn't experience any racial prejudicial treatment, the students did acknowledge that prejudicial treatment based on Greek affiliation does exist as certain fraternities and sororities have ties and loyalties to each other resulting in members of other organizations experiencing unfair treatment. One student explained, "if the Sigmas and Alphas [here] were to get into an

argument or whatever, the Sigmas would get kicked off campus and the Alphas wouldn't because the provost, the student activities coordinator, things like that, the high positions at this university, they are in [their fraternity]."

The students at the public HBCU agreed that faculty and staff view Black Greek life as "unnecessary." Although admitting their constant physical fights with one another didn't help their reputation, the students ultimately believed the faculty's lack of HBCU knowledge is causing the divide. One student stated, "I think the faculty here, they don't understand the culture of our university. A lot of our faculty are new and white and they don't understand it. So when they see us, they're just like, 'shut them down.'" With faculty ignorant of the significance and traditions of Black Greek letter organizations, it was evident that support on campus stemmed from within the student body. One student explained, "Your friends are your support systems." Another student agreed, "Your friends, your line sisters, your line brothers. Whatever you have ... that's your support system."

Greek members attending the private HBCU perceived campus support in a different way. They described campus as one big community as one student stated, "We have the saying here "[University name] Family" and for the most part we are really a family. Well actually no, not for the most part. We *ARE* a family! We fight like family, we love like family." That student went on to explain how support is shown throughout the student body: "when we take classes with ... a person who may not even be someone that we talk to on a regular basis but just because you are in the same class ... you're like 'let me help that person' and you develop maybe a study group or something like that ... So yeah it's definitely a support system cause we don't like to see each other doing bad.

We do what we can to those who want to be helped.” They also talked about their appreciation of the student-faculty relationship: “A lot of times our professors will take a genuine interest just because we are a small university. So even sometimes if they see you missing from class, they’re calling your phone and saying ‘is everything ok?’ and texting your phone like ‘you missed my class today, is everything okay? We got this assignment coming up.’ Or sometimes you can call your professor and be like ‘Hey Dr. so and so I’m not feeling well today or I got a family emergency’ and they understand. Like it’s a communication between the professors and the students and some of them understand 'life happens' and they’re willing to work with you and they want to see you succeed.”

The private HBCU students felt supported by their staff despite recognizing that the faculty does not favor Black Greek life as a whole. When asked how faculty and staff perceive Black Greek life, one student laughed and answered, “A lot of them actually hate it.” Another student elaborated: “You have some teachers that have done it [joined a BGLO] and they look at you like ‘well, I didn’t let it affect my grades so you shouldn’t either.’ And you also have teachers who haven’t done it and look at it like ‘this is something that is hurting the Black community.’ Not because of what you’re not living up to as far as service and community outreach and all of that stuff but it’s hurting ... some people physically and you know it’s hurting some people mentally as far as grades go.”

At the public PWI members of Black fraternities and sororities did not feel valued by faculty and staff. One student noted, “They hate us! They want to shut us down!” Another student agreed, “They have been trying to get rid of NPHC since I got here.”

That student further explained by summarizing a meeting they had with a University administrator: “Basically she said ‘you come to school to get your education.’ And yet, especially Black male fraternities oftentimes have the lowest grade point averages of most student organizations on campus. So they are basically saying if you are coming here and you’re joining your organization and your grades are getting worse, what’s the point of you being here? Like how are you benefiting our school? How are you benefiting the campus? How are you helping yourself if you’re doing nothing but fighting, getting in trouble and not making grades?” Another student added: “It’s also a financial thing because if you can’t benefit the campus financially, then why are you here? You know? Like that’s what one of the former Greek advisors was talking to me about when I was speaking to her about trying to get plots so we could have some sort of representation on campus that says yes there are Black people here because there is nothing that shows that there are any people of color on this campus. And she was like ‘well it will never be like that because you guys don’t contribute financially to the school.’”

