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WE MATTER, WE'RE RELEVANT AND WE ARE BLACK WOMEN IN SORORITIES: AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK SORORITY MEMBERS AT A PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTION

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WE MATTER, WE'RE RELEVANT AND WE ARE BLACK WOMEN IN SORORITIES: AN
EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERINCES OF BLACK SORORITY MEMBERS AT A
PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTION

By

DeLores J. Allison

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WE MATTER, WE'RE RELEVANT AND WE ARE BLACK WOMEN IN SORORITIES: AN
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DeLores J. Allison, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2016

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This qualitative research study explored the experiences of NPHC Black sorority women at a predominately White institution and the benefits that their individual sororities provided. The theory that guided this study is Black feminist thought, which reveals the complexity of Black women's experiences. The case study approach was used to collect their stories because it focuses on them individually. Three Black graduate sorority women were interviewed in depth. Throughout these women's college careers they have been faced with racism and sexism. Through their individual sororities they were able to find solace and embrace their Black womanhood on campus.

Dedication

الرَّحِيمِ الرَّحْمَنِ اللَّهُ بِسْمِ. *In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.*

To all the Black women who have overcome barriers in a system that was not designed for you. You, found comfort, support and love within a sorority. I honor your tenacity, strength, and regality in being your authentic self. My project is a way of reciprocating all of the sacrifices and contributions not just for me but for all Black women in the world. Most importantly, your experiences and stories matter.

*To my mother, my beautiful Black queen EHITE J. Allison, who encouraged me to continue my education in pursuing a master's degree. You were and are the living embodiment of a powerful Black woman, or as Audre Lorde would say of Old Magic. The bond that we have can never be severed because it is eternal. I find my solace in the love you give me; your mother's touch makes me feel cherished and that everything is going to be OK.
Momma, you are utterly sacred to me and I love you.*

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the role of big 'sis' when I was unable to for my siblings. You will always and forever be my sister.

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To the We Matter, We're Relevant, We are Black Women in Sororities (participants) thank you for sharing and trusting me with your stories. Without your patience and understanding this thesis project would not be possible. I humbled and truly honored to have worked with you.

To my so sweet sorors of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. you all have had a great impact in my life since my first semester of college. You have shown me the importance of servicing our communities, appreciating and accepting my Black womanhood. I know that I am a better woman, friend and soror through the bond/sisterhood we have fostered over the years.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I have been woman
for a long time
beware my smile
I am treacherous with old magic
and the noon's new fury
with all your wide futures
promised
I am
woman
and not White.
-Audre Lorde

Audre Lorde's (1997) poem, "A Woman Speaks" echoes through my mind, and I am reminded of all the Black women who have influenced and touched my life. Their love, manifested through action and words, reassured me that the struggles faced by Black women are a testimony of our strength. Every one of the Black women in my life enabled me to reach deep inside of myself to shine and reveal the resiliency I have held as a young Black woman. Whether it was my mentor giving me the encouragement to attain my goals, or my mother equipping me with the stamina to serve family, friends and community, it is this "fury," as described in Lorde's poem (1997, p. 410), and passion that enabled me to overcome the negative stereotypes ascribed to my gender and race that I have experienced all my life.

As a member of a Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. at a predominately White institution (PWI), I can testify to the experiences, negative and positive, of Black sorority woman. While in undergrad, I was an active member on campus, as I was chapter president of both my sorority and the local National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)

chapter, participated in induction of new members, and collaborated with different student organizations on campus by enacting different social and cultural events. My varied experiences in a Black sorority helped me gain the confidence to embrace my Black womanhood, foster community within my sorority and NPHC, and support other Black women on campus. The education I received in my sorority helped me unashamedly embrace the pride I hold as a Black woman.

Not only was I learning to embrace my identities through my involvement in my sorority and in NPHC, but I noticed other Black women seeking support through social networks on campus as well. Those support networks provided a sense of belonging with other Black women through shared experiences, common goals, preservation of culture, and their struggle to combat racism in the hopes to foster solidarity with fellow oppressed people. Those experiences are in line with the intentions of the founders of NPHC because as Lorde's (1997) poem stated, the founders of NPHC embodied the "old magic" to arrive at and become the "fury" as a modern day Black woman (p. 410)

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine and gain a greater understanding of how Black women in a NPHC sorority at a PWI experience support. This study aims to enable higher education practitioners with scholarly information on how to better assist Black women sorority members who are leaders on PWI college campuses. In order to gain a better understanding of these women's experiences, an exploratory study will be conducted to further contribute to existing literature and offer intervention strategies for college professionals.

Significance of Study

During the early twentieth century, education stood as a symbol to represent the intellectual abilities of Black college students to a racially insensitive society. An educated Black populace symbolized a racial obligation to succeed and be leaders on and off campus to other Black people, who may not have believed in their ability to succeed in higher education. Leaders of Black Greek lettered organizations (BGLOs) had a desire to create a community geared towards brother/sisterhood within the Black community on college campuses. NPHC organizations created specific communities for racial minority students on college campuses by providing a network of support as those students navigated a space that was not designed for them (Rodriquez, 1995). This history points to the probability of the NPHC sorority as being a site of support for Black women. If institutions are genuine in their interest to support the success of Black women on campus, they should consider the potential of NPHC sororities to contribute to the retention and development of Black women. This study is intended to learn more about the role of these NPHC organizations at PWIs.

In Kimbrough's (2003) study, he identified some of the positive aspects of being a member of NPHC, such as building lifelong friendships with other members of NPHC to create networking opportunities and becoming role models for other students on campus. Kimbrough (2003) also determined that literature on the experiences of NPHC organizations, especially those about Black sorority women, is limited. Therefore, Black NPHC sorority women's experiences need to be further researched and better understood to fully grasp the value they bring to college campuses.

Recently, much attention has been given to Black men's retention in college. Specific institutes and federal funding have been designated towards increasing retention of Black men (Strayhorn, 2016). As will be discussed in Chapter 2, Black women tend to be lumped together in one group with Black men (White, 2013), but Black women's experiences are different. Black women are not garnering as much attention and resources even though their retention and graduation rates are low.

Additionally, in terms of being lumped together, research on Greek organizations and the benefits of student involvement on campus continues to proliferate, but it mostly focuses on predominantly White organizations (Brown, Parks & Philips 2005; Hughey & Hernandez, 2013). Since students in organizations that have mostly People of Color in them often have different values and needs, more research on organizations designed to serve Black women should be explored. Finally, race and racism on campus have been very visible in the wake of several prominent Black Lives Matter protests on campuses across the country (Alcindor, 2015; Samuels, 2015). Demands from students during these types of protests indicate that Black students feel like they are not being supported on campus (WeTheProtesters, n.d.). This suggests that campus administrators should be exploring what types of experiences will support Black students on campus.

This study emphasizes the experiences of Black sorority women within NPHC organizations at one PWI. According to Evans (2007), Black women are regularly marginalized and excluded from research in higher education. Their exclusion from research is unfortunate because their personal insight has value in research. The significance in writing about NPHC Black sorority members will allow their stories and

experiences to be told from their unique perspective. My study will (a) contribute to the literature regarding the experiences of Black women in sororities and (b) inform readers on issues and experiences regarding Black women on college campuses, specifically PWIs, and the importance of changing these undesirable environments. When educators and BGLO members know more about the experiences of Black women in BGLOs, they can promote positive elements to members and use the outcomes as a rationale for increasing support and resources to the organizations. If institutions want to increase the participation of Black women across campus and in the local community, then they could benefit from studying BGLO's organizational models. The institution can then utilize those models by supporting and improving the experiences of other Black women across campus. This research study intends to provide a rationale for college institutions to utilize BGLO's organizational models by better understanding the experiences of Black sorority women.

Research Questions

This qualitative research study will be guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How does being in an NPHC organization benefit Black sorority women at the PWI Heartland University?

RQ2: How do race and gender influence NPHC Black sorority members' experiences at the PWI Heartland University?

Research Design

The methodology used for this study uses a transformative paradigm and incorporates a qualitative research approach. According to Mertens (2015) there are five

types of qualitative research methods that can be utilized, of which I have chosen to use a case study approach. A case study will allow me to gather data based on the participants' individual experiences within NPHC sororities at a PWI. The case study will provide an in-depth analysis of each individual's narratives about similar phenomena (Creswell, 2013). The case study approach is focused on providing a rich description of each participant's experience in a particular context (Creswell, 2013). Using a case study approach is an appropriate choice for this small, understudied population, because it allows me to examine multiple experiences in depth. This approach also aligns with my conceptual framework of Black feminist thought, which holds that Black women's experiences are varied and important (Collins, 2002).

Recruitment of participants occurred through means of emailing potential participants as well as reaching out to the Greek Affairs Office at a university in the Midwest. Criteria were set based on age, gender, race and affiliation with NPHC, which will be further described and detailed in Chapter 3. I conducted three semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions with each participant. Additionally, I made observations of participants' daily living on college campus to gain a more holistic understanding of their experiences. I created transcripts and analyzed them using Black feminist thought as an interpretive lens in order to describe each participant's experiences and the role of the PWI organization in supporting them. During analysis, I paid particular attention to the context of each participant's experiences consistent with the case study approach.

Definition of Terms

The important terms used in this study are defined as follows.

Black Sorority: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. (<http://nphchq.org/home.htm>).

Black woman: Someone who self-identifies as being of African descent. Ethnic identities within the Black race include but are not limited to African, African American, and Black Caribbean (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994).

Chapter: A local membership unit of a national or international sorority or fraternity.

Greek: A member of a social fraternity or sorority; also refers to a fraternal organization (Kimbrough, 2003).

Line: Individuals going through the membership intake process together.

National Pan-Hellenic Council: Collaborative organization of nine international African American Greek-lettered fraternities and sororities (<http://nphchq.org/home.htm>).

National Pan-Hellenic Council organizations: The nine international African American Greek lettered fraternities and sororities: Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (<http://nphchq.org/home.htm>).

Soror: The term used to refer to members of the same sorority.

Delimitations

For this study I focused on women enrolled in college who identified as Black, were 19 years old or older, attended a midwestern PWI and were a member of a NPHC sorority for at least one year. Their age was important as it allowed for participants to be able to participate without parental consent and to be able to have at least one year in their organization. The focus of this study was to understand the experiences of Black women within a sorority at PWIs and how they received support from their individual organizations.

Limitation

In Chapter 3, there will be a more detailed description of the limitations found in this study. One limitation was the relationship that I fostered with each participant prior to this case study. All the women knew me through my involvement in my sorority, which I believed caused them to have reservations about what they would disclose to me because they may not have wanted to share negative experiences with me. However, if I had not had a relationship with each participant, it could have resulted in less familiarity and rapport and restrictions in observing their daily interactions. Lastly, the Black sorority women who participated in my study were graduate students who described their experiences as undergraduate and graduate students. This was a result of who was available in the population and whom I had relationships with. I believe including undergraduate students could have positively impacted this study by utilizing current undergraduate experiences.

Conclusion

Black sororities have been impacting the lives of Black college women since the early 1900s. They have created sisterhoods among Black women and have served as a community resource for personal empowerment. Black sororities at PWI were established due to the harsh realities that Black women experienced on their campuses such as racism and sexism. This research study will focus on the experiences of Black sorority women in NPHC and the benefits they receive in their individual sorority at a PWI because there is a lack of information available about the unique experiences of Black sorority women at PWIs. The collected data will be used to highlight the challenges and struggles that these Black sorority women face as well as identify their needs in order to be a successful student.

Chapter 2 will explore the background of Black women as it pertains to sisterhood and community. Additionally, the literature discovers how Black women formed Black women's clubs, discuss the importance of academics in college and the creation of Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs) that later established BGLOs. Research regarding Black women is limited therefore this research study was developed to further explore Black women at PWI. The chapter will also explore the theoretical framework in regards to the study. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology of the study and how it was conducted. Chapter 4 will discuss the themes, subthemes and the findings of the data. Finally, Chapter 5 will discuss the findings and provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Throughout history, Black women have demonstrated their understanding of the linkage between community and social networks. During slavery Black women developed leadership roles for themselves to help build a sense of community. Within these communities Black slaves took on the same family notion as West African communities by including distant relatives and friends as close family members. “These families functioned as micro-communities that fostered support networks in areas of caretaking, resource gathering and protection” (Domingue, 2015, p. 456).

Some of the challenges that Black women had to endure as slaves were “expected to bear the burdens, the lash and children for their respective masters” (Edwards, 2000, p. 85). By having these hardships the Black woman was at a disadvantage of preserving her essence as a woman, while relentlessly uplifting the community by preserving the Black culture. These women were not allowed to follow the middle and upper class White women's way of mothering by staying at home and being dependent on the man. Instead Black women had to learn how to develop leadership through mothering and networking.

