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Exploring the Leadership Experiences of Minority Women in a Black Greek Letter Sorority

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Exploring the Leadership Experiences of Minority Women in a
Black Greek Letter Sorority

by
Ashley Nichole Jennings

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Ashley Nichole Jennings under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Statement of Original Work

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Ashley Nichole Jennings

Name

November 16, 2017

Date

Acknowledgments

“You’ll always be a part of me, I’m part of you indefinitely” – Mariah Carey

To Eulee Jennings, Daddy, no words can describe what you mean to me. I am forever a daddy’s girl. I miss you. To Carolyn Jennings, Mom, I learned to be a strong Black woman because of you! Thank you. To Asia Shootes, you called me Dr. before I had the designation. You spoke life into me when I could not give any more of myself. Thank you for being an incredible wife. I love you.

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God, you are the center of my life. You give me strength and comfort. I praise you!

Abstract

Exploring the Leadership Experiences of Minority Women in a Black Greek Letter Sorority. Ashley Nichole Jennings, 2017: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education. Keywords: sororities, leadership, leadership training, minority groups, success

This qualitative phenomenological research study was designed to explore and reveal the lived experiences of minority women in Black Greek Letter Sororities and their understanding of sorority membership and leadership development following graduation. Data collection was completed using two qualitative streams: online questionnaire and one-on-one interviews. This study will contribute to the discussion of leadership development for Black Greek Letter Sorority members. More specifically, this study focused on the role that a Black sorority has in developing minority female leaders as they matriculate and develop within higher education and simultaneously in the sisterhood. This research study provided suggestions on opportunities to enhance the female student experience through Black sororities by emphasizing leadership as a platform.

Additionally, this study can influence dialogue to address the lack of inclusivity of female targeted leadership development for Black sorority members. The emphasis of leadership development for Black sorority members can positively impact college aged women. The skills attained through leadership development will be invaluable for maneuvering in the 21st century. This research will provide a platform for addressing two major gaps that include the role of female leadership and minority female leadership. Consequently, research that supports the development and inclusion of women of color in leadership capacities and the benefits of joining Black Greek Letter Sororities can prepare minority women to excel in various aspects of life following graduation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Black Greek Letter Organizations are widely respected for the sense of pride expressed by their members, particularly in areas of education, leadership, and cultural awareness. Harris (1998) contended that these organizations represent the strongest political, social, and cultural forces in the Black community. Traditionally, Black Greek Letter Sororities have worked diligently to represent the marginalized voice of African American women within their communities and in higher education. The idea of establishing an organization in support of African American female students developed at Howard, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Generally, Black Sororities are acknowledged as compassionate organizations that accomplish good deeds and develop virtuous women (Parks & Hughey, 2011; Tindall, Hernandez, & Hughey, 2011). These are certainly the characteristics exhibited by the brave and innovative founders of each sorority that paved the way for Black Sorority women today.

The HBCUs played an integral role in educating free Blacks during the transition from slavery to post-Civil War. Mbajekwe (2006) asserted, “When the Civil War erupted in 1861 at least ninety percent of all African Americans were illiterate, and only twenty-eight percent had received college- or university-level training from any American institution” (p. 7). African American women entering education were confronted with ongoing challenges seldom faced by Black men. They encountered a considerable amount of ostracism and exposure to somber issues such as racism, violence, and discrimination without the aid of Black male counterparts. Thus, the matriculation through education proved to be a journey of self-worth and endurance.

Consequently, these college-educated women used social discrimination as a

platform to organize groups, patterned from White and Black male fraternal organizations. As a result, Black Sororities developed into strong sisterhoods thriving on female leadership. The focus for Black Sorority members was to be of service to the African American communities, encourage education, and promote equality and justice to support the growth of Black men, women, and children. Aside from historical sorority documents, very little is known about the leadership development opportunities within these organizations. As each of the four historically Black Sororities celebrate over a century of service, their collective leadership influence has made an irrefutable impact.

There is an underwhelming amount of data that identifies minority female leaders and their experiences. According to Wilson (2014), leadership literature has focused on male assessments with even fewer published perspectives of minority female leadership. Despite the lack of data, it is critical to recognize the rapidly increasing amount of minority women in leadership roles across a variety of fields many of which have attained higher education and graduate or terminal degrees. Abowitz and Knox (2003) contended that research regarding minority leadership is limited; therefore, it is no surprise that women of color are underrepresented.