They further indicated that the only faculty and staff who supported Black Greek life were those who were Black and who were affiliated with the NPHC organizations. Despite the existence of an Intercultural and Diversity Affairs office, students attending the public PWI reported feeling supported solely by their friends. Many had never heard of the office and one believed it was “geared towards students that come from other countries instead of towards the Black student population.” These students felt they had nowhere to turn but inward to other Black students for support and sometimes that wasn’t even enough. One student discussed how the lack of an overarching Black student organization has caused the NPHC to try and fill that void but its competitive nature has

caused them to fail at it. She stated, “We don’t have a [Black Student Union] here. We don’t have a place where Black students can come and share ideas. That is not provided for us ... I think the NPHC provides a lot of opportunities for Black students ... We’re like the umbrella that holds the Black community together ... but I think we [Black Greeks] have such a hard time getting along with each other that there will never be a safe platform for us to generally share ideas.”

Students attending the private PWI had similar sentiments about campus support. They indicated there may be a misunderstanding between Black Greeks and campus faculty. One student believed Black Greeks were viewed by staff as “trouble” and a “liability” while their hard work remained ignored. She explained, “I don’t think that they understand our value. I think that because it’s not enough of us they don’t understand the service that’s being put forth. So like every year they make a report and they’re like the Greeks have done 2 million hours worth of community service and a *LOT* of that is Black Greeks. A lot of that is the 50 members in the NPHC versus the Pan-Hell [PHC] chapter that does 1 or 2 hours. But because it’s 150 of them in a chapter it multiplies. But you have these Black people that are servicing these schools, that are going out and they’re helping and ... I think if we were more supported in that, I think that they would really understand our value and I don’t think that they do yet ... I don’t think that there is enough people that are caring about us and the productions that we put forth and that needs to change.”

Fortunately for the Black Greeks attending the private PWI the university has a Black Student Association active on campus which functions as “the umbrella” Black organization. In addition to that, the campus has a Black Cultural Center that is

considered a “hang out spot” on campus for Black students to have events and study. One student shared how it even “helps build the Black community.” These aspects of the Black community help to combat perceptions of the faculty and staff as lacking knowledge of Black Greek culture, allowing Black students to feel supported on campus through other students, especially within their Greek letter organizations. One student said, “We all have principles of brotherhood and sisterhood” insinuating that support was inherent within fraternities and sororities.

DISCUSSION

In this study I found that Black Greek affiliation provides its members with a variety of experiences including enhancing social lives, impacting academics, offering networking opportunities and providing an on-campus support system. Although Greeks on both historically Black and predominantly white campuses shared similar experiences with increased popularity, altered friendships, and exposure to professional networks, other influences manifested themselves differently in the lives of collegiate Black Greeks depending on the campus racial composition of the university. Variations appear to stem from the fact that double-consciousness and outsider-within situations present differently on historically Black and predominantly white campuses.

As with past research, in this study I similarly found that membership in Black organizations provides a supportive environment for growth with others (Ross 2000) and HBCU campuses assist Black students in adjusting to collegiate life by providing supportive Black organizations for them to join (Allen, Epps, and Haniff 1991; Kimbrough 1995; Kimbrough and Hutcheson 1998). Students from historically Black universities however did not initially seek BGLO membership because they felt out of

place on campus; instead they tended to pursue Black Greek life as a means to enhance their racial identities and to increase their popularity among their fellow Black students. In this way, it can be argued that Black Greek affiliation on historically Black campuses helps to combat the “strife” associated with the double-consciousness experienced in the wider society by Black students who seek out the Black experience by choosing to attend Black colleges and to join Black organizations. Because a significant amount of identity development takes place throughout the college years, mediating double-consciousness is particularly unique for Black college students at HBCUs. Despite the fact that the majority of HBCU campus populations are comprised of Black people, as a racial minority in America, collegiate Black Greeks still struggle with balancing being Black and being American. Joining a historically Black fraternity or sorority assists members with harmonizing the two identities by signifying the value placed on one of America’s greatest resources, education, while simultaneously committing students to serving and bettering the Black community. By immersing themselves in a Black community that values higher education and promotes leadership roles, particularly at a life stage when development of aspirations and career goals is so important, Black students are able to mitigate negative messages and treatments that may be promoted in the wider predominantly white culture.

Similarly individuals who frequently experience outsider-within locations develop a distinctive perspective as victims of racial oppression and are able to readily recognize systems that foster social inequality. Black Greeks on predominantly white campuses initially seek membership in BGLOs because the campus environment fails to make them feel included. While affiliations with Black Greek organizations helps to

make Black Greek students feel welcome, included, and perhaps even protected from unfriendly influences on campus, as members continue to affiliate with their organizations, they become more cognizant of the segregated nature of their campus racial climates. These new angles of vision obtained as outsiders-within aids collegiate Black Greeks at PWIs in realizing the importance of Black social spaces on campus thus deepening their understanding of the significance of BGLOs.