Traditionally, Black slave women had to find ways to take care of their families as well as accomplish the tasks that were forced upon them from their slave masters. According to Domingue (2015) slave women created support networks as a way to manage the traumatic circumstances that defined their livelihood. In an effort to cope with the demands of slavery, women formed cohesiveness with other slave women to provide a

supportive and emotional system. One of the ways that they would embody the idea of cohesiveness was through the concept of othermothering.

Stalin James (1993) defines othermothering as “acceptance of responsibility for a child not one’s own, in an arrangement that may or may not be formal” (p.45).

Othermothering can be traced back to the independent West African cultural values which many slaves adopted as a routine component of their duties, even as a slave. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) stated that centrality of othermothering is not based on the absence of the Black man. The Black man may be physically present and is culturally relevant and still the family ties are strengthened by the Black woman. Due to the instability of slavery, by means of regular selling of slaves, separation of families occurred frequently. The separation emphasized the need of other mothering to maintain a perception that the family was still intact. Slaves without their biological families felt the need to be a part of a community, where women felt it was their responsibility to care for others within their network (Domingue, 2015). Women who participated in mothering the community were respected and admired by those who they cared for comparable to one’s own biological mother.

Black Women Clubs

During the Jim Crow era, Black women centered communities continued to persist through Black-led establishments such as churches, women’s clubs, educational institutions and Black sororities (Domingue, 2015). The Black women primarily performed their work throughout the church whether it was service, advice through prayer and worship and bible study (Edwards, 2000). Furthermore, Black women felt the

need to provide guidance to the church members and being a resource to the Black community. The women-centered networks continued to transform and developed into women clubs formed by Black women. Club membership was invitation only and many of the invitations were given to professional women or wives of professional men who were middle and upper class (Edwards, 2000). These members promoted the success of the Black community by encouraging Blacks to spend their money in Black stores/communities instead of buying things at White owned stores (Durant & Loudon, 1986). The club movement was created out of the arrival of education of Black people. These now educated members were a part of the Black community. The club work provided Black people, specifically Black women the encouragement to seek knowledge, power and influence in their communities (Edwards, 2000). Through education, Black women had provided resources for themselves in order to assist with obtaining the racial uplift of the Black community while preserving the culture and traditions. The Black women's club movement was parallel to those of White women's clubs, unlike the White women's movement the Black women were driven by the desire to transform the Black community and experience in America.

College Access

During the early 1800s higher education for Black people became available. One of the first Black people to graduate was Alexander Lucius Twilight “ a Vermont native, who graduated from Middlebury College in 1823” (Slater, 1994, p. 47). Amherst and Bowdoin both awarded degrees to African Americans in 1826. Giving access to some Black people by awarding degrees started a movement to grant college opportunities to

freed slaves. “Nearly all the free blacks who went on to pursue a higher education attended the first black colleges” (Slater, 1994, p. 48). Although, there were institutions that accepted and graduated more than a few Black people, Oberlin College founded in 1833 was the first college to create policies that allowed Black people to gain more access to higher education.

According to Harper, Patton and Wooden (2009), prior to the civil war, Cheyney University (formally known as Cheyney State Training School), proclaimed itself to be the first historically Black college. First it was an elementary and high school then transitioned into a higher education institution (Harper et al., 2009, p. 393). Another historically Black institution designed to educate and award baccalaureate degrees is Lincoln University (formally known as Ashmun Institution) (Harper et al., 2009). Between the years of 1837-1855 there were five higher education institutions created to educate Black people, one being Miner Teachers College, and an academy for Black women. These higher education institutions would ignite a movement for Black people to establish historically Black colleges/universities (HBCU) (Harper et al., 2009).

It was not until many years later that Mary Jane Patterson became the first Black woman to graduate with a baccalaureate degree from Oberlin College (Bell Scott, 1984). The fact that Black women were granted access into higher education signified progress, especially for the lack of representation of educated Black people and the poor status of women. Other women leaders in education included Mary Church Terrell, Anna Cooper and Maria Stewart. These women sought out to make changes within society that included women’s rights, civil rights and an end to educational segregation (Johnson,

2013). Education was used as a coping mechanism for many Black people as a way to resist stereotypes, combat racism and demonstrate competence. Black women had roles as teachers and helpers as a way to cope with and combat racism. This meant that Black women valued education and its importance. Historically, Black people have believed that education was power and the key to achieving equality and overcoming oppressions (DuBois, 1940; Giddings, 1988). However, there had been minimal systemic changes to policy for Black people up to this point in history (Harper et al., 2009).

Influences of Black Colleges and Universities

Historically Black colleges and universities have housed many Black scholars and leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Toni Morrison, Nikki Giovanni and Alice Walker. Some of the most popular and influential training schools, which later became HBCUs are Fisk, Howard, Spelman Morehouse and Hampton Universities. These higher educational institutions focused on educating Black people during the segregationist years and continue to provide educational opportunities for Black students. According to Allen and Jewell (2002) many HBCUs were founded by White missionaries who thought of Blacks as “hapless victims” who felt the need to “civilize and educate” Black people. Due to the mistrust and racism of the White founders of these HBCUs they were hesitant to allow Black people to become administrators of the colleges/universities, instead they chose to exclusively have only white instructors and administrators who controlled the curricula (Harper et al., 2009). The majority of what the Black people learned at these institutions reflected the European culture and disregarded the Black culture and traditions.

Giddings (1988) reported that by the 1880s segregation and racism increased, which resulted in exclusion of Black students from campus facilities such as residence halls. Solomon (1985) stated White students demonstrated hostility towards the Black students by not sitting or socializing with them. Black students often hid their sense of rejection by not discussing the racially hostile environment in which they navigated in (Allen, Jewell, Griffin & Wolf, 2007). Most Black students internalized the horrible treatment they were susceptible to while others failed to address the issue (Allen et.al, 2007). The creation of HBCUs was very important in the establishment of Black women-networks for college students. In addition to the racism that Black students faced in the early years of HBCUs, Black women also experienced sexism by being forced to exercise stereotypes that were considered duties of a woman.

Black Greek Organizations

In the 20th century, in order to fight injustice and racial oppression, Black men and women on Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) created Black fraternity and sorority organizations. These organizations adopted customs from White fraternities such as Greek symbols and names, criteria regarding admission, rituals and secret oaths. Additionally, education stood as a symbol to represent the intellectual abilities of Black college students to a racially insensitive society and symbolized a racial obligation to succeed and be leaders on and off campus. BGLOs had a desired to create a community geared towards brother/sisterhood for Black students on campus. These organizations were different from their White counterparts because the BGLOs were

created specifically by and for racial minorities in the efforts to uplift the Black community (Torbenson, 2012).

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. were the first and second NPHC organizations to be created. Due to the racism and prejudices of the Black culture from the administration at Cornell University and Indiana University these fraternities established a group to help combat racial and stereotypical issues that Black students on their campuses faced. Although, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity were all founded at an HBCU these men faced similar experiences as the Alphas and Kappas in regards to racial discrimination. Floyd (2009) argued, “Black Greek fraternities were instrumental in the founding and expansion of Black Greek sororities” (p. 21). Much like the experiences of the Black fraternity members, Black women created sororities and foster sisterhood to combat racism and challenge the traditional role of women (Giddings, 1988).

Some inequalities facing women on college campuses were the prohibition of dancing and smoking and limited interaction with men due to the expectation that women have good morals (Giddings, 1988). Violating the rules that were imposed on women could result in expulsion from the college. According to Brown Parks and Phillips (2005) women were limited in which courses they could take due to societal ideologies about gender and women’s socio-cultural role expectations. Women were expected to take nursing, education, and clerical courses to prepare for work in those fields.

Based on Collins’ (2000) findings “Black women strategies of everyday resistance have largely consisted of trying to create spheres of influence authority and

power within institutions that traditionally have allowed Blacks and women little formal authority or real power” (p. 146). The social networks of women’s organizations on campus became Black Greek sororities. These social systems “for college women met the needs and advanced the agenda of Black women on college campuses for individual survival and racial uplift” (Floyd, 2009, p. 23). Through this collegiate social movement African American sororities were established.

At Howard University three sororities fought to establish organizations that would combat the oppressive behaviors of racism and prejudice these organizations were: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, founded in 1908, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, founded in 1913, and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, founded in 1920. Additionally, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority was founded in 1922 at Butler University, a PWI. Phillips (2005) stated, “The sisterhood network of African American sororities has provided avenues for self-improvement, racial uplift, and leadership development” (p. 347). These organizations created various leadership roles, opportunities for civic responsibility, and established networks to promote community service and academic excellence (Patton, Bridges & Flowers, 2011).

Although, the rise in higher education for women especially Black women was growing, on many campuses across America women had limited resources and educational opportunities because of the social stigma of how a woman should act and who they should interact with. These rules and norms were enforced outside of campus as well demonstrating the sexism of the U.S. society. The establishment of Black sororities “sought out feminist gain-as well as race direct respect” (Neumann, 2008,

p.178). With the combination of sexism and racism the students on PWI and HBCU campuses needed to establish meaningful relationships. This was salient in the Black students' lives in order for them to survive and excel academically and personally. (Floyd, 2009). These organizations would provide a means for student leadership within the Black community on and off campus.

These newfound sisterhood organizations created missions, motto and principles that each member would pledge to uphold. Alpha Kappa Alpha's was the first NPHC Black sorority to be established. The motto of AKA symbolizes racial uplift of the Black community through service and education (Brown, Parks & Phillips, 2012). Their colors salmon pink and apple green represented how women should portray themselves as loving, graceful and strong. Delta Sigma Theta was established because these women wanted to provide service to their community and address social concerns. "They desired an organization that would transcend the traditional social aspects of Greek-letter societies and provide its members with continued opportunities for community service, activism, and fellowship after they left school" (McKenzie, 2005, p. 191). These members wanted to have more community service initiatives and address social inequalities.

Zeta Phi Beta was founded upon the principles of scholarship, service, sisterly love and finer womanhood. According to Lullelia Harrison, Zeta Phi Beta's 12th International President, "the founders of Zeta Phi Beta believed that the elitism of the existing sororities, as well as their overemphasis on social activities, failed to adequately capture the mission of more progressive organizations" (McKenzie, 2005, p. 196). The

women of Zeta strived to encourage the highest standards of scholarship, uplifting community and campus projects that were beneficial, and promoting sisterly love and the ideal of finer womanhood (Brown et al., 2012). Sigma Gamma Rho was unique in founding because it was the only sorority founded on a PWI and was created for teachers who were graduates of normal schools. Due to NPHC policies Sigma Gamma Rho changed their focus to collegiate women, establishing chapters at colleges became their priority (Brown et al., 2012). Since its founding Sigma Gamma Rho has developed into an international sorority with women from different backgrounds and professions. Their motto “greater service, greater progress” is reflective of their advancement for creating program initiatives that promotes the uniqueness of Black womanhood and service that is provided to Black communities around the nation (McKenzie, 2005, p. 196).

Black Sisterhood

Black women sought to fight against racism and sexism on campuses by developing clubs geared towards Black women. This new movement was built on the precepts of unity, and self-improvement to create a system of survival through Black sororities. According to Collins (2000), Black women have the power to develop a “culture to transmit folkways, norms and customs as well as build shared ways of seeing the world that insured our survival” (p. 285).

Through Black sororities, Black college women would commit to sister networks that pledged to promise to provide mental and spiritual support to help the race survive. Collins (2000) noted “I am the keeper of self, my sisters and the race” (p. 285) as the goal of Black women that transferred to Black sororities. Phillips (2005) stated Black women

realized the importance of networking for the betterment of the race and to promote change. Black women have played a vital role in the survival and betterment of the race through their strength and perseverance dating back to African traditions. However, Black women developed sisterly bonds and provided support and survival tips for each other due to the lack of outside resources and access to education (Giddings, 1988).

In her crafting of Black feminist thought, Patricia Hill Collins often references Audre Lorde, who helped to establish the position of *Sister Outsider* to depict the reflections of Black women who are multiply oppressed within White patriarchal society. As Black sororities are struggling to be heard within Greek life on college campuses, administrators and Greek council leaders need to understand these women's advocacy for greater strength in their own communities. Lorde and Collins describe the notions of *sister outsider* and *outsider within* by speaking to the ways in which Black women are marginalized in several ways by White males and females, while still being allowed access to spaces that help to create the oppression that they experience.