Where are the voices of minority women who have gained leadership opportunities and respect for their contributions? Bell and Nkomo (1998) attested that women of color face several prejudices within leadership that are gender based, racial, and ethnic. As a result of these prejudices, minority women are challenged with overcoming more obstacles in leadership than their White female counterparts. Howard-Hamilton (2003) stated, "Finding and applying theoretical constructs that are appropriate for explaining and understanding the experiences of African American women can be challenging" (p. 19).

The matriculation of women of color through Black Sororities demonstrates a lifelong commitment to leadership. One might revel at how many notable women hold membership in Black Greek Letter Sororities, many of which graduated from HBCUs. These members are testaments of the vital roles of both Sorority membership and the influence of higher education on shaping academic, social, and economic development for people of color. Some academic institutions incorporate various leadership development programs that address Greek Letter Organizations. However, fewer programs specifically address the leadership needs of minority female students within Black Greek Letter Organizations (Walker, Martin, & Hussey, 2015).

Allison (2010) concluded that, if participating in Greek life is a part of enhancing the student's motivation and leadership development, then research on Black student involvement within sororities and fraternities is necessary. The correlation between membership into Black Sororities and leadership is critical, as it provides more insight into the way members understand both themselves, and the obligation they have to impact the world around them. The sorority then becomes the vessel for women of color to engage one another, learn through interactions, and achieve leadership experience. Giddings (1988) described how sororities "have always been important sources of leadership training for Black women, whose opportunities to exercise such skills in formal organizations were few" (p. 16). This research aids in understanding the relationship between leadership development and Black Greek Letter Sorority membership.

It is essential that colleges and universities provide a space to prepare minority women for leadership roles. Student affairs professionals have the ability to provide inclusive leadership development within Black Greek Letter Organizations. The

implementation of such programs would encourage student leaders to explore the characteristics of setting positive examples, influencing visions, acting as change agents, and empowering others (Allen & Hartman, 2008; Posner, 2009). Exposing minority women in Black Greek Letter Sororities to leadership development opportunities can address skillsets needed to be effective leaders. Exploring the lived experiences of minority women as leaders within Black Greek Letter Sororities will enhance opportunities for improved leadership development programs. The belief is that members of Black Sororities will flourish if a positive leadership example is created to provide valuable interpersonal relationships that are necessary for students of color academically and personally (Abowitz & Knox, 2003).

Phenomenon of interest. For over a century, college-educated women of color have sought membership in Historically Black Greek Letter Sororities. Membership into Black Greek Letter Sororities is by invitation only. Black Sororities provided opportunities for leadership, individual growth, and sisterhood. The establishment of Black Greek Letter Sororities created a platform for minority women not previously accessible within higher education. The increase of sorority membership inspired four Black Greek Letter Sororities in the 1900s to organize and support women with like-minded purposes and goals. Phillips (2005) contended the success of Black Sororities at HBCUs was a result of these organizations that “lived to bring about change in a racially hostile nation” (p. 341). The foundation of these sisterhoods not only encouraged academic excellence, but also contributed to leadership development, which served as an integral social aspect of the higher education experience.

African American women found that their admittance into higher education had limitations. Howard-Hamilton (2003) explained that African American women faced

double oppression from Black and White men as well as White women regarding sexism and racism. As a result, Black Greek Letter Sororities served as an outlet for African American women to express their concerns as well as increase their involvement in political and social matters. The participation of Black Sororities demonstrated that African American women were prepared to challenge the injustices impacting their quality of life. The momentous work of these Sororities set the precedence for future civic engagement, leadership, and education for African American women and generations of members.

Due to the racial climate at the turn of the century within the United States, Black Greek Letter Sororities were faced with addressing immediate concerns that required their attention. The sorority members not only understood social injustice but actively challenged and voiced their concerns catapulting them to the forefront of African American issues and essentially earning them increasing popularity. Giddings (1988) suggested the importance of this is due to the lack of opportunities previously provided to undergo training and participate in activities. Black Sororities took on the responsibility of fostering leadership and personal development within its membership. Their focus on empowerment encouraged “Black women to be assets to themselves and their communities” (Anderson, 2002, p. 22). The members developed their organizations in a way that would establish a history, bond them together, and create an identity. Banks (2009) explained that each Black Sorority created its own symbols, colors, traditions, and national programs that guided the work done by the organization and distinguished them from one another.