On the campuses of historically Black colleges and universities, Black Greek life is anticipated and revered by students. Many have parents affiliated with Black Greek letter organizations and are eager to continue the legacy while others were inspired to join a Black fraternity or sorority after being influenced by active Black Greeks in their communities when they were younger. Because of the prominence of Black Greek life in HBCU culture, most members experience a significant increase in popularity after joining. Black Greek life is the most prestigious and sought after extra-curricular activity on campus. Because HBCUs have large pools of interested potential members the competitive nature of Black Greek life is intense and maintaining a prominent social presence in the campus community is a felt necessity among current members. Black Greek life also impacts friendships and relationships. Because Black Greek affiliation serves as social capital within the HBCU setting, members of BGLOs have to be wary about why people want to be friends with them. In the case of romantic relationships where the partner is not Greek, Black Greeks are forced to choose between hanging out with their significant other and affiliating with their organization. Non-Greeks often feel uncomfortable in the “Greek World” because there are certain things they don’t know or understand and other things they can’t do, frequently resulting in awkward situations.

At predominantly white universities Black Greek membership exposes students to new groups of people on campus. Although previous research indicated that the campus racial climate of PWIs provided disincentives for Black students to engage with white students thus encouraging them to participate in Black organizations (Cabrera et. al. 1999), my study suggests that participating in Black Greek life actually helps Black students to branch out of the predominantly Black social spaces they typically occupy and introduces the students to new spaces and experiences on campus. In the same way, Black Greek affiliation forces members to meet a variety of people, thus enhancing their social skills. Black Greeks at PWIs are also expected to attend and participate in social events. This is a necessity because unlike HBCUs many Black students at PWIs are completely unaware of the relevance and purpose of Black Greek letter organizations. Generally on white campuses sports are the most prominent extra-curricular activity while Black Greek life is only significant within the Black community. However, because Greek life is more attainable to most students than is athletics, it still carries a lot of social prestige and helps to empower members. Black Greek life comes with loyalties and commitments to new people which often results in insecurities in old friends, damaging previous friendships and relationships. In addition, members find themselves restricted from doing certain things as they feel pressure to constantly represent their organization.

Members of Black fraternities and sororities experience similar social benefits at both predominantly white and historically Black campuses, yet variations exist. On one hand, being Greek at a HBCU puts you in a totally different “world” from the rest of campus while at a PWI just being Black distances you from the university community. Black Greek life at HBCUs cause social separation between members of different

organizations as a result of the constant mode of competition they are in and at PWIs, Black Greek life socially exposes its members to the wider campus through its organizational activities, introducing them to new aspects of their university not otherwise explored.

The social component of Black Greek life was sometimes found to overshadow academics, particularly at HBCUs where the inherent social aspect of the campus culture may already provide a distraction for students from their scholastic work. Black sorority and fraternity members frequently find themselves choosing between studying and doing Greek-related work. This trend was more prevalent at the state universities than the private universities. Black Greeks at PWIs come to college ready to prioritize academics. Joining a BGLO teaches them how to balance academics with having a social life. Often times, however, last minute chapter demands for events and programs take away from students' personal study time. These decisions in favor of social obligations result in the unintentional neglect of academics. However, the universities' implementations of academic standards such as a chapter grade report and the designation of "inactive" status for individual members below a 2.7 G.P.A., keep students accountable for their grades. Ultimately, HBCUs are notorious for their parties and the social scene while PWIs are well known for their academic rigor. These generalizations manifest themselves in the academic experiences of Black Greek members. Greeks at HBCUs often sacrificed their study time to participate in social events they anticipated upon enrolling, while Greeks at PWIs found themselves expecting an arduous academic experience when entering college

and used Black Greek life as a means to become more social. They never fully disregarded their scholarship as the university's academic expectations constantly reminded them of the consequences of their grades dropping.