Challenges at PWI's

There was a severe need for Black sororities at PWIs due to the administration not listening to Black women's concerns and not valuing their opinions (Wheatley, 2008). Many Black students faced racism not only from their peers but from campus administrators and staff as well (Davis, Dias & Greenberg, 2004). Despite the negative treatment many Black students continued to attend PWIs because of the convenient location, wanting to be closer to their families and the Black community, financial constraints (Floyd, 2009). Due to limited research on Black women at PWI, specifically

Black sorority women, the rest of this section will discuss the experiences of Black people specifically Black men because this is the literature available. According to Cuyjet (2006) Black students are stressed because of low enrollment numbers at PWIs. These students feel abandoned on campus due to the limited number of people who can identify and connect with them. This feeling of isolation has strained the relationships that the students have with faculty and peers (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). Many students have perceived that their instructors have preconceived ideas about Black people. They feel that their instructors are racist and treat them different based on racial stereotypes. According to Bradley (2010) Black men at PWIs have experienced non-supportive, hostile environments based on their race and the stereotypes that others associate with a Black man. Black students feel a continuum of negative encounters throughout their college careers. The students are less satisfied with the institutions they are attending than the White students on campus (Lloyd, 2007).

Black students who attended PWIs felt that their issues and concerns were not being valued. This could negatively affect the Black students' academic and social performance. White (2013) stated, "They may perceive the environments of PWIs campuses as unwelcoming, hostile or threatening" (p. 30). Black students have reported that they felt alienated and unsatisfactory relationships with faculty at PWIs. Some students felt that they were being left out of campus activities. Research has shown that Black students enrolled in PWIs have felt discriminated against. This concept can be equated to microaggressions. Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) define

microaggressions as “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (p.60).

By experiencing the harsh and racist realities of U.S. higher education institutions Black sororities were designed to be a resource for Black undergraduates by providing a safe haven for them against racism, sexism and isolation. These sororities hosted most of the culturally appealing social events to educate the campus whether students were members or non-members (White, 2013). The leadership of Black sororities provided Black women supportive spaces to grow professionally, academically and socially.

While Black sorority women’s experience in higher education is rich in history there is a lack research about it. Kimbrough (1998) stated, research “identifies some of the positive aspects of Black Greek life, [but] it only scratches the surface of what is known about these organizations” (p. 104). There is not a substantial body of research literature on the experiences of Black students specifically Black sorority women. Nonetheless, the literature that discussed the Black sorority women’s experience in higher education has provided a foundation for future research to be conducted.

Theoretical Framework

The Black Feminist Thought. Black feminist thought was used as a guide in this study to inform my analysis and interpretations of the Black sorority women’s experiences and benefits in membership as well as an influence in the development of the interview questions. The Black feminist thought (BFT) theory was revolutionized by Collins (1989) to bring scholarly awareness of Black women's collective experiences. Throughout history the Black women's experiences have been negated, and Collins

(1989) focused her research efforts in bringing awareness to the Black woman's historical oppressions that have established her as having an inferior status throughout history. This oppression according to Collins (1989) stemmed from the Black woman's race, gender, socio-cultural standing within society, and known as intersectionality. In her explanation of the Black feminist thought this theory provided a standpoint for Black women that showcased their experiences as a collective group. Collins (1989) challenged two aspects of an oppressed people, which I will explain next.

The first claim that was challenged by Collins (1989) stated that an oppressed person or group would rather assimilate than challenge the status quo. The second claim challenged the ideals that the oppressed are less intelligent and incapable of challenging the status quo of the dominating ruling class because they are considered subhuman (Collins, 1989). She argued that these claims that are based on generalized and/or marginalized scholarly information and cannot be used as a defining point for the Black women's experiences (Collins, 1989). These misguided ideologies and claims about the Black women and their experiences are forged from others' scholarly observations; specifically, scholars who are White and Black men and White women who have grouped all Blacks and women into one ascribed group (Collins, 1989). Most scholarly research have grouped Black women into generalized categorizations that have them as being an oppressed and dominated group in which throughout history can be viewed as truth (Collins, 1989). However, these some scholars have negated to examine the true essence and experiences of the Black woman through their own distinctive viewpoint (Collins, 1989). Collins (1989) stated, "their shared experiences as a group have allowed them to

have a different worldview or reality that is not reflective of the dominant group's realities" (p. 747) and other women's realities and/or the Black man's realities.

With the same sentiments of Collins (1989), other feminist scholars argued that with their refusal to be oppressed, it allowed the Black woman to re-define Black womanhood, their identities and collectively changed their viewpoints on themselves as well as how they perceived other Black women (Collins, 2000; Settles, 2006). Furthermore, these scholars expressed that all women have similar experiences that connect them as women, but the Black woman's standpoint is unique to the Black woman's unique perspective (Collins, 1989; Collins, 2000; Patton, 2006;). The Black feminist thought theory holds that Black women define their own standpoint that is based on their realities (Collins, 1989; Collins, 2000).

Research has discussed how Black women often find themselves caught in the middle as well as psychologically conflicted to choose between their racial background and gender ascribed identities (Collins, 1989; Collins, 2000). However, to counteract these conflicts between their socio-cultural ascribed identities, Black women have identified themselves with an original and separate categorization that is reflective to their unique identities: the Black woman's identity (Collins, 1989; Collins, 2000). This essential and creative identity is a reflection of the Black woman's unique essence, experiences, and incorporated a combination of their racial, gender, and cultural identities. Black woman have re-defined their identity that is separate of the Black (i.e. which is reflecting the Black man's experiences) and woman (i.e. which is reflecting the White woman's experiences) (Collins, 1989; Collins, 2000). In conclusion, Black

feminist thought can be simply explained as being a unique perspective that is rooted in the inferior socio-cultural status of Black women who have been deemed subhuman throughout history. People who are not Black and women have a history of claiming they understand the Black woman's experience, but Black women are capable and should make their own claims about their experience. (Collins, 1989; Collins, 2000).

Conclusion

There were many aspects of the literature that examined the history of Black female life and how it has influenced the notion of support amongst Black women on U.S. universities and colleges. The scholarly literature revealed student affairs professionals need to examine the importance of developing a safe space for Black sisterhood and acceptance of racial diversity. Sorority women in NPHC have created a sense of Black womanhood, despite the negative environment in which they are plagued to operate under. Despite these unfortunate challenges, they have been able to be a beacon of hope and encouragement to other Black women in their acceptance of their similarities as well as differences as Black women. With this understanding and acceptance, NPHC sororities seem to have created a comfortable sociocultural environment that is a resource for emotional stability. The literature also revealed there is a rise in research in regards to Black male students experiences at PWI's who are in Greek lettered organizations, but the scholarly literature is lacking for Black sorority members that are participants in NPHC across the country. In light of all this, I will explain the methodological choices for this study in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and the available support afforded to NPHC Black sorority women at a Midwestern predominantly White institution (PWI). Specifically, this study will describe the benefits and impact of membership in a NPHC sorority at a PWI. While research on Greek life can be helpful it is not reflective of NPHC organizations because of the limited research on NPHC specifically Black sororities. This qualitative study attempts to answer the questions of how has membership in a NPHC Black sorority benefited Black women at a PWI Heartland University (HU) and in what ways do race and gender influence NPHC Black sorority members' experiences at HU.

Qualitative Research

According to Mertens (2015) qualitative research gives the observer the opportunity to directly engage and interpret the phenomena of the participant. Qualitative researchers “transform the world” (Mertens, 2015, p. 236) by using a series of representations to small population of people to gain a greater understanding of their situations. I hope to create a ripple effect with this research, which is aimed at understanding the experience of NPHC sorors at a PWI because there is so little written about their specific experiences. Generally, qualitative researchers collect data from the participants who have experienced the same type of phenomenon (Creswell 2013; Mertens, 2015). For this study, I am focusing on the Black women's experiences in an NPHC organization at a PWI.

Transformative Paradigm

The researcher's view of the world is important when choosing a qualitative method. I am using a transformative view. This paradigm is used to address social issues within society that deals with oppression (Creswell, 2013). Further, this paradigm examines how Black sorority women experience a PWI campus. According to Mertens (2015) the transformative paradigm "places central importance on the lives and experiences of the diverse groups that, traditionally, have been marginalized (i.e. women, minorities, and person with disabilities)" (p.21). Transformative researchers analyze how politics and social action are linked to inequality. They also examine how inequalities based on marginalized identities equate to distorted access to equity. The transformative researcher also considers their positionality relative to the topic and population at the center of the research; I do this later in this chapter in the researcher reflexivity section.

The transformative paradigm was created due to the dissatisfaction with the dominant research paradigm practices and the limitation of research of marginalized groups (Mertens, 2015). According to Mertens (2015) the point of view of the individuals must be described in a narrative review without any continued oppression by the researcher. One can do this "through collaborative construction of text" in order to "enable resistance to continued oppression" (Mertens, 2015, p.262). The powerful gifts given to me by the young Black women in the study took me to emotional places through time and space, as they were my teachers. Each participant caused me to reflect upon my own college experience as a Black woman, taught me no matter the era I have a duty to help the younger generation attain higher education and be empowered to reignite that

torch I carry for the legacy of my sorority. These interviews represent more than recordings of narratives they represent trust and rapport amongst the Black community more specifically Black women. Although I am confident in the findings presented in this study, I feel I am just beginning to understand their challenges, motivations to continue to further their education through the lens of their sorority and learn about their access to resources. Therefore, I have provided a list of suggestions for future research in the last chapter, as I have come to understand there is still a lot unknown about Black sorority women's experiences at PWIs.

Case Study

In order to understand the importance of Black sorority women's experiences at a PWI a case study method was chosen. Baxter and Jack (2008) defined case study as "an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources" (p.544). This is to ensure that multiple perspectives are taken into account, which allows the phenomena to be revealed and understood. According to Mertens (2015) a case study method "is an investigative approach used to thoroughly describe complex phenomena, such as recent events, important issues, or programs, in ways to unearth new and deeper understandings of these phenomena" (p. 245). These Black women are not a monolithic and exist inside of a system that wants them to be the same and wants them to be easy to cope with so the case study method allows me to make an in depth examination of their individual experiences in an effort to resist these pressures.

Mertens (2015) described the purpose of a case study as: “focus[ing] on a particular instance (object or case) and reaching an understanding within a complex context” (p. 245). She explained there are problematic situations that occur when trying to define a case study as a form of research (Mertens, 2015). Mertens discussed how Stake solved this problem by recognizing that a case study criterion does not have a specific methodology but is defined by the study itself. Stake writes that “The more the object of study is specific, unique, bounded system” (p. 445) the more credible it is to be called a case study. For this study, I am focused on the individual as the case. I am looking at the experiences of each individual soror in an effort to understand their unique experiences. Focusing on them as individuals is a way for me, using the transformative paradigm, to resist stereotypes and resist an understanding of Black women in a monolithic group.

Mertens (2015) suggests that a case study should have a collection of data within the nature of the case, its historical background, and physical setting. There should also be data collection in other contexts, such as economic, political, legal, and aesthetic and through informants whom the case can be known (p.247). I have provided these types of data as part of my findings by describing the participants’ histories, the important relationships they have with others, the political climate they experience and their reactions to it.

When collecting data, Mertens (2015) recommended the following information be considered: (a) the nature of the case, historical background, (b) physical setting, (c) economic, (d) political, legal, and aesthetic contexts, (e) informants through whom the

case can be known and other cases that can be recognized from this case. While reading the phenomenon the reader should not compare cases to find similarities and lose the essence of the case in which makes it unique. Stake understands that readers will generalize case study findings but encourages people to view each case study as being important (Mertens, 2015) which is one reason that I present the participants' stories individually.

Recruitment of Participants

The participant population includes women students who identify as Black, are members of a National Pan-Hellenic Council sorority and held a leadership position on campus. All participants were over the age of 19 years when the recruitment and interviews were conducted. Participants were recruited from one institution with the assistance of the Greek Affairs office. Both the institution and the students are referred by a pseudonym to protect the identities of the students. Heartland University is a large public research institution located in the Midwest. In late November a recruitment script was emailed to the NPHC advisor in Greek Affairs, who directly emailed the recruitment message to about 15 Black sorority women on campus. In addition to the recruitment message sent out by the Greek Affairs advisor, I sent out a personal recruitment message to six other Black sorority members who were not included on the Greek Affairs listserv because they were no longer apart of the undergraduate NPHC chapter. I sent out an email and enlisted all the individuals who responded to the invitation to participate. I selected participants who had been in their organization for at least one year, since one year of experience would increase the likelihood of their having a substantial knowledge

of the NPHC experiences on HU's campus. Participants of this study were enrolled full time and had been at the institution for more than 3 years. A description follows. More information about each participant is provided in Chapter 4 as part of their stories.

Research Site

Through my professional contacts with the Greek Affairs advisor I chose one institution to send my recruitment message. No other institutions were chosen because of the lack of connection and networking. Collecting data from one site is consistent with the case study approach.