Prior to this time, leadership development was exclusive to White male fraternal organizations. These fraternal organizations excluded Black women and men and were

found at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). The first Black Greek Letter Organizations patterned themselves similarly to the White Greek Letter Organizations, which represented the highest level of leadership encompassing academic excellence and community service (Wyche, 2008). As Black Greek Letter Fraternities developed and organized, Black Sororities incorporated their strategies. Although the first Black Greek Letter Fraternity and first Black Greek Letter Sorority were founded at different institutions, they established a familial bond.

Currently, for some women, joining a Black Greek Letter Sorority is the pinnacle of their college experience. One of the most important factors when pursuing membership is demonstrating unending loyalty to your organization of choice. The aspirants attend campus activities and community service, hoping for an exchange of conversation that might seal their fate as future Sisters. Despite the efforts made, only a select few will earn the privilege of joining a Black Greek Letter Sorority in her undergraduate experience. The concept of earning membership is often controversial as Greek Letter Organizations are frequently associated with negative practices such as hazing. However, in this context, earning refers to meeting requirements and demonstrating a genuine desire to belong. Consequently, it is through the selection process of Black Sorority hopefuls that leadership qualities are examined. The review of each candidate's campus activities, academic history, and character references are scrutinized thoroughly to determine which young lady meets the standards of the organization and will perpetuate its legacy. Frequently, women who do not join during college pursue graduate membership into their organization of choice.

Publicly, Black Greek Letter Sorority members are seen as educated women of high ethical standard and personal accomplishments. Each sorority empowers members

to support its goals through various efforts. These include education platforms, service programs, community engagement, and membership recruitment. The purpose of belonging to a Black Greek Letter Sorority is to actively engage the community by perpetuating the dreams and mission of each organization's respective founders. For women granted membership, their college experience includes demonstrating leadership qualities among peers, and within the community. These roles will change as they matriculate through higher education and into the graduate chapter or general membership, bestowing upon them the great responsibility of leading new generations of members.

There is a lack of research providing insight into minority female leadership development opportunities for members of Black Greek Letter Sororities. As a result of this, it is difficult to determine how Black Sororities contribute to the success of members personally and professionally. According to Mitchell (2014), it is critical to investigate obstacles challenging minority women from gaining professional leadership accomplishments. Based on limitations of research, little is known about Black Sororities and what contributions membership have on the holistic development of minority women in preparation for their futures.

To contribute to the research, it is necessary to explore the experiences of women of color in a Black Greek Letter Sorority and their perspectives of leadership. In addition, research should focus on the developmental growth of these women in their undergraduate experiences. It is valuable to study the history of Black Sororities, as well as provide individual accounts from various women who are sorority members (Tindall et al., 2011). Although research on Black Greek Letter Organizations exists, it has not specifically addressed the relationship between the leadership development opportunities

for Black Greek Letter Sorority members and the direct benefits to an individual's personal success.

Background and justification. Black Greek Letter Organizations are woven into the African American community and represent among minority men and women an educational and social elitism. Black Greek Letter Organizations are a symbolic part of higher education. The HBCUs compose approximately 3% of all higher learning institutions (Cook, 2006). It is difficult to discuss Black Greek Letter Organizations without mentioning the role that HBCUs played in creating these influential groups. The HBCU is categorized as a learning environment that affirms and nurtures the success of African American students (Kim & Conrad, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). For minority students entering HBCUs in the 20th century, the desire to find stability and supportive networks among friends made the transition into education easier. Therefore, the establishment of Black Greek Letter Organizations “provided their members with opportunities to interact with other students who share similar perspectives, cultural values, and experiences” (Strayhorn & McCall, 2012, p. 700).

Each Black Greek Letter Organization's presence is a representation of the rich traditions that complement their historical presence. These organizations had great influence on areas of politics, education, and various fields. Three of the Black Greek Letter Sororities were founded at an HBCU and the fourth at a PWI. Although Black Greek Letter Organizations are a keepsake for HBCUs, the PWIs that admitted minority students experienced the growth and popularity of Black Greek Letter Organizations as well. The founding sorority members with limited resources gathered interested women together to discuss what the function of their groups would be. Those circumstances created “college-based organizations built on their traditions of self-help, racial solidarity,

and racial uplift” (Phillips, 2005, p. 341).