At HBCUs, Black Greeks are exposed to networking opportunities after joining their organizations. They experience formal networking at events such as attending national conferences as well as informal networking such as at restaurants when a member of their organization notices their paraphernalia and exchanges contact information with them. Because Black Greek letter organizations conduct themselves like small businesses, members are able to retain the professionalism they are exposed to for use after graduation. At PWIs Black students are particularly cognizant of an "outsider within" status as described by Collins (2004), feeling that they go to a completely different school than white students because in their opinion no one cares whether they succeed. In order to be successful at a predominantly white university, Black Greeks have to go out and search for on-campus resources on their own. Being a part of the minority teaches Black Greeks at PWIs how to find opportunities when the odds are against them. It also makes them more aware of their outsider-within status and raises consciousness about being both central within their own Black communities but marginalized within the wider white culture of the university and society. Fortunately Black Greek affiliation exposes these students to networking opportunities with Black professionals of all Divine Nine organizations, not just the one they are affiliated with. So while HBCUs expose their Black Greeks to opportunities within their specific organizations and teach Divine Nine members necessary skills for the workforce, PWIs prepare their Black fraternity and

sorority members for negotiating life after college by teaching them how to fend for themselves in an atmosphere and in American society that may not necessarily care if they succeed or not.

Students at HBCUs found support for their Greek life within the student body and among friends. However, participants in this research perceived much less support from university faculty, staff and administrators. Participants believed that these university officials often perceived Black Greek life as detrimental to the Black community, causing divisions due to its competitive environment and distracting its members from focusing on academics. Typically the only faculty and staff who support Black Greek life are those who are also affiliated with a Divine Nine organization. University officials who are members of BGLOs oftentimes show favoritism to their undergraduate members on campus causing undergrads in other organizations to feel unfairly treated. However, despite some disagreements with Black Greek culture, faculty and staff, particularly at HBCUs, take an active interest in the students and maintain personal relationships with them. Just as Oates (2004) argued that university faculty's attention to student needs played a role in overall campus experience, my study indicates that the student-faculty relationship plays a significant role in perceptions of on-campus support. HBCU faculty pride themselves on supporting students' goals and creating an environment that encourages them to be successful.

Black Greeks at PWIs also find their support systems within their organizations and friendship groups. Faculty, staff and administration oftentimes do not understand Black Greek culture and as a result fail to acknowledge all of the work Black Greeks do on campus and in the community. This causes members of Black Greek organizations to

feel under-appreciated. The larger campus size of most PWIs results in the impersonal faculty-student relationships forcing Black Greeks to seek out mentors for help. This ultimately contributes to their feelings of seclusion from the main campus community and a heightened sense of outsider-within status. While Black Greeks at HBCUs lean on friends and sorority sisters/fraternity brothers for support they also know that the faculty, staff and administration have their best interests at heart and want to see them succeed. Their counterparts at PWIs however are forced to rely only on friends for support because faculty and staff for the most part do not understand their organizations and devalue their significance on campus.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine how campus racial composition and perceived racial climate influences the experiences of Black fraternity and sorority members. Four focus group interviews were conducted (two at historically Black universities and two at predominantly white universities), with participants affiliated with Divine Nine organizations. Although commonalities existed among the responses from all four schools, my research strongly suggests that campus racial climate does play a role in impacting the collegiate experience of Black Greeks, particularly in the areas of social life, academics, networking opportunities, post-college preparation and sense of on-campus support.

Black Greek life causes division on HBCU campuses yet bridges Black Greeks with the wider “white” campus at PWIs. The social scene prevalent on HBCU campuses often distracts collegiate Greeks from their academics while PWI Black Greeks are provided academic expectations, with consequences for not meeting them, by the

university. While the presence of Black faculty and staff at HBCUs provides students with positive role models thus building their confidence for success after graduation, the campus environment at PWIs also prepare Black Greeks for life after college by teaching them how to negotiate the sometimes unfriendly environment and to utilize resources and networks in situations where help is not always readily available from faculty, staff and administrators. Black Greeks attending HBCUs indicated that they felt they were supported in every aspect of their college experience except when participating in the potentially harmful cultural practices Black Greek life. However just as Black college students in the early 1900s were excluded from campus activities because of their race, Black Greeks at PWIs still find themselves outsiders-within, alienated from the “main” campus, turning inwards to friends and their Black Greek family for support.