Heartland University. Heartland University (HU) is a predominately White large public research institution located in a city with population over 100,000 people in the Midwest. It was chartered in the 1800s and is the flagship school of the state. HU offers bachelors and graduate degrees with over 100 majors to choose from. HU has approximately 20,000 students enrolled at the institution and of those students about 2% is Black/African American. The majority of the Black students are athletes. There are limited interactions between student athletes and the rest of the Black students due to the fact they are housed separately from the rest of the student population which tend to happen because of the residence halls floor plans. Also, there is one cultural center where scholarship and academic programs as well as a cultural library are housed. Minority students mainly use this center for studying, meetings and relaxing. The campus also has a newly renovated union and library where students are encouraged to study and "kick it."

Additionally, HU has a plethora of student-led organizations on campus. Of those organizations, the largest organizations on campus are Greek organizations. They are separated into four councils based on gender and race: Interfraternity Council (IFC), Panhellenic Council (PHC), National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), and Multicultural Greek Council (MGC). Each one of these councils is a part of the Greek Affairs office which was founded in the 1970s after becoming a part of the Division of Student Affairs. Although, the administration of HU take pride in having a diverse campus that sentiment is not felt amongst many minority students on campus, specifically Black women due to the fact of discriminatory acts and high racial tension that occurred on campus in prior years. For example, during one of the campus weekly brown bag discussions at HU, Black female students passionately argued about not having a space that provides resources just for their identities. Instead they are referred to either the women's center where they perceive is only White women or the multicultural center where the Latino and Asian communities are provided more opportunities and resources.

Another example is from a couple of years back when a few of HU's Greek councils participated in Greek Week. The theme was geared towards celebrating different cultures and ethnicities. During the rally a couple of organizations stereotypically imitated Hispanic culture by wearing sombreros, dancing to a mariachi band and throwing burritos into the audience while a high level administrator of the university was presented on a float. Another example was within the same year someone wrote the n-word outside a residence hall on campus, this caused uproar on campus between the Black faculty, staff and students and HU's administration. Due to the damaging backlash

of the two incidents as well as others, the administration was forced to acknowledge the racial tension on HU's campus. To counteract negative publicity, the administration was forced to create a committee that was charged to construct an educational plan that dealt with racial and diversity issues in an effort to promote cultural and racial awareness. I read in a news article that many students felt that even with this new plan in place, the issues were not completely resolved due to the fact that the problems were not addressed in a timely manner. In addition, the parties that were involved were not reprimanded, which resulted in frustration, feelings of isolation and non-supportive atmosphere for minority students. The most recent incident occurred in the late spring when Black students became "fed up" with HU's administration and campus culture. The students held a silent protest, marched in solidarity with the Black victims who were killed by police brutality, which had been the subject of many recent news reports over the last year, and held a campus wide political rally to address student concerns regarding racism, discrimination and isolation.

The following incidents were just examples of what Blacks and other minority students faced at HU. These were not isolated or standalone events. Throughout HU's flagship history, racism and discrimination have been a part of their past and present. Despite what plans the administration tried to implement, the following narratives in Chapter 4 reveal a deep sense of frustration towards campus administration. The women involved in my project are the embodiment of the Black experience on campus. Their narratives reveal that racism is alive and well.

Data Collection

I collected data via two methods: observations and interviews. Both forms are recommended in case study research. Creswell (2013) describes observations as the “researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site” (p. 190). Field notes should be reported in an “unstructured or semi structured” way making sure to use questions from the researcher and record any activities and engagement from the research site (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative researchers can decide whether they will be a complete participant or a nonparticipant within the observation. In order to ensure that the participant is willing to provide their perspectives without consequences the researcher should ask general questions and the observations should be open-ended (Creswell, 2013).

Due to the low NPHC sorority member numbers all my participants were graduate students that attended the same institution for their undergraduate degree. Three face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant, lasting approximately 45 minutes on average. These semi-structured interviews involved generally open-ended questions, which were conducted at three separate times. The questions were structured with the intent of eliciting views and opinions from the participants. Participant observations took place in spaces where Black sorority women engaged with other students on campus. These would include monthly social support meetings and interactions, which took place in a multicultural center.

Data Analysis

Thematic coding of the data was performed according to instructions outlined by Auerback and Silverstein (2003). Interviews were transcribed, saved as Microsoft word documents and printed along with observation field notes. They were then coded using a manual open coding system. Main ideas were highlighted and labeled according to their relations to their research concerns. A code sheet was devised which explains the different color-coding system. In the second round of coding I organized all the coded text in a separate file according to repeating ideas. “A repeating idea is an idea expressed by two or more research participants” (Auerback & Silverstein 2003, p. 54). Highlighted text was cut from the document and put into a folder and labeled with the pseudonym, the date and page number from the original document. Themes were solidified by noting which passages contained orphaned text, that is ideas that seemed to broad, to narrow or misplaced. The list of repeating of ideas was double checked with the master list. Once this was done the repeating ideas were organized into larger groups that reflect a common theme. A theme is “ an implicit idea or topic that a group of repeating ideas has in common” (Auerback & Silverstein 2003, p. 62). Instead of reporting the themes by describing different elements from the data (Bazeley, 2009) for each common idea between all there participants I have decided to report two individual themes that emerged from each sorority member and two collective themes of all the participants in order to identifying. The themes are reported this way to gain a better understanding and acknowledge the different experience of the individual Black sorority woman.

Researcher Reflexivity

According to Creswell (2013) a qualitative researcher “reflects about how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations” (p. 186). I, as the primary researcher will reflect upon my experiences and how it will shape the data. Upon reflection of the reflexivity questions, I found myself not being forthcoming about what I believe to be ideal. So I started to answer the questions more authentically. When I think about who I am (my identity): I am strong, independent and outgoing 24-year-old Black woman. I believe these things of myself because of my background. I grew up in a Black, low-income single parent home, and as the eldest child I was tasked with helping my mother to take care of my siblings. Many times I felt unappreciated and angry because I felt I did not get the childhood experience as my friends and distant relatives. At a young age, my mother instilled in me the value of having an education. As the conversations about attending college increased my mother reminded me of the importance of getting involved on campus and joining cultural organizations such as a Black sorority.

After becoming a member of a NPHC sorority at a PWI I knew I would be tasked to become a positive leader on campus. By being available and present throughout campus I felt that I would be able to change the environment in which other multicultural students navigated through by providing more resources and support through events and programs, volunteer work and mentorships. Although, these activities were effective it did shed light on other challenges that I and other Black students would be faced with.

As a NPHC member I noticed that our recruitment and intake processes were different from our White counterparts (i.e. IFC and PHC). We were not afforded the same financial resources, moral support and specialized leadership development. The trainings were geared towards IFC and PHC organizations and did not focus on the uniqueness of NPHC and the multicultural Greek council (MGC). Other challenges that I faced, as a NPHC member was the lack of support in regards to advising. Our advisor at the time of my undergraduate career was not employed through the Greek Affairs office instead was an employee in a different department. The method of permission and resource distribution wasn't conducive for MGC and NPHC because it had to come from the director of the Greek Affairs and not the direct advisor. This process created communication barriers between the advisor and the council members, which resulted in missed opportunities on and off campus and a bad representation.

As time went on and I continued to grow within my sorority and NPHC becoming president of both organizations I wanted to provide ways to improve communication between the Greek affairs staff, our advisor and NPHC by using a calendar system that will list all the time and location of NPHC events for the year that could be shared via email. This system would have provided effective communication and assist with getting permission for events and programs in a timely fashion by the Greek Affairs director by giving a semester an advance to sign the permission forms and turn them in before the due date. Although this procedure was never adopted by Greek affairs or NPHC the director of Greek Affairs did extend working hours each week to gain a better

understanding of the needs and wants of the NPHC members. In spite of the fact that the gesture had minimal change I knew it was a step in the right direction.

Learning about the history and intake process of NPHC organizations has always been a passion of mine since senior year of high school. Upon joining my sorority I had to go through a hazing workshop provided by the Greek Affairs office. During the workshop we defined hazing, discussed the dangers and who to report hazing to as well as what to expect within an intake process. I thought the workshop would be beneficial for all Greeks on campus. As the year progressed I notice that the hazing workshop was not seen as a requirement anymore to allow new members to join the Greek organizations. We requested the information to be updated by discussing more of the recent hazing incidences instead such as paddling, sleep deprivation and verbal abuse and taught for more than fifteen minutes but no changed happened because the Greek Affairs administration thought did not feel the need to give more examples of how students can endure hazing and thought it was better than no information at all. When we realized there were no conversations being had about our absence, we started to conduct our own hazing workshops within our individual sororities. Through this experience I felt that NPHC lacked the support needed from Greek Affairs and the campus community. I also noticed that our leadership skills were not as refined as our White counterparts and that no one attempted to resolve this issue.

The aforementioned challenges motivated me to conduct this study and to use research as a tool to learn more about the challenges that Black sorority women face, along with understanding the support and leadership development or lack thereof that is

available at the PWI. From my personal experiences of being a NPHC sorority member at a PWI I felt the need to tell the stories of other Black NPHC sorority women's experiences and how they cope with these challenges.

Ethical Concerns and Criteria for Goodness

“In qualitative research, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings” (Merriam, 2002, p. 37). Ethical concerns allow for the power to shift from the interviewer to the person being interviewed which allows the interviewee to stop the interview and observation at anytime, ask questions about the research, have the choice to review their comments and choose not to answer any questions (Mertens, 2015). This study addresses ethical concerns by stating at the beginning of each interview and observation participants were given the opportunity to opt out of the study at any time if deemed necessary. The semi-structured interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and were assured that they could stop the recording at anytime without consequences. The interview questions were designed to provide comfort and trustworthiness as the participant expanded upon their perspectives and experiences without feeling pressured to respond in a different way because of my position as the researcher.

Prior to the interviews each participant was emailed an informed consent form detailing the study, interviews and observations. Participants signed the informed consent document which is included in Appendix B. In order to protect the participants from risk all transcriptions, audio records and field notes were filed in a password locked personal computer that only I could access. The interviews were conducted in a private space that

the participants had chosen. During observations I had to announce the reason why they were attending the meeting and state that the actions of people attending the meetings who were not part of the study would be documented but no identifying information would be reported within the study. They were encouraged to ask me to stop observing and leave at anytime of the observation. There was no known risk attached to this study.

According to Mertens (2015), there are five criteria in judging the goodness of qualitative research. The criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and transformative. These criteria will be addressed in this study in order to ensure quality research.

The first component of goodness is credibility. Mertens (2015) describes credibility as having the following components: prolonged and persistent engagement, peer debriefing, member checks, negative case analysis, progressive subjectivity, and triangulation. Over the course of the research, repeated interviews, the collections of text/artifacts and observations were conducted to establish prolonged and persistent engagement with participants in order to establish trust and rich data. At the end of each interview I conducted member checks by summarizing what the participant had said and reviewing field notes to ensure the participant's perspective was accurately recorded. In the second and third follow-up interview I gave participants a draft of the findings based on the interviews and the observations of previous interviews. This is done to give the participant the opportunity to correct any errors and challenge interpretations that they may perceive as wrong. During the data collection process, I used a journal and wrote memos as a method to keep an open mind about the study and challenge their bias

through progressive subjectivity. From the text/artifacts, observations, interviews, journals and field notes, data were triangulated to ensure that the study was comprehensive and well developed.

The second component Mertens (2015) described was transferability. Transferability means providing rich and detailed analysis of participants' experiences so that readers can understand the context and consider the applicability of the study's findings to other situations. I added perspective about the institution, the organizations and is a member of the Black woman community, which helps to add context for transferability of this study. Readers are reminded however that the aim of this study is not generalizability or transferability, it is more precisely to share the stories of these individual Black sorority women.

Dependability addresses the change that occurred in the study and how the researcher tracks and inspects the change in order to be considered dependable (Mertens, 2015). The researcher had regular discussions with her advisor about the study design and progress. These served as a check point to ensure that the design and decisions were aligned. These discussions were then documented in this methodology chapter to share the decisions that were made.

Qualitative research assumes that each researcher presents a unique perspective to every research study. So, a universal truth irrespective of the researcher cannot be determined. Alternately, confirmability suggests that each finding should "be traced to its original source" (Mertens, 2015, p. 272). During the study I did informal member checks after every interview and formal member checks before the follow-up interviews to seek

verification and understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences and that the findings represented their experiences.

The final component of Mertens' (2015) criteria of goodness is transformative criteria. Transformative criteria provide a framework for addressing social justice, inequalities and human rights. The following criteria guide this study: "Positionality or Standpoint Epistemology/Critical Reflexivity," "Praxis," or "Social Change" (Mertens, 2015, pp. 273-274). As a Black sorority woman at a PWI, I am aware and acknowledge the experiences of the other Black sorority women whom I will be interviewing. I understand that their stories need to be told accurately in order to reflect their experiences at a PWI and the benefits of joining a NPHC sorority and to promote positive change and solidarity with these women. Due to the nature of this transformative criteria I will attend to the varied historical, racial, social and gender issues that are inextricable.