Membership into Black Sororities has maintained a sign of prestige and leadership among women of color. Despite the view that African American women lacked intellect and culture and were sexually inferior (Phillips, 2005), Black Sororities successfully substantiate their contributions. Membership signifies the individual is recognized as having positive qualities including leadership, scholastic excellence, and commitment to serving the community. Black Sorority membership is selective, and vying for consideration into these Sororities can be competitive. The assumption is that a woman who is selected for membership exceeds the expectation of the chapter and the Sorority in which she wants to join. Undergraduate female students often go to great lengths to show themselves deserving as a prospect to join the sorority of their choice. The influence that Black Greek Letter Sororities have on young women is so profound that they sacrifice in an effort to belong (Westring et al., 2014).

It is possible that women of color join sororities because of the positive image and prestige associated with them. They observe the connections between opportunities and membership and want to capitalize on them, or simply their female family members participate and they want to continue the legacy. What many members come to realize is that the hard part takes place once you join. The real work is providing programming to address local and national needs, upholding academic excellence, and setting standards for leadership on campus. Maintaining membership in a Black Greek Letter Sorority is a big deal and requires more than overcoming sorority stereotypes. Rather, it is a privilege that encourages her not to behave as if she is better than others but to be the best woman she can be.

Literte and Hodge (2012) conducted a study about Black Sororities at HBCUs.

The authors concluded that research of Black Greek Letter Organizations are critical because the “views of social issues and social problems propagated by Black Greek Letter Organizations have a great effect on the Black community at large” (Literate & Hodge, 2012 p. 676). Despite the growing membership of minority women in Black Greek Letter Sororities, there is little evidence of the leadership development and leadership experiences they have as undergraduates and if that experience impacts their personal success as leaders. Collectively, Black Greek Letter Sororities have members in leadership positions across various occupations. Therefore, what function, if any, does membership in a Black Sorority play in preparation for those leadership roles?

Deficiencies in the evidence. Previous research pertaining to Greek Letter Organizations have excluded information about minority Greek Letter Organizations and focused primarily on White Male Fraternities (Eberly, 2010). As the majority of Black Greek Letter Organizations were founded at an HBCU, the experiences shared by the Black Greek Letter Fraternities and Sororities established at majority institutions differ significantly from their PWI counterparts. Kimbrough (1995) stated, “Black Greeks with their smaller chapters, lack of student housing, and elaborate recruitment did not fit in with the models presented by traditional [White] Greek Letter Organizations” (p. 63). These studies have created a void that omits Black Greek Letter Fraternities and Sororities and provides no clear understanding of Black Greek life at institutions of higher education.

An overwhelming amount of literature excludes the significance of membership in a Black Greek Letter Organization on the personal and professional success of minorities. Strayhorn and McCall (2012) explained, “Literature is virtually silent on the reasons African Americans join Black Greek Letter Organizations, their experiences

within such organizations, and the perceived benefits members accrue from their involvement” (p. 700). Furthermore, the experiences of Black Greek Letter Organization members are traditionally ignored, and the general perception of Greek Life is represented by White Fraternity and Sorority members. The lack of data marginalizes minority organizations within the Greek Letter Organization community. Studies conclude that the exclusion of research on Black Greek Letter Organizations at the majority and minority institutions contribute to the gap when based on other organizations. Consequently, variables such as leadership, college experience, or personal development for people of color are misrepresented and their presence is lost. As a result, recommendations for future research suggest studies that specifically address the Black Greek Letter Organization experience for women of color.

Moreover, women leadership studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s explored White women typically middle or upper class, excluding minority women or differing economic or social status (Collins, 2000; White, 1974). The 1980s and 1990s literature suggests female leadership styles were more inclusive and created a better working environment focusing on collaboration and diversity (Helgesen, 1990). Despite the 1990s proving that women in leadership roles did not have negative impacts on organizations, research did not clearly distinguish the role of African American women in leadership capacities during this time period. According to Wolfman (1997), understanding Black female leadership was part of a social structure where Black families saw their daughters as having the potential to excel and have a significant impact on the community where they live.