Nonetheless, this study verifies the significance of BGLOs in the lives of their members on both historically Black and predominantly white campuses and should encourage other social researchers to consider the Black Greek population for future studies. Potential studies could focus on the stratification and hierarchy of National Pan-Hellenic Council organizations or the evolution of Black Greek culture and how it was and is currently perceived by non-Greeks. One might also consider researching the self-identity development of BGLO members and whether or not Black fraternity and sorority affiliation has an impact on it or investigate the historical significance of the contemporary stereotypes of Black Greek letter organizations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent Script

Informed Consent Agreement Stomping the Yard in Black and White

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the positive benefits of participating in Black Greek organizations and culture on college campuses with different racial climates and composition. Using focus group interviews and digital sound recorder I will record your responses to questions about your perceptions and experiences as college students participating in Black Greek organizations. I will also take notes. The focus groups should last about 90 minutes. You are free to not participate in any questions that make you uncomfortable or to leave the group at any time without penalty.

Benefits: This study gives you the opportunity to express your ideas, concerns, and views on the importance of Black Greek life on college campuses. It may also provide the researcher with important information that could help in making policy recommendations to improve campus racial climate.

Possible Risks: Participation in this research should not put you at risk for physical harm. There may occasional be a minimal risk of feelings of discomfort, embarrassment, or emotional distress as you recall your experiences on campus. To minimize this risk, only discuss topics that you feel comfortable sharing. If at any time you feel that the questions become too personal, you can decline to answer. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

Confidentiality: I will protect your confidentiality and identity by using common names (pseudonyms) in place of your name. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law; therefore I ask that you do not discuss illegal activities.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal: Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time with no penalty. You may decline to answer or to participate in any portion of the discussion that you are not comfortable discussing.

Contact Information: If you have any question or concerns about this research study, your rights as a participant, or the way that they study has been conducted please contact Professor Vicky MacLean (thesis advisor) at 615-898-2692 or Ms. Emily Born at the MTSU Office of Research Compliance at 615-494-8918. If you have any questions about the research, please contact me, the principle investigator, Shaonta Allen (MTSU student) at 253-486-7293.

If you agree to participate in this interview, please say aloud that you agree.

Do you agree?

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Collegiate Experience: I am going to begin the interview with questions about how being affiliated with a BGLO has positively affected your collegiate experience.

1. In what ways has being a Black Greek influenced your social life?

How has your social life changed from before you were Greek?

Do you feel obligated to go to parties, yard parties or any other social events now that you are Greek? Why?

Has being a member of a Black Greek Letter Organization impeded your social life in any way? How?

Has it affected any of your previous friendships/relationships?
Has it resulted in any new friendships/relationships?

2. Since you joined your organization how well have you done academically?

In what ways has being a member of a Black fraternity/sorority affected your academics (study time, grades, curriculum choice, etc.)?

Has being a member of a Black Greek Letter Organization impeded your academic life in any way? How?

3. Are you affiliated with any other campus organizations?

How did your Black Greek affiliation influence your decision to join other groups?

Were you in these groups before becoming Greek?

How have these influenced your social life?

4. Have you been exposed to any opportunities to network and meet people who may help your future career?

Could you have access to these if you were not a member of a Black Fraternity or Sorority? How?

5. Do you feel you are ready for life after graduation?

Has your school or your organization prepared you for life after graduation? In what ways?

How has your organization influenced your career goals and strategies?

Campus Climate: Thank you for sharing this important information about your experiences in BGOs. Now I would like to ask you some questions about the campus climate.

1. How would you describe the campus racial climate on your campus?
(Race relations, faculty support, student services, prejudicial treatment, etc.)
2. How has being a member of a BGLO helped you adjust to this climate?
3. How do you think that Black Greek life is perceived on your campus by other students, faculty, staff?
4. Do you feel that you have a support system on your campus?
5. Do you think the collegiate experience differs for Black Greeks at PWIs vs. HBCUs? Explain.

Other Observations and Experience. This concludes the formal aspects of my interview. There may be other important observations that I have not addressed.

1. At this time could you tell me if there is anything else you would like to add about your experiences or observations on Black Greek Life at your school?
2. Do you think this (observation or experience) would be the same at school with a different racial composition than yours?
3. How would this look at a predominantly white campus? A mixed campus? A predominantly black campus?

Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter

April 10, 2013



Shaonta Allen, Vicky MacLean
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Shaonta.Allen@gmail.com, Vicky.MacLean@mtsu.edu

Protocol Title: "Stomping the Yard in Black and White: A Comparative Study of the Perceived Benefits of Black Greek Life at Historically Black and Predominantly White Institutions"

Protocol Number: 13-306

Dear Investigator(s),

The exemption is pursuant to 45 CFR 46.101(b) (2). This is because the research being conducted involves the use of survey materials, interviews or observation of public behavior.

You will need to submit an end-of-project report to the Compliance Office upon completion of your research. Complete research means that you have finished collecting data and you are ready to submit your thesis and/or publish your findings. Should you not finish your research within the three (3) year period, you must submit a Progress Report and request a continuation prior to the expiration date. Please allow time for review and requested revisions. Your study expires on **April 10, 2016**.

Any change to the protocol must be submitted to the IRB before implementing this change.

According to MTSU Policy, a researcher is defined as anyone who works with data or has contact with participants. Anyone meeting this definition needs to be listed on the protocol and needs to provide a certificate of training to the Office of Compliance. **If you add researchers to an approved project, please forward an updated list of researchers and their certificates of training to the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.** **Once your research is completed, please send us a copy of the final report questionnaire to the Office of Compliance.** This form can be located at www.mtsu.edu/irb on the forms page.

Also, all research materials must be retained by the PI or **faculty advisor (if the PI is a student)** for at least three (3) years after study completion. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Andrew W. Jones

Compliance Office
615-494-8918
Compliance@mtsu.edu

Appendix D: Glossary

- **AKAs:** Acronym and nick name for members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.
- **Alphas:** Nick name for members of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.
- **BGLO:** Acronym for Black Greek Letter Organization
- **Bruh:** A term used to identify members of the same fraternity. See also: Frat
- **Chapter:** The campus group of a national organization
- **Deltas:** Nick name for members of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
- **Divine Nine:** Nick name for the nine historically Black Greek letter organizations affiliated with the National Pan-Hellenic Council. See Also: NPHC
- **Frat:** A term used to identify members of the same fraternity. See also: Bruh.
- **Fraternity:** The name informally applied to a Greek letter organization for men
- **HBCU:** Acronym for Historically Black College or University
- **IFC:** Acronym for Inter-Fraternity Council. Refers to the governing council of the traditional “white” fraternities on campus
- **Inactive Member:** An individual who is still a member of the organization, but is denoted as “inactive” to designate that they can no longer participate in the day-to-day activities of the fraternity or sorority.
- **Intake Process:** The process by which a prospective member joins a Greek letter organization. See also: (On/Off) Line
- **Iotas:** Nick name for members of Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc.
- **Kappas:** Nick name for members of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.
- **Kappa League:** A national program for the educational, occupational and social guidance of male students in grades 6-12 hosted by Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.
- **Legacy:** The child, sibling or grandchild (or in some cases other relative) of an initiated fraternity or sorority member
- **Line:** A group of members who are chosen to become initiated/inducted together into a particular organization
- **Line Brother (LB)/Line Sister (LS):** Individuals who are members of the same intake line.
- **Neophyte:** A term that refers to a new member of an organization. Also referred to as “neos.” This designation typically stands until another intake process occurs
- **NPC:** Acronym for National Panhellenic Conference. Refers to the governing council of all traditional “white” sororities on campus
- **NPHC:** Acronym for National Pan-Hellenic Council. Refers to the governing body that oversees the nine historically Black fraternities and sororities

- **Nupe:** Nick name for a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. See also: Kappa
- **Omeegas:** Nick name for members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. See also: Ques
- **(On/Off) Line:** Refers to the membership intake process for NPHC organizations. See also: Intake Process
- **Prophyte:** A member who has been in the organization for over a year and has been involved with at least one intake process for new members
- **PWI:** An acronym for Predominantly White Institution
- **Ques:** A nick name for members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. See also: Omeegas
- **SGRhos:** A nick name for members of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.
- **Sigmas:** A nick name for members of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.
- **Soror:** A term used to identify members of the same sorority.
- **Step show:** A series of complex, synchronous and precise rhythmic body movements performed to the tune of stomps, songs or chants created by organization members
- **Strolling:** A traditional dance or “party walk” performed by members of Black fraternities or sororities in a line at social events
- **Zetas:** A nick name for members of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.