Limitations

In education it is not possible to conduct a research study without some limitations. Therefore, it is important for me to find and address those limitations. Time was a limitation within this research study. The initial plan was to start contacting participants and scheduling interviews and observations within the first month of the semester. Unfortunately, due to the sensitive nature of conducting research on minority women, IRB status was not approved until the last few weeks of the semester. As a result of the delay in IRB, my initial time line had unforeseeable changes such as meeting with participants multiple times in a week instead of spread out over two semesters.

Some might consider the fact that the study took place at one PWI in the Midwest as a limitation. However, it was not the intention of this research to be able to generalize the findings. In light of this, readers should not assume all Black NPHC sorority women at PWIs have the same experiences in college, instead realize the study only shares the narratives of three Black women at one PWI.

Additionally, some may have found that being a member of a similar community as the participants could be seen as a limitation. Due to the researcher's own experiences at a PWI, their personal bias may have influenced the research study. I attempted to address this through my reflexivity statement, continual journaling throughout the process, member checks with participants, and consistent reflections and conversations with my advisor and other colleagues about my data and analysis.

Conclusion

This chapter addressed the research design and methods. As a transformative, case study I relied on face-to-face interviews, and observations and field notes as a means for data collection and analysis. This chapter also explored the ethical concerns, criterion of goodness as well as considered the significant role of the researcher in order to establish trustworthiness and validity in the study. Limitations were also recognized and discussed within the chapter. Chapter 4 will identify and describe the findings and themes of the research study.

Chapter 4

Findings

This qualitative research study is geared towards getting a better understanding of the experiences and the available support afforded to Black sorority women at a Midwestern, predominately White institution (PWI). The two research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: How does being a NPHC Black sorority member benefit their experiences at PWI Heartland University?

RQ2: How does race and gender influence NPHC Black sorority members' experiences at PWI Heartland University?

The three participants from this study all have different backgrounds, with vastly different experiences from one another. However, they have commonalities within the investigated phenomenon. The most significant, collective similarities in their experiences of being a participant in a prestigious Black sorority were that their expectations were not met. They felt that they did not receive equal treatment from the resources affiliated with Greek affairs as well as administrative figures on Heartland's campus. This caused all three participants to feel isolated, disregarded, misunderstood and disrespected.

Introduction of Participants

Each Black sorority woman was given a pseudonym in an effort to protect their identities. The following descriptions are my interpretations and insights of the Black women based on my individual interactions and affiliation with each member. The experiences of these women will be presented in three different cases. The paradigm, in

which my thesis is centered on, is reflective of the importance and the purpose of my study. In relationship to the transformative paradigm, this aligned with putting the women first and letting them tell their individual stories. The importance of the usage of the case study approach was to showcase the uniqueness of each participant's experiences and the context in which they experience it.

As discussed in Chapter 3, purposive sampling methods were initiated to locate participants. I located participants through my involvement in the Greek Affairs system at Heartland University as a leader in a Black sorority. Each participant agreed to three separate one hour-long interviews, which were audio recorded in addition to three observations during Greek events. My three participants were Mary, Frankie and Keyshia who are between the ages of 20-40. Each participant was able to provide a unique view of the situation based on her own background and experiences. They represent two different NPHC organizations. All the participants have joined sororities, received their undergraduate degrees, and are now attending graduate school at the current PWI named Heartland University (HU). Each of them has been at HU for at least two years. More detailed information about the participants is not provided in order to protect their identities.

As previously stated in Chapter 3, I collected data through three one hour-long interview and observations with each participant individually. An extensive analysis was conducted which utilized my field notes and transcribed interviews that were later organized into individual themes and two collective themes. With the adoption of Creswell's (2015) suggestions about how to make transcribed texts from a case study

more manageable, I combined related text in an attempt to discover repetitive concepts and to cultivate individual and two collective themes. This process allowed me to organize my themes that corresponded with my theoretical framework the Black feminist thought. After an extensive analysis of the data, themes were formed and separately analyzed individually for each of the three Black women sorority members. The three Black women's responses shaped each theme, which represented their unique everyday experiences as Black, sorority members who is currently in attendance at a prestigious PWI. My interpretations of the themes revealed that the three Black sorority members are aware that they are not listened to, overlooked and their concerns are not a priority within the dominating White culture and administration on HU's campus. Although, their collective experiences at HU have not been idyllic, that has not deterred them from empowering other minority students. Each theme dictated their invisibility, intersectionality and the willingness to empower others in relation to the phenomenon.

Introduction to Themes

All the Black sorority members had diverse backgrounds and experiences as a college student but all had similar experiences in college in relation to being a Black sorority woman and experiencing racism and sexism, being ignored by campus administration and having to navigate systems that disregarded their unique role on campus. Through the data collection process, themes emerged that provide a unique insight into the lives of the Black sorority women from their different perspectives. Each Black sorority woman had two themes about their different experiences and one collective theme representing data provided by all of them. The presentation of the

themes were chosen to help the reader gain a greater understanding about the individual woman's experiences on how they accepted their Black Womanhood and then focus on how all their sororities was beneficial to their existence on and off campus. Mary's themes are *Upbringing Centered on the Black Male Consciousness* and *I'm a Black Woman, NOT a Passive Victim*. Next Keyshia's themes are presented, which are *You Want Me to Do What?!?* and *My Black is Beautiful*. The themes *Stop Racially Profiling Me...I'm Bi-Racial... Meaning... A Black Woman* and *Stop Generalizing Me!!! I'm NOT An Angry Black Woman* was presented for Frankie. Lastly, one collective theme was presented for all the participants and their shared experiences at HU. This theme is titled *Black Sisterhood vs. HU's Institutional Norms*. The seven themes will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter with supporting data from the Black sorority women. These themes highlight the complexities of these Black sorority women's lived experiences at a predominately White institution.

Mary. As a child growing up, Mary revealed that her grandmother was her sole support system. Her grandmother was very attentive to Mary's needs and instilled in Mary the values of becoming an educated Black woman. Mary gave credit to her grandmother for encouraging her to be academically and professionally successful. She remembered her grandma teaching her how to be great amongst those who have already achieved this status. However, her grandmother's acknowledgments of Black people were solely centered on Black men's accomplishments and not Black women.

Upbringing centered on the Black male's consciousness. Through her grandmother's influence based on her grandmother's socio-cultural beliefs in Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X signified her grandmother's ideologies that are interrelated to her era. Based on her grandmother's wisdom and understanding of Black male education during her upbringing as well as the changing times, Mary stated in relation to Dr. King's teachings and theological principles, he possessed a powerful ability to sway others to commit to his causes:

I think Dr. King was an excellent leader just because he had the support of a movement and I think his ability to speak to the struggles of the everyday people was important for getting people to support him but also just the way that he was committed to causes.

In relation to Malcolm X as a powerful influence on education, she stated:

You know I think the disadvantage of a formal education is that we expect people to give us opportunities. We expect people to tell us what we need to know to succeed versus persons like Malcolm X who had an eighth grade education and decided this is what I need to know to be able to perform in what I want to do.

However, during the data collection process, Mary never spoke about Black women's accomplishments during her grandmother's, Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X's interconnected era. Nonetheless, I recognized that the acknowledgement about Black women's achievements became apparent in her consciousness when she spoke about her newfound experiences at Heartland University. During this time, Mary was exposed to different aspects of Black life that was centered on Black womanhood and development through her NPHC organization and sisterhood. These experiences included volunteering

at schools and working with Black students from different socioeconomic status, interacting and assisting Black families who have been displaced from their home.

I'm a Black woman, not a passive victim. Mary's years on HU's college campus, she joined many student led organizations that helped define her as a Black woman. In her first year of college she joined the Black student government, which introduced her to Greek life. Through this affiliation, she was introduced by peer mentors to a prestigious Black sorority and in time would become her sorority sisters. Based on her interactions, she grew to know that these women were highly educated, promoted Black womanhood and in essence taught her that because she was Black and female, she did not have to continue to be passive.

Mary unconsciously believed within her pursuit for collegiate success, she would excel in all aspects of collegiate life. She felt because other Blacks were successful and paved the way that she would also have that privilege as a Black woman. Unfortunately, Mary predefined for herself who was going to be her mentors in college and what goals she would set for herself to be a Black successful woman based off of her previous assumptions. However, she forgot about the teachings of the trailblazers before her and their education, gender and racial struggles such as Black women marching in the civil rights movement in the 1960s to secure voting rights for Black people.

After this realization, in her efforts to overcome these negative perspectives, she created three spaces where she found comfort and support: family, student led organizations and her sorority. Mary explained that at home, her family took priority over anything that she was involved in. "They come before school and work to me. And so

I'm definitely a person who is willing to negotiate my time to make them a priority if it's essential in that moment." She further elaborated that she understood the importance of family and how they were very important in her journey for academic success, but more importantly laid the foundation for her to discover who she was becoming as a Black woman. She disclosed that her involvement in different campus organizations enabled her to continue to understand and shape her position as a Black woman on campus.

In regards to her affiliation with student led organizations, Mary stated "When I came to [Heartland University] I experienced Blackness in a different way and so I was understanding it more so through my experiences in [Black student organizations' sponsored activities]." Joining the Black student government assisted Mary in finding her voice and defining herself not only as a campus leader but one who is Black, woman and educated. This self-discovery can also be attributed to her affiliation and then initiation into her sorority. The bonds that were fostered within Mary's sorority created a gateway from the harsh realities of campus, which Mary experienced. Such as being called racial slurs at campus events and her White peers staring at her when Black people are discussed in class.

Mary expressed that her sorority sisters played a vital role in providing support and acknowledged her as a Black woman through the relationship that were fostered in result of being a member. She stated that:

If I were to have best friends they would all be shouting [sorority name] just because we spend so much time together. We have arguments together and we've

gotten past arguments together. We shared in some intimate moments in each other's lives.

Mary also expressed that her sorority sisters played a vital role in providing support and acknowledging her as a Black woman through the relationship that were fostered in result of being a member.

As Mary became more involved in the Black student government as well as her sorority's community events, her Black female consciousness began to reveal itself. This metamorphous allowed her to mindfully self-reflect on the life she had been living prior to her interactions with the Black women in the Black student government organization. She decided that she no longer preferred to be a passive participant in her life. Through this transformation, Mary was not going to allow others to dictate her identity as a Black woman instead she voices her opinion about things she is passionate about and is not afraid to tell others no when she does not want to do things that may cause her discomfort.

Keyshia. Does Keyshia have to scream and be loud for you to take her seriously? Hell!!! She's tired of these folks telling her what to do and how to do it. She's got her own way of doing things and it is not listening to you unless you're her father. Keyshia's single parent father raised her along with her two siblings in a low-income neighborhood. Knowing the low-rates of Blacks in college, Keyshia's dad encouraged her and her siblings to attend the flagship university. During Keyshia's time at Heartland University she was an active member in several organizations. Many times in meetings, she was

mindful of her behaviors because of her identification as being a Black woman and the stereotypes that others may have of her.

You want me to do what?!?!? Keyshia has a unique perspective on what it means to be an activist. She understands because of the change in time in our diverse community it is imperative that the institution's activities should be geared more towards being inclusive. Keyshia discussed a time when she was involved in a protest on campus about racial equality, which was a pivotal moment for the history of the college as well as the nation. I realized this protest was around the time of the Michael Brown verdict, when racial tensions and emotions were high. Keyshia explained

a lot of students and faculty, not a lot though, we were pretty outraged and pretty upset about it and we wanted to do something about...so there was many protest.

One being on the capital stairs that I participated in.

Keyshia expressed that HU's campus activities should be more culturally sensitive to the students in the community that they serve. There have been many racial incidents in previous years on campus regarding racial incidents. As Keyshia reflected on the Greek Week events and the writing of a racial slur in front of a residence hall she described her feelings and those of others who were affected by the traumatic events. She passionately vocalized her feelings by stating "there was many racial incidents going on at this institution like what happened at Greek Week and all that and there was no support from the administration and barely no support from staff and faculty and so that was tiring." Through Keyshia's experiences of the aforementioned events she inherited a newfound passion in activism, spearheading in the planning and implementation of political rallies.

She stated, “I see myself as, I want to be one of the forefront leaders of change.” Keyshia has demonstrated her loyalty by combatting racial discrimination, prejudices and inequality.