Consequently, it is critical to identify and understand the role of Black Greek Letter Organizations in minority communities. Hughey and Hernandez (2013) described

how media plays a role in stereotyping and highlighting Black Greek Letter Organizations. The authors argued that often the charitable work of Black Greek Letter Organizations are overshadowed by the publicity they receive for doing what they were founded to do. Hughey and Hernandez contended, “Often the stories centered on the cheerful attitude toward helping others, not the inequalities that called for Black Greek Letter Organizations to engage in volunteerism in the first place” (p. 308). Thus, the continued legacy of service to marginalized people and the need for new members to grow and contribute to the organization’s impact is important. Without the involvement of Black Greek Letter Organizations, many communities would be underserved and the minority voice silenced.

Prominent Black Greek Letter Sorority members such as Ida B. Wells, Zora Neale Hurston, Dorothy Height, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, Shirley Chisholm, Katherine G. Johnson, Autherine Lucy Foster, Septima Poinsette Clark, Hattie McDaniel, Coretta Scott King, Loretta Lynch, and Kamala Harris are examples of the remarkable women who represent exceptional leadership by minority women over several decades. Their leadership transcended education, civil rights, and politics, and even sent a man to the moon. The individual success of these women is a testament to minority women and their excellence. The awesome steps each woman took made an unforgettable impact on changing the way the world views minority women, and also fortifying their memories and contributions within their respective Black Sororities. Similar to the women named prior, there are thousands of members of Black Greek Letter Sororities that have followed in the footsteps of their founders and notable Sorors in making changes in their communities both local and abroad (Nohria & Khurana, 2010).

Wyche (2008) described the need to “look at the experiences of women of color

on their own terms, not simply as part of a larger group of people of color or as women” (p. 31). The study involved 12 African American female college presidents leading in both 2- and 4-year institutions. These women shared that their experiences and motivations to pursue leadership opportunities in higher education was part of their identity and desire to overcome challenges faced as a woman of color. The author argued “the importance of understanding the identity of leaders, as well as their skill sets, can contribute much to our understanding of leaders and leadership” (Wyche, 2008, p. 42).

Audience. The target audience of this research study involved higher education student affairs practitioners, nonmembers, Undergraduate members of Black Greek Letter Sororities and graduate members of Black Greek Letter Sororities in leadership positions. The researcher’s data-collection process relied on information that was provided by the participants identified from the undergraduate chapter. Information collected from this demographic provided the sources of data obtained for the purpose of this study. Individuals categorized in the target audience determined if benefits were obtained as a result of participation or exploration of the research study. Overall, the researcher anticipates an opportunity to bring awareness about involvement in Black Greek Letter Sororities and how participation can provide holistic student experiences such as preparation for leadership roles after graduation. This study has the ability to align with the sorority culture of nurturing and preparing minority women to give back to their communities in leadership capacities. Additionally, participants may use their involvement in the study to reflect on personal leadership ideologies and share those with others.

Definition of Terms

Some of the words and terms in this research study may be used interchangeably

or represent a change in terminology over time. The purpose of defining these words is to provide a broader scope of how the verbiage and understanding would be communicated in the context of this topic.

Collegiate Greek fraternities and sororities. This term refers to organizations traditionally composed of members based on gender (Eberly, 2010).

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). This term refers to colleges or universities established to provide education to Black Americans (Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

Historically Black fraternities and sororities. This term refers to Black Greek Letter organizations formed in college by African Americans. This group is also identified as the Divine Nine as well as Black Greek Letter Organizations. According to Brown, Parks, and Phillips (2005), these organizations compose the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC). The Divine Nine Sororities are as follows:

1. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated, founded January 15, 1908, at Howard University.
2. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, founded January 13, 1913, at Howard University.
3. Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Incorporated, founded January 16, 1920, at Howard University.
4. Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated, founded November 12, 1922, at Butler University.

Minorities. For this research, minorities will be used interchangeably with Blacks, African Americans, and people of color to represent the community or participants of this study.

Predominantly White Institution (PWI). This term refers to colleges or universities in which the student population is predominantly White, often referred to as Majority Institutions. These institutions were established for White Americans (Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

Sorors. This term refers to other members belonging to the same organization. This is also used by fraternities to refer to a female organization in reference to a Sister (Shelton, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of graduate minority women in a Black Greek Letter Sorority and their participation in leadership capacities after graduation. Leadership development programs for minority women are essential to the maturation of female leaders. Members of Black Greek Letter Sororities often experience opportunities to demonstrate leadership skills among peers through Sorority mandated programs and initiatives. It is important that Black Sorority members feel empowered to participate in leadership programs implemented by the sorority to increase their exposure to leadership development opportunities outside of their learning institution.