Keyshia’s boycotting behavior has also been exercised within the classroom on different occasions. In one occasion in particular she explained how she had to stand up for views against her professor and peers. The project topics had been assigned but Keyshia was upset about the assignments. Keyshia explained what happened:

Our teacher was like you know let's get a better understanding. I said I feel that my point got across. I feel y'all heard me and what I have to say but that doesn't mean that just because I said and I feel a certain way that we are going to do it because I know that is not reality you know. Or it is like or are you just going to give it to me because I'm the only Black girl and y'all want me to shut up you know?

Although the professor asked Keyshia more about her perspective, she felt as though asking her opinion was attributed to her being a Black woman and not wanting Keyshia to view the situation as racist. By not having the support of the group members nor the instructor Keyshia felt as though her opinion and ideas were not respected nor wanted because of the previous racist and injustice behaviors that she has experienced at HU in the past, which resulted in her to being standoffish and non-receptive of her instructor’s advice.

Although, Keyshia is aware of the objections of her actions and had been viewed as an agitator to those who are unsupportive of the cause, she stated that part of activism

is never forgetting why you are a part of a cause and “never becoming bigger than that cause.” Like many Black women before her, Keyshia has continued to challenge the political systems at predominately White institution where political racism and sexism are common practices.

My Black is beautiful. Through her journey of self-definition Keyshia has taken a more Afro-centric approach in the way she cares for herself and other Black women.

The way I care for my sorors is different. Like if they need something I will help them or check on them. Sometimes I hang out with them and talk about Black stuff like natural hair, music and how it is being a Black college student on a White campus.

Keyshia recognized that her sorority sisters played a vital role in helping her define her role as a Black woman. Through her interactions with her sorority sisters and the collective experiences with other Black women, Keyshia defined Black women as “strong and taking initiative.” She realized that her definition of Black women aligned with how she identified herself as a Black woman. She expressed “ I see myself as strong and determined and I like to say that I persevere through things. I like a challenge.” Keyshia’s involvement in her sorority was very essential in her understanding of how self-appreciation and love have to be a key component in embracing the beauty and essence of the Black woman image. She has challenged societal norms by embracing her natural beauty in wearing her hair in afro’s, braids and other styles that are deemed as ethnic. When Keyshia was asked about ways she promotes her Blackness she commented by saying “My hair because I don’t put any chemicals in it. I just have my

natural texture...for me that is part of my definition, part of my reputation of being Black.” Her hair became a symbol of accepting and loving her biological attributes while showcasing that Black is beautiful. Through the support of her sorority sisters, Keyshia was taught how to take care of herself physically, emotionally and spiritually through attending church, meeting with the college counselors in the counseling center and learning about the different fashion eras in which she adopted her style. These women encouraged Keyshia to embrace herself as a Black woman and welcomed others to appreciate her Blackness.

Frankie. Frankie described herself as a mature, responsible and educated Black woman who had gone through a plethora of things to gain her independence. Growing up in a interracial two parent household, Frankie was raised and encouraged to identify as a Black woman from her father’s family. After her parents’ divorce Frankie moved out of her family’s house on a quest to find her own independence. At a young age she married a military man who she divorced a few years later after she confronted him about his infidelities. Then she enrolled as a non-traditional, divorced student of Heartland University.

Stop Racially Profiling Me... I’m Bi-Racial... Meaning... A Black Woman.

Frankie’s experiences at HU had challenges in regards to her race and ethnicity. She clarified by saying that being biracial, with a light hue complexion, not having the stereotypical and/or traditional facial attributes as well as not having a coarse texture of hair she is often times mistaken for being of Hispanic decent and not considered Black.

She exclaimed that she is not a stereotypical representation of a Black woman that has been negatively portrayed throughout the ages. Frankie explained that:

Because I am biracial and depending how I wear my hair I can look more African American and so first of all people think I'm Hispanic if I'm wearing my hair straight which is mostly in the winter time and they have preconceived notions about me or ... I will understand certain cultural references that I might not understand.

She expressed that there are many shades and physical characteristics of Black. She stressed that just because she is a lighter shade of Black and her facial characteristics are not traditional to Blacks and can be versatile with her hairstyles, those superficial attributes cannot negate her Blackness. The importance of this sentiment was made clear when Frankie stated in her self-definition of her unique Blackness:

How do I define myself as a Black woman? Oh I don't know. [My Blackness is] beautiful, strong, independent, kind of exotic. I love the fact that I can have my hairstyle be any which way whether it be [styled in a way that can be considered] Caucasian or in braids or ethnic to wavy to curly whatever [respective of my Black roots]. I like the versatility.

She went into more detail about her heritage and why she is automatically classified as being Hispanic instead of being Black. She explained due to her father's Caribbean heritage who resided in Florida in the USA, his facial features and skin complexion were passed on to Frankie. Although, her mother was White, she discussed

that these inherited exotic features have enhanced others' preconceived notion that she is Hispanic.

Frankie pronounced, "because of my biracial heritage, I have exotic features. My skin tone is tan, I have freckles, and semi-straight hair [as well as] Caribbean facial features that can be associated with Puerto Rican features." She began to reminisce about her adolescent years growing up and being faced with racism based on her skin tone. She remembered that she would often ask her divorced parents why she was being discriminated against because of her ethnic differences and both parents realized that she had been faced with an aspect of racism. She emotionally expressed:

As a child I was taken aback, so to say when I was called the N-word for the first time. I questioned why I was called the N-word and my mom asked me why are you being called the N-word? My response was what does that N-word mean.

Frankie's parents gingerly explained that their societal differences between people based on the color of their skin. This disclosure became Frankie's first encounter with racism and reinforced how she views herself as a Black woman. Although Frankie disclosed that there were many more incidents as she matured throughout her life, the ones that she discussed during her enrollment at HU was more significant to my study.

Frankie disclosed that on HU's campus, her ethnic/racial identity was often mistaken. The significance of this conversation was because she was in an environment that housed scholars who taught, spoke about, and have written scholarly journals and books on racial diversity. Part of their teaching is not to assume the obvious. However, she realized that this was not the case. Frankie began to discuss a time when she was

participating in a college event on HU's campus about racial tolerance and being respectful of the diversity within different cultures. At that time, Frankie felt she was being discriminated against because of her Blackness, but in retrospect she was being generalized as being Hispanic as well as being discriminated against on one of her White classmates' preconceived notions about her racial background. Frankie described the situation as such:

Honestly, I was so busy with both jobs and school that I didn't even know about the event until the teacher said something in class and of course my friend who is Romanian in that class jokingly turns to me and says [Frankie] do you know about this and I [responded jokingly] ... why because I'm Black and she said no because you are so involved in school (laughter) ... and some [White] girl said oh, I thought you were Hispanic.

Recognizing Frankie's experiences as a Black woman on HU's campus further demonstrates the cultural unawareness that some Whites have about diversity amongst Blacks and other people of color. Frankie expressed that if it was not for the women in NPHC for providing a safe space through her sorority affiliation it would have been more damaging to her self-esteem as a bi-racial female who identifies as being a Black woman. Through this newfound affiliation that was interrelated with education, she felt, at the time she had the tools to navigate through any unforeseen intersecting discriminations. However, as she continued her collegiate journey she realized that although her educational background was established at HU she now will be perceived as being a stereotypical Black woman.

Stop Generalizing Me!!! I'm NOT An Angry Black Woman. Coming from a divorced single parent household, Frankie learned the value of hard work by having to provide for herself at a young age. Frankie stated “ I lived with friends for awhile before getting a job and saving for a decent apartment.” Frankie was use to dealing with difficult situations and the institution provided another difficult situation through the discrimination that she experienced on Heartland’s campus. In short, they were quite different from the other participants because she was not only discriminated against based on her race, gender and class but also on her non-traditional status as a student.

As a student on a funded scholarship, Frankie understood that to become successful in college it would take hard work and dedication. However, she did not realize that she would be isolated and would be left to feel alone throughout her academic journey. She had to deal with an unfriendly campus atmosphere that was more supportive of their traditional students. Frankie stated to me that: “I am a non-traditional and older student [and] as an [graduate student] like a lot of the older students they didn’t’ feel like they fit in.” Unfortunately, Frankie’s work experiences on HU’s campus are similar to her experiences as a graduate student who was constantly plagued by gender, racial, socio-cultural and work oppressions.

Frankie explained that she was stereotypically preconceived by some of her subordinates/co-workers as being bossy, aggressive and bitchy. She passionately expressed:

You know I’ve had people be like you’re bossy, you are being bossy. You are being bossy. You are being a bitch. You are being outspoken. And I’m like would

you tell the dude over here if he was saying the same thing? Probably not. So I never heard a guy be called bossy before. He's bossy.

However, others who allowed themselves to get to know Frankie stated to her that she does not behave or have stereotypical characteristics that are normally ascribed to Black women in general. Frankie discussed a conversation between her and another employee. She stated: "We actually talked about this about seven times well [Frankie] sometimes you don't seem like the typical Black woman. And [Frankie] was like what is a typical Black woman to you? Oh, you know, loud and obnoxious." Frankie then explained that this particular coworker expressed that because she was a Black woman, she thought Frankie would be bossy, like the typical Black woman.

Another example of this stereotypical behaviors and ideologies about Black women amongst her coworkers transpired during a conversation about a famous Black female hiphop artist. Frankie discussed her being tired of always having to educate White people about Black life especially Black female livelihood. She expressed this by stating:

Like with the whole thing with Beyonce at the superbowl. Well, he was like Beyonce shouldn't have been doing that. I was like you know Beyonce is Black, right. He said yes but she doesn't really act like it. I told him that she came from that lifestyle. I was like you don't know her and what she goes through and so sometimes it's just a little frustrating and dis-hearting and stuff like that but at the same time sometimes I just don't have the energy to educate [White] people.

Frankie avidly exclaimed that she is truly hard working, knowledgeable, pleasant and well received by those who are not influenced by negative media sources and portrayals that has bombarded society in regards to Black womanhood.

Frankie works on campus and began to discuss Black womanhood and its influence on people's perceptions of management. Frankie explained: "When somebody says oh [Frankie] you hold great leadership. I hear the word leadership [in regards to management] ... I think it's almost a negative thing and not so much a positive thing because of the negative connotation for Black women." She continued to explain that being a Black woman in a management position at a PWI could be an isolated existence due to the fact that she felt that people viewed her success based on her gender and race. Some felt she only was employed in that position because of her being a Black woman and not because of her education and/or skillset.

These Black sorority women had complex experiences while at HU. Navigating a racial and sexist environment as a Black sorority woman has left these women to find support within women's networks such sororities. They are well aware of the realities on campus of not appreciating and valuing the unique background and experiences that each of them represent. Their relationships with the White administration, professors and peers are unhealthy and non-supportive of their goals to succeed as a Black woman. Understanding those relationships help to explain her sororities importance, benefit and impact it had on each Black sorority woman. The fostering of sisterhood and embracing Black womanhood would influence how they establish relationships with other Black women. Next, I present two collective themes.

Black Sisterhood. Black sisterhood could be described as a connection between people who have an understanding that they have to work together to accomplish goals that serve the Black community. The Black women in this study talked a great deal about their needs for feeling accepted, and findings a sense of belonging at the PWI they attended. They found these things in Black sisterhood through their NPHC sorority. Sisterhood involved accepting Black women for who they are. For example, Frankie who was concerned about being accepted for being biracial saw someone wearing Greek letters and went to talk with her:

She told me about a little bit about the organization and invited me to an informational. I told her I was a little bit concerned about being accepted because I am biracial. And she was like that is okay we are a multicultural sorority and accept all races. I went home that night and looked online and looked up some stuff about the organization and felt oh that would be cool to join.

Moreover, Keyshia expressed how her sorority sisters, prior to knowing her a personal level, embraced her and how she wanted to exemplify the things they stood for.

The people that I saw that were [NPHC sorority] and the way they interacted with each other and other Black students on campus were cool. They were all nice because they hugged me sometimes and I was like that's really sweet because I'm not a hugging person and I did not know them prior to coming to college. And just seeing what they stood for like social justice activism and having their own identity outside their sorority was really important to me. I felt

like just being able to be like them as strong and independent Black women who stood for something was great.

Additionally, Black sisterhood involved understanding the unique experiences of Black women in a predominantly White environment. For example, Keyshia talked about how she needed to be with women who understood her experience, which she found in her sorority:

It's like you can do so much research but some point you will never understand what it feels like to be a Black woman and in my life currently I need someone who can truly basically another Black woman who can understand what it means and what it feels like to be at a PWI and I found that within (NPHC sorority).

They understood why I am so down with the cause by loving my people.

Similarly, Mary spoke about a time when her sorority sisters encouraged her to run for a position within the Black student government because they believed in her skills to lead others:

I think I never really had that chance to prove myself as a leader, I had chances but I never did it until I was in my sorority. To say this is, if my sorors did not encourage me to run for Black student government president and ensure me that I was influential leader that others could look up to I would have not ran for the position.

Further, sisterhood was centered on working together to serve the Black community. For example, Mary said, "You know something that we take very seriously is the uplifting of Black women." This understanding came with the opportunity of

meeting and working with other Black women in the hopes of improving their circumstances as well as their surrounding and native Black communities. Frankie said, “Actually a lot of volunteering projects I’ve done in the past was with [NPHC sorority]. I really like the experience of tutoring young girls in the seventh and eighth grade math.” For Frankie, teaching math to middle school girls at a school where they have a high population of Black students was a way to serve the community.

Questions about the Institution’s Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion.

HU makes several claims about a commitment to diversity and inclusion. For example, Mary talked about how recruiting materials and orientation events painted a picture of significant presence and involvement of Black people in campus life. However, when she got to HU, she found that it was nothing like that. For examples, the pictures in recruiting materials included students who had since graduated, giving the sense that there were more Blacks on campus than reality. Further, while the orientation event featured a group of Black students Mary later found out that what she imagined was a small subset of the population was more accurately the entirety of involved Black students on campus. These high profile placements of Black students in the photos and at orientation gave Mary a false impression of the daily realities, which she described as Black people being invisible on campus. Mary discussed the limited access she had to campus administrators and wanting the opportunity to discuss the concerns of minority students on campus:

I feel like if I had a chance to take those conversations about our concerns into a conference room, into places where persons like the [administration] was present,

heads of departments those types of people who aren't involved in those conversations already but I want them to be involved in those conversations.

Furthermore, Keyshia discussed how she feels invisible on campus when the only events she is invited to are the ones where a group of students are displaying their culture instead of events that promote academic success:

The ideal support for me would be doing a better job at promoting and advertising things on campus to Black students. I feel like I do not know about certain events on campus unless it has something to do with displaying someone's culture.

Frankie, echoed the sentiment of feeling unwanted, disrespected and isolated from campus when she discussed her experience at an all Greek council meeting for homecoming where the other council members disregarded the traditions of NPHC and MGC and significance of strolling and stepping:

At the homecoming meeting we discussed ways to involve all the councils in the talent contest. IFC and PHC were calling it a skit, which I told them lets, call it a talent show so that NPHC and MGC would be able to showcase their talents by strolling and stuff like that. The other councils were like we don't know how to judge it [strolling and stepping] so we should not allow them to do it. I was questioning them on how they judge other talents and what they considered entertainment.

Another issue that the Black women faced was not being taken seriously by administrators and others on campus. For example, Mary said

Through [the Black student government] and my sorority we put on these events talking about oppression and it's going to involve multiple perspectives and voices from students and other persons who are apart of this system. And so I feel like it's almost looked at as a plaything.

During our discussions, Mary explained how administrators did not support their events by showing up at them. Keyshia described how there was limited support on campus during a Black student protest until a nation wide campaign focusing on the safety of Black lives became popular in our society. She explained:

I remember my senior year as an undergraduate, we planned to do a silent protest on campus and we asked the campus administration to participate. As far as I could reach my arms to tell a person was how many people showed up. There wasn't any support and so for the next year to go around and to help plan another Black student rally and there to be over 2000 people there was frustrating.

Frankie had similar feelings about explained not being taken seriously by others on campus when she wanted to attend an event about people of color who were professionals and she asked her department to fund a ticket to the event she explained her employer did not see the purpose and thought it was a waste of time in attending an event to network with other people of color on campus.

One of the events I wanted to attend this year was networking event for people of color on campus that was for faculty, staff and students who wanted to learn more about being a professional on campus. Unfortunately I could not attend because my boss thought it was a waste of money and time to attend an event to meet

other people of color. This sucked especially because I told other minority people in different departments to attend.

Finally, with regards to questions about HU's commitment to diversity and inclusion, the sorority women noted that their NPHC organization was typically expected to fit within the norms of the PHC and IFC Greek organizations. This lumping together of NPHC organizations with the other Greek organizations often resulted in language and education that did not apply to the experiences within NPHC organizations. For example Mary explained that, administrators would often refer to Greek houses, which do not apply to NPHC organizations or about recruitment, which in NPHC is called intake. The significance of this conflation is that the Greek administrators would never talk to IFC organizations about their intake because it is obvious that it does not apply to their organizations. The refusal to acknowledge the language differences suggests that understanding and supporting the unique needs of NPHC organizations is not a priority whereas addressing the needs of PHC and IFC organization is a priority.

Another example is when training includes sessions on hazing involving alcohol as a primary element. Alcohol is not a major part of NPHC organizational history so tips about how to monitor and manage alcohol do not address NPHC organizational needs. These trainings are often mandatory for the organization to remain in compliance with the institution yet they do not reflect the history, language, and needs of the organizations. Frankie described a time when she attended an all-Greek council training where the presenters discussed the importance of housing regulations in their Greek houses. She explained that she another members of the NPHC felt excluded from the

conversations. Frankie stated, “we were trying to figure out why we had to attend this mandatory training which talked updating housing regulation for Greek houses. We obviously don’t have any so we felt it was a waste of time.” Similarly Keyshia discussed attending training seminars about leadership development and workshops on anti-hazing where all the presentations were tailored to the IFC and PHC organizations. She explained:

All the presentations shown used words like philanthropies, rush and houses all the things we do not say as NPHC organizations. When I tried to raise my hand to tell the presenter about the words we use such as intake, chapter and principles I was told by a White sorority girl that it meant the same thing.

Keyshia was upset in the about the way the training was conducted and did not truly represent the NPHC culture. It might indeed refer to the same things, but the significance was that HU mostly used the language reflecting largely White organizations and rarely used the language common in NPHC organizations. Mary briefly described a conversation she had with a PHC member where she explained her involvement in her sorority after graduation. Mary discussed that she is not done with her duties as a sorority member when she graduates from college with her bachelor’s degree; instead she is encouraged to join her organization’s city wide graduate chapter. Mary remorsefully disclosed that:

We don’t have this you pick three houses and hope you get your first choice like that’s not our process. You know if you join our organizations it’s for a lifetime it's not for the four years you’re here at college.

This is just another example of how people at HU make assumptions about NPHC organizations and members based on the norms of IFC and PHC organizations without making it a priority to understand and reflect the values of NPHC organizations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, through my interpretation of the data, my awareness and understanding of the phenomenon became more vibrant. I found that the Black NPHC sorority women's collective experiences mirrored my experiences as a Black sorority member in a PWI. Their individual themes collectively made me realize that I am not alone in feeling that I am judged because of my female Blackness, and they too understand my feeling of isolation. Through their narrative stories and descriptive experiences, I was able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how they defined Black womanhood and sisterhood. These themes will be used to make implications for practice and make recommendations for future research for student affairs professionals in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and the available support afforded to NPHC Black sorority women at a Midwestern PWI. The primary research questions for this study asked (a) how being a NPHC Black sorority member benefited the experiences of Black women at PWI Heartland University, and (b) how do race and gender influences NPHC Black sorority members' experiences at PWI Heartland University. In Chapter 4 the findings revealed the experiences and the available support afforded to Black sorority women at Heartland University. Chapter 4 highlighted two emerging themes for each sorority member and two collective themes. These themes highlighted the experiences of Black sorority women have within their respective organizations and on a PWI. The following is a list of all the themes presented in this study in order: (1) Upbringing centered on the Black male consciousness, (2) I'm a Black Woman, NOT a passive victim, (3) You want me to do what?!?!, (4) My Black is beautiful, (5) Stop racially profiling me...I'm bi-racial...meaning...a Black woman (6) Stop Generalizing me!!! I'm NOT an angry Black woman. The overall themes are Black sisterhood and Questioning HU's commitment to diversity. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results guided by the research questions and themes from the prior chapters. Additionally, in Chapter 5 themes will be connected to the literature in Chapter 2. Lastly this chapter provides implications of practice and recommendations for student affairs professionals and ideas for future research.

Scholarly research about the experiences of Black women in NPHC sororities at PWIs is limited. The research that is published about the experiences of African American/Black students at PWIs is the perspective of the Black males experiences as a student and/or a member of a Greek organization. Researchers often negate the college experiences of Black women, specifically those who are members of a Black Greek organization. The literature has been culturally lacking and misrepresents the image and experiences of the Black woman. According to Thomas (2004) “The void in studying the lives of Black women within their own uniqueness calls for a repositioning of scholarship” (p. 288). Scholarly research has often shown Black women as a collective group and/or sharing the same experiences as Black men on campus without the consideration of the uniqueness of their Black womanhood as individuals (Phillips, 2005).

Black sorority women are often ignored within literature in regards to the experiences of Black students in higher education. Although, scholarly research on Black students has risen there is still limited research on the experiences of Black women who are in sororities at PWI's and the benefits for joining such organizations. To combat racial and gender discriminations Black women have created groups/sisterhoods at PWIs to help cope with the harsh realities of the campus environment. This study was developed to highlight the inconsistencies in the availability of support by focusing on the experiences of Black sorority woman at PWIs.

Summary of Findings

The primary research questions that guided this study analyzed the benefits of membership in NPHC Black sororities and how Black women's experiences influenced their perception of support at Heartland University (HU). Incorporating Black feminist thought as the theoretical framework, the findings suggest that NPHC Black sororities supported and accepted the identities and experiences of Black woman more than any other cultural organization. Through these research questions I found how Black sororities foster community and social support to Black women members at HU. Black women have increased their enrollment numbers at higher educational institutions within the last 20 years, making up over 60% of the Black population enrolled in college (*The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 1997). As enrollment increased their experiences will continue to show relevance for successful community building and matriculation.

The findings indicate that the three Black sorority women felt that their individual sororities assisted tremendously in shaping their experiences on HU's campus. They expressed gratitude for the community that was fostered by the more experienced members of their respective organizations. They described the support they received as forming even before their membership in sororities became official. Their support systems continued to grow through ties in their organization to other resources on campus such as a multicultural women's center or women's support group. As a result they experienced close bonding relationships, which helped to avoid the experience of feeling alone. Thus isolation, which would normally be experienced by Blacks at PWIs, was diminished/avoided through the Black sorority experience. The sorority could not prevent

everything that they faced at HU. The sorority promoted Blackness and supported the Black experience but the sorority women still needed to create and define their own individual identities as Black women.

Summary of Themes and Connection to Literature

As discussed in Chapter 2 there is limited research that addresses the on campus experiences of Black sorority women at PWIs. Although, this study will only provide one additional research study to the Black sorority women at PWIs, I hope that it will encourage other researchers to examine this phenomenon. I will address and connect the research findings with the previous literature in Chapter 2.

Black women's experiences are significant and different from other groups on campus. All Greeks are not the same; by the same token all Black Greeks are not the same. Black Greeks have different histories and experiences from White Greeks. By the same token, Black sorority women face unique challenges and have experiences which are different from Black fraternity men. On the other hand, Black sorority women's experiences had some similarities with Black fraternity men at PWIs. Both groups have felt discriminated against and isolation from the rest of the campus community as well as because of the stereotypes associated with their skin tones and culture. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize and understand that grouping all Greeks and/or all Black people together takes away from their individual experiences. For example, the Black sorority women discussed the lack of support and diversity on campus, which has previously been included in literature about Black men (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Also, others need to recognize the unique identities of Black women as an independent group rather than a sub

group of somebody else. Moreover, the Black sorority women questioned the university's mission for diversity and inclusion and the unwelcome environment in which they navigated. Similar to participants in this study, Jones, Castellanos and Cole (2002) explained that PWIs discuss diversity but did not act on it. They concluded that the absence of concrete alternatives to currently exclusionary practices in the Greek community creates a group feeling of isolation and neglect among Black students in general. However, the exclusion is particularly detrimental to the development of Black women's identity. Discussions with Black sorority women in this study revealed the fact that Black women were not taken seriously by Whites on campus. They were marginalized as both Black and as female. They found that student groups, such as Black student government, Black women counseling support services, and especially their sororities, offered avenues for identity expression and a sense of belonging. This study makes a contribution to the literature in better understanding the marginalizing experiences of Black sorority women.

The women in this study expressed extreme disappointment with the ways that campus administrators and peers negated their existence by creating programs that encourage dialogue to talk about race, inclusion and diversity to better assist White people on campus with facilitating these types of discussions. Like the themes *My Black is Beautiful* and *I'm a Black woman, NOT a passive victim* implied, the program was designed to make White people feel more comfortable discussing race but does not necessarily change the lived experiences of Black people especially Black women on

campus. Instead it further marginalized and created distrust among the Black population in the sincerity of the White campus administrator's support.

The Black sorority women experienced racialized and gendered microaggressions daily, either in classes, at campus events, or in everyday experiences. Their frustrations were often only addressed when they came together with other Black women, and especially with their sorority sisters. This points to an understanding of NPHC organizations that is not discussed widely in the literature. Sorority membership provided a safe-haven where these women could express themselves freely and use their experiences with racism and sexism to grow, solidify their personal values, and shape their own identities.