However, leadership development programs provided by institutions of higher learning that specifically address minority women are not available for female leaders within higher education institutions. Dugan and Komives (2010) contended, “There is a growing call for research examining organizational-level leadership learning” (p. 525). As there is a gap in leadership development programs offered to women of color, millennial members of Black Greek Letter Sororities are missing critical learning opportunities to prepare for future leadership capacities.

More specifically, leadership development opportunities targeting women of Black Greek Letter Sororities are few in higher education. Members of Black Sororities may participate in leadership positions within the chapter, attend sorority leadership conferences, and engage in various sorority related programs. However, there is no explicit leadership development programming in higher education that addresses the needs of minority women. As a result, membership in a Black Greek Letter Sorority can serve as a supportive foundation for learning to lead peers while furthering the organization's goals. For women who do not receive membership into Black Sororities, they are challenged with finding alternative ways to experience leadership development in higher education that can be used in their careers.

Black Greek Letter Sororities initiate hundreds of undergraduate women annually. In their matriculation as members, they learn about the hardships faced by Founders who were denied basic rights as women of color. Despite the ongoing challenges, Black Sororities persevered and cultivated many prominent members, several who hold leadership roles across various fields. Literature reveals a gap in research surrounding leadership development for minority women in Black Sororities and personal success after graduation.

This research study sought to examine how membership in a Black Greek Letter Sorority impacts the leadership experiences of graduate sorority members and their personal and professional postgraduate success. Through the research process, this study sought to determine if leadership development is attained as a result of sorority membership or an outcome of an institutions leadership development programming. This research study strived to understand the role that membership plays in the development of these leadership competencies. In addition, the objective of this research was to positively

contribute to the discussion of higher education and the benefits of Black Greek Letter Organizations for minority women. As a result, this research study revealed the influences of joining and if membership in a Black Sorority shapes member experiences and perspectives on leadership. The research participants for this study were graduate members of a Black Greek Letter Sorority who joined the same undergraduate chapter at a southeastern university.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

History of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

African Americans experienced visible legal separation and isolation within the education system, creating unequal education systems that became HBCUs (Butner, 2005). Both Black and White organizations and churches reached out in support of funding HBCUs. Religious leaders found this as an opportunity to train men and women who could share the gospel with others. White missionaries felt it was their responsibility to train Black men and women to be more acceptable for White society. In an effort to accomplish this, missionaries would “Christianize the freedman and rid the country of the ‘menace’ of uneducated African Americans” (Gasman & Tudico, 2008, p. 2). This mindset became a widespread concept as more minority-serving institutions formed and African Americans sought education opportunities. As a result of this approach, some missionaries were met with opposition by Blacks. It was apparent that White missionaries were underestimating the African American community and, according to Browning and Williams (1978), “mixed social, economic, and religious ideas in their dedication to the task of uplifting the freedmen and women” (p. 120).

Unfortunately, White missionaries used education as an opportunity to save souls rather than provide Black communities with resources to better assimilate into occupations that would improve their quality of life. As a result, African Americans took a deeper interest in implementing change within minority-serving institutions by demanding more influence. McPherson (1970) described how African Americans “desired not to change the system but to achieve greater participation in it as teachers, deans, presidents, and trustees” (p. 1357). The goal of implementing these changes would provide them autonomy over their educations and lives. Cook (2006) asserted that most

HBCUs have maintained the original core values of their sponsoring religious institutions. As a result, HBCUs wanted to hire more African American teachers and staff that would reflect this change.

Early Funding Support for Historically Black Colleges and Universities

The Second Morrill Act of 1890 created a large growth in HBCUs within the southern United States. However, the legislation did not increase opportunities for newly established institutions. Raffel (2016) stated, “In the 1890s, state aid to the Black colleges was virtually nonexistent. As a result, most schools depended almost entirely on their small Morrill fund allocations for the greater share of their support” (p. 511). The HBCUs found that state funding was provided in favor of White land-grant institutions leaving Black schools financially in despair. According to Raffel, the Second Morrill Act increased the number of Black-serving institutions but limited their studies in areas of mechanical, industrial, and agriculture education. By creating these limitations, minorities were restricted from pursuing higher paying or prestigious jobs. These confines eliminated the ability to receive liberal arts education (Raffel, 2016). The years ranging from 1865 to 1896 marked a difficult time for HBCUs.

Wennersten (1991) contended that states received \$15,000 annually and, after a 10-year period, an increase to \$25,000, a provision outlined in the Second Morrill Act that supported growth for HBCUs. The control of legislators over the funding of both Black and White institutions detrimentally hindered HBCUs. The financial struggle would remain a critical conflict in maintaining Black institutions into the 21st century. With these practices in place, a discrepancy in financial backing limited the ability of HBCUs to educate and provide adequate resources to students. This inequality would create ongoing financial inferiority among HBCUs.

Court Decisions and New Laws

Black institutions emphasized the separate but equal policies that influenced American culture. The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision provided directives indirectly isolating African Americans from Whites. *Plessy v. Ferguson* would perpetuate negative assumptions of inferiority toward African Americans for a total of 60 years (Washington & Nunez, 2005). Furthermore, the *Plessy* decision required that schools, restaurants, and public facilities would remain segregated. The impact of *Plessy v. Ferguson* impacted all levels of Black schools, causing them to suffer immensely as a result of various expenses associated with maintaining two education systems. Consequently, Black students were left with inferior facilities and poorly compensated teachers (Washington & Nunez, 2005).

In 1954, the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* had a monumental impact on African Americans by desegregating education (Landman, 2004). As a result, more African Americans were offered admission into PWIs. Although students were able to attend PWIs, the HBCUs continued to support and educate the marginalized populations. Therefore, with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the HBCU experienced a detrimental decline in enrollment. Anderson (2002) stated, “At the end of the 1960s, virtually all leading U.S. institutions of higher education had initiated policies and programs to include more students of color in undergraduate and graduate programs” (p. 11). Without the ability to provide competitive programs and funding to African American students, HBCUs were disadvantaged (Kelderman, 2010, 2012).

African American Women and Education

Research studies on the success of minorities in education are often inclusive and fail to address the distinctive experience of minority women. Although women of color

experience marginalization in higher education as a result of gender and ethnicity (Banks 2009; Moses, 1989), it is necessary to identify the common challenges they face.

Disproportionately, minority women experience a lack of support from their college or university. This obstacle can be detrimental to helping minority women find a sense of belonging or further their goals. Research on the student experience in higher education often creates a division among ethnic groups.

Bartman (2015) asserted that the comparison of minority and White students suggests an inadequacy toward minority students. This suggests that minority students experience greater risks associated with failure. However, Winkle-Wagner (2010) argued that comparing minority and White students excludes the experience of minority women as independent from their minority male counterparts. In addition, Winkle-Wagner explained that, despite challenges to adjust and excel in education, negative experiences influence minority women's identity development, and Wolfman (1997) suggested this factor has a positive impact on their long-term success.

Emphasizing the experience of minority women in higher education provides a space to discuss not only racial identity but the holistic self. Phillips (2005) argued that minority women were dehumanized as immoral and believed to be lacking the virtues held by White women. Historically, the experience of minority women has been exclusionary with negative stereotypes that created obstacles for African American women in an effort to justify destructive treatment toward them (Gordon, 2008). Several factors impact the success of minority women in higher education. Banks (2009) argued that institutions play a role in creating leadership capacities for women of color, and these strengths can be nurtured through supportive programs and services. This research study discussed the leadership experience of members in a Black Greek Letter Sorority while

considering how membership impacts overall success after graduation. Johnson (2012) contended that the bonds and relationships established by Black organizations create opposition toward White social norms. As a result of minority women participating in organizations, research on the role of leadership in correlation to success continues to develop (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, & Wagner, 2011).

African American Female Development and Theoretical Frameworks

The history of marginalization of African American women in leadership is an increasingly relevant topic. Beal (2016) asserted that African American women were expected to conform to domestic, counterrevolutionary positions that removed them entirely from conversations of power. In fact, a significant challenge faced by African American women included the belief that Black women contributed to the poor condition of Black men. As America was unforgiving to him, the Black woman became the image of his condemnation. Consequently, this fallacy resulted in further exploitation of the African American community, wedging a gap between African American women and men that was perpetuated throughout centuries.