As Patricia Hill Collins (1990) asserts, the women in this study experienced this sense of belonging through the othermothering that they received from sorority sisters. Additionally, the sisters experienced an intense feeling of community, one which included Black fraternity brothers, which helped them to provide service for the uplift of people in their own Black communities, which either surrounded the HU campus, or the cities from which they came. The women expressed a sense of family with their sorority sisters, who simultaneously served as mothers, older sisters, professional mentors, and best friends. As such, they could talk to sorority sisters about hardships and racist experiences while using those hardships to plan community events which brought attention to racism and inequality across their campus. These actions mirrored those discussed by scholars who focused attention on Black women's clubs and their desire to transform the Black community and experience in America (Durant & Loudon, 1986;

Edwards, 2000). Black women's clubs uplifted Black communities then, and they are doing it now through Black sororities. These women's perseverance is noted in the telling of their stories, as they have been raised by grandmothers or single fathers, they have continued their educations as non-traditional students, and they have continued to pursue personal and professional goals even as they strived for racial equity of Black women.

Often, participants spoke of combatting stereotypes. For example, they wanted to be able to construct their own identity and behaviors they reflected their sense of being a Black woman. If they showed any type of displeasure, they were stereotyped as "angry black women," and the reasons for their displeasure were quickly dismissed (Walley-Jean, 2009). This is consistent with what others have written about Black women being viewed as angry. Specifically, Black women at PWIs have felt that they are not appreciated by the White people that they encounter at their institutions. The lack of support for diversity on PWIs campuses created an unwelcoming environment for the minority students as which resulted in alienation from the White students on campus (Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; McClure, 2006).

The generalizations that these women experienced were tantamount to their positions as activists in their communities. The insult of a constant racial and gendered bias, based on Whites' stereotypical views of Black women motivated the women to become more active speaking out against inequalities.

Limitations

There were several limitations within my case study due to its design. First, the Black sorority women's experiences in this study were limited to one Midwestern PWI

and does not speak for every other Black sorority woman. As such, the results of this study are not generalizable to all Black sorority women in the Midwest, or in the United States. Secondly, the time frame for the thesis may have limited the data received. If I had more time I could have spent more time observing participants and strengthening the depth of information from multiple sources, which is important in the case study.

Another limitation was my relationship with each one of the Black sorority women. They all knew me through my involvement within my sorority which included conference interactions and volunteer work within the community. Due to this familiarity, I felt as the researcher that they had reservations about answering some of the questions. I believe they may have been concerned about my opinion of their answers to the questions, and this concern may have guided their responses. On the other hand, if I had not had an existing rapport with these women it would have been a bigger challenge in connecting with them on a more personal level, and I may have had more restrictions such as not being able to observe their daily interactions.

Finally, all of my participants were graduate students. It would have been more beneficial to explore the experiences of undergraduate Black sorority members as well, to gain better understanding of the resources available to less experienced students. Sorority and university life look totally different from an undergraduate perspective than from graduate student.

Implications of Practice

This research study has many implications for student affairs professionals, administration and the general campus community in higher education. First, there is a

salient need for White administrators and student affairs practitioners to understand, embrace and acknowledge the unique identities of Black women students on campus. Further analysis on the impact that NPHC sororities have on Black women experience at a PWI needs to be examined in greater detail. The Black sorority women in this study recognized that the White administrators and student affairs practitioners did not support their experiences, instead contributed to the feeling of isolation. As educators on campus, student affairs practitioners must learn to demonstrate and teach students the importance of being open minded and inclusive of racial diverse students. For instance, behaviors are influenced by people in power like campus administrators, who should make responsible and careful effort to not perpetuate privilege on campus. Instead student affairs practitioners must acknowledge, accept and embrace the uniqueness of Black sororities through program recognitions, developing training seminars that educate others on the role NPHC sorority women have on campus and express how important it is to be conscious of this population's differences in language, culture and organizational structure from other Greek council members. As previously mentioned in literature, the traditions and purposes of NPHC Black sororities are different from IFC and PHC. The importance and value of fraternities and sororities should be evaluated, but this conversation must take into consideration the multiple facets across systems that may be impacted by their racialized backgrounds (McClure, 2006). As a result of the current challenges that Black sorority women face, mindful consideration in the differences as well as the similarities of student experiences by race, gender and Greek affiliation is particularly necessary at PWIs.

Administrators and student affairs professionals should develop training seminars focusing on the experiences of NPHC organizations and promote intense campus discussions about ways to be more culturally competent, in order to have a more equitable understanding of how ethnic differences can be fostered among all organizations within IFC and PHC. Additionally, campus administrators should promote Black sorority women's skills and talents in a more educational setting rather than requesting them to be a form of entertainment at a campus event at the beginning of the academic year. For example, administrators should involve Black sorority women in the planning process of the campus wide volunteer day. Interest expressed must be genuine and ongoing rather than only generated when the institution will also benefit. These women are educated, skilled and deserve to be included in campus within the campus culture. As Audre Lorde (1997) so eloquently expressed, "Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic" (p. 110). Often ethnic minority organizations such as NPHC stress the values and culture of the population from which their members originate. Tinto (1993) argued that any organization which is a part of the campus ecology should be supported by the institutional policy. Since NPHC sororities are part of the campus, it stands to reason that they should be recognized in institutional policies. For example, in the student handbook when it says that diversity and inclusion matters, institutions should have a policy that aligns with that statement. Tinto (1993) wrote "a restructuring and/or modification of the social and intellectual conditions of the institution and the creation of alternative mechanisms for the integration of individuals into its ongoing social and

intellectual life” (p.104). This means that if students on campus tell administrators about their negative experiences and express complaints about how they are treated, administrators should “restructure and/or modify...the conditions of the institution” to support those students.

This is especially important for Black sororities as the enrollment rates continue to increase for Black women. Understanding the experiences of Black sorority women who have benefited from their individual sororities through the fostering of sisterhood, enriched academic achievement, increased self-esteem, and development of community support can provide administrators and student affairs practitioners information that is applicable to events, training and programming decisions concerning Black students at PWIs.

As a result of feelings of isolation, loneliness and lack of acknowledgment of the Black sorority women’s experiences, campus administrators with the support of student affairs practitioners should provide a resource center for multiple intersecting identities that provides intersectional support much like the LGBTQA office, women’s center and multicultural center but specifically for Black women in sororities. For example this space the student would not have to be a woman, or Black or a part of a sorority but will allow the student to be a Black sorority woman. In other words, these women can benefit from the space where their intersecting identities can be supported, acknowledge and embraced.

Lastly, campus administration and student affairs practitioners, should refrain from dismissing the experiences of the Black sorority women by grouping their

experiences with those of Black fraternity men, or their White female counterparts.

Although each Greek council and organization have similarities, NPHC sorority advisors should be knowledgeable of the challenges Black sorority women face at a PWI and the benefits of being a Black member of a NPHC sorority. Their advising style should be tailored to the experiences of Black sorority women in order to better serve this population and provide resources to fit their needs. While providing and acknowledging the needs of Black sorority women is important, there still needs to be “restructuring” of the institution’s policy and changing the campus culture through education, best practices and more administrators/student contact. Overall, the HU’s student affairs practitioners and administrators need to respect and acknowledge that all Greek organizations are not the same and face different challenges which can be attributed to their race and gender. In short one size does not fit all.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research that needs to be conducted should analyze the experiences of Black sorority women in higher education compared to those who are non-Greek. It is important to examine the challenges, support and self-definition of Black women who have decided to not join NPHC sorority. Another recommendation for future research is to evaluate programs and resource centers that Black women utilize at PWIs to gain support and acknowledgment. This study chose to interview three Black sorority women from the same PWI institution. An interesting avenue to take would be to explore the impact of membership in a Black sorority of two students from different higher education

institutions who are in the same sorority to see how their experiences differ from one another.

More specific qualitative research studies that seek to discover the roles and impact of Black faculty and staff have on Black women in sororities. The study could explore the relationship and mentorship with Black faculty and staff at a university. Lastly, Black sorority women leadership development at PWIs and the impact it has on the minority student population should be considered in research to allow others to learn more about the leadership experiences of Black women in NPHC sororities.

Conclusion

The focus of this qualitative research study was to explore and better understand the experiences of Black sorority women at a PWI and the benefit of membership in their sororities. Each Black sorority woman had two individual themes and two collective themes that emerged from the data and provided insight into their experiences. These themes were (1) Upbringing centered on the Black male consciousness, (2) I'm a Black Woman, NOT a passive victim, (3) You want me to do what?!?!, (4) My Black is beautiful, (5) Stop racially profiling me...I'm bi-racial...meaning...a Black woman (6) Stop Generalizing me!!! I'm NOT an angry Black woman. The overall themes are Black sisterhood and Questioning HU's commitment to diversity. The themes were connected with the reviewed literature in Chapter 2. I then provided recommendations to HU's administration and student affairs practitioners. Lastly, I provided recommendations for future research on Black women specifically members of a NPHC sorority.

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Appendix A

First interview:

1. What are you involved in on campus?
2. How do you define yourself as a Black woman?
3. What does it mean to you to be a Black woman at a PWI?
4. Why did you join your sorority?
5. What is the sorority's mission?
6. Tell me about some meaningful relationships you have while in college.
7. In what ways, if at all, has being in the sorority allowed you to make meaningful relationships?
8. What kinds of things do you do related to being in the sorority? How much time do you spend on these things?
9. Tell me about the different ways you're a leader.
 - a. In what ways have you been involved in fighting for social causes?
 - b. How are you a part of a community and taking a role in that community (i.e., church, neighborhood, racial community)?
 - c. In what ways do you take care of others?
 - d. How do you make your ideas known to others and encourage them to work with you on them?
 - e. Which of these things you just discussed would you describe as part of your being a leader? Tell me about how you decide what is leadership.

Next interview we will focus more on your leadership experiences, and specifically I will ask about how the sorority has shaped you as a leader and how the institution supports your leadership development.

Second Interview:

1. How do you think others will describe black women's leadership?
2. How do you describe how black women are as leaders?
 - a. Do you feel pressured to uphold those ideals?
3. Who has influenced your leadership style?
4. What are your leadership skills?
5. In what ways does the institution support your leadership development?
6. What do you still need for the institution?
7. How specifically has membership in your organization shaped your opportunity in leadership? (Tell me about the ways that being in a sorority has shaped your leadership experiences?)
8. What has been your experience of taking care of others or being taken care of? Do you believe that is connected to your role as a leader? How?
9. Tell me what it has been like for you being a black leader at a predominantly white institution (PWI)?
 - a. How, if at all, has being in an NPHC sorority helped you be a leader at a PWI?
10. Are there ways you can think that the institution could do a better job of supporting NPHC member's leadership development?
 - a. Things to start doing
 - b. Things to continue doing
 - c. Things to stop doing

Third Interview

1. Ask questions prompted by observations that have not already been answered by the participant
2. Review the participant's experience as understood by the researcher at this point (after sorting through data of interviews and observations)
3. Present some preliminary findings from across participants and ask which parts resonate with the participant and which ones don't.

Appendix B



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

IRB#15693

We Matter, We're Relevant and We are Black Women in Sororities:
An Exploration of Leadership Experiences in College

Purpose

This research project will aim to examine and gain a greater understanding of how African American women in a National Pan-Hellenic Council sorority at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) experience support and leadership development. Participants for this study will be selected based upon the following: African American women aged 19 years or older and a member of NPHC for at least one year.

Procedures:

You will be asked to answer questions and be audio-recorded during three interviews. Each interview will last for approximately one hour, and will be conducted in a private and confidential location as selected by the research participant. As part of this process, I will observe each participant three times for an hour each time. During each observation, the observation will only consist of ethnographic behavioral observation.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant. The field of higher education will benefit from a better understanding of the experiences of African American women's leadership experiences.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

Participants are unlikely to experience more risks than the discomfort from recalling painful experiences

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study, which could identify you, will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office and will only be seen by the investigator during the study. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but any identifying information will be removed and only pseudonyms will be used to depict research participants.

Compensation:

You will receive zero compensation for participating in this project.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before

Appendix C



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Dear _____,

My name is DeLores Allison and I am conducting a research study on the experiences of African American women in NPHC. I am looking for African American women who are 19 years or older to participate in this study. The interviews will last approximately one hour on three different occasions and three observations, which involve her shadowing you for an hour on three different occasions.

There will be no compensation for this study. Your contribution to scholarship and research with Black sorority women is highly valued and your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

If you are willing to assist me with this endeavor, please email me at djallison74@yahoo.com or call me at 402-202-5280.