As African Americans wanted change, the idea of moral uplift became a vessel to achieve unity. The purpose of moral uplift was to progress the African American community by achieving equality during the 19th and 20th centuries (Hunter, 2016). The objective of moral uplift was to effectively improve the social, political, economic, and educational advancement of African Americans. The intergroup conflict surrounding moral uplift was the perspective taken to attain equality. Some individuals felt that to accomplish their goals, it was necessary to adapt to White American values, whereas others believed that moral uplift could be accomplished by changing the negative assumptions about Black people, as well as implementing self-help approaches that

would strengthen the African American community (Hunter, 2016). Unfortunately, gender inequalities within the moral uplift ideology confined Black women to homemakers, rather than engaging in the movement's leadership roles. Here again, a consistent theme that the contributions of African American women were significant only through the support of Black men. The moral uplift ideology rejected Black female leadership and characterized much of the discrimination imposed on people of color by Whites. An obvious downfall of the moral uplift ideologies was its promotion of leadership roles as exclusively attainable by middle-class Black men.

Nevertheless, African American women understood the importance of engaging in social uplift and wanted more involvement and influence within the social and political realm. The intent of moral uplift may not have been successful in all respects, but it did succeed in developing a widespread solidarity among African Americans. In addition, the uplift ideology influenced the rise of African American owned businesses, education institutions, and social clubs such as Black Greek Letter Organizations (Hunter, 2016), All of which are key components of the African American community today. Therefore, moral uplift extended an opportunity for African American women to influence and lead from a different standpoint.

The literature on Black feminist thought recognizes theoretical frameworks that support African American female development. Black feminist theory is grounded in three principles. Hill-Collins (1990) explained, "Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it" (p. 3). Black feminist thought identifies the theory to include the lives of African American women as the first principle. The second principle references the unique essence of Black women. The third principle addresses the existing similarities among African American women in

regard to social class, economic standing, and relationships (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

The work of African American female leaders prior to the 1970s, which addressed racial uplift and community development, was largely unrewarded (Barnes, 2016).

Black feminist ideology gave a voice to Black women with an emphasis on their experiences. Black feminist thought underlined how African American women were disproportionately restricted from resources and power. This theory advocated for efforts to develop African American women as viable leaders within the community. As minority women are receiving opportunities to compete for traditionally exclusionary positions, it is critical that they are adequately developed and trained. Bridging the gap for women of color in leadership is necessary. Minority female leaders need the resources to overcome challenges within education and the workforce that are traditionally not experienced by Black or White males and White female counterparts.

Black Greek Letter Sororities and Colorism at Howard University

Although it is not entirely uncommon for members to recreate their perspective of the founding meetings of each sorority, one can only imagine the transformational work that took place. Three historically Black Greek Letter Sororities were established at Howard University in Washington, D.C., which was founded in 1866 as a private institution (Kerr, 2007). Research conducted about the early years of Howard University reveals a history of prestige among HBCUs, with a hidden past permeated by colorism and discrimination toward people of color. Kerr (2007) asserted that Howard University administrators who identified as fair-skinned Blacks often extended preferential treatment to “those who resembled themselves” (p. 82). Consequently, this behavior created a division among African Americans which was particularly noticeable throughout the sorority membership selection process. Those who participated in sorority activities

found themselves being classified by complexion, academic achievements, and family prestige. For women who did not pass those qualifications, they were not permitted to join.

Contemporary stereotypes expressed about Black Greek Letter Sororities can be harmful. Levitt (2010) expound that Black women are viewed as “too aggressive, direct, assertive, or flashy” (p. 66). Although these characteristics may apply to some women who join, it is not an appropriate generalization of all Black Sorority members. To apply negative stereotypes to Black women allows the concept of colorism to play a vital role in how non-Greeks understand sorority membership and history. Today, Alpha Kappa Alpha members are viewed as pretty girls with light skin and long hair, Delta Sigma Theta women as brown skinned with natural hair, Zeta Phi Beta members as dark skinned and overweight, and Sigma Gamma Rho members as scholarly or unnoticeable. These claims reveal facets of untold historical experiences of joining the Black Sororities in addition to the culture of Howard University at the turn of the century. Despite these controversial behaviors, millennial members are discouraged from engaging in historically discriminatory practices when accepting new members.

Many millennial members will not identify with unfair practices in their Sorority experience. Mitchell (2014) found that members appreciated the safe space sororities create for women of color, as well as the ability to belong to a group of women sharing similar experiences. Ongoing research conducted about Black Greek Letter Sororities address color discrimination. Discussion of Black Greek Letter Organizations and color discrimination highlights the role membership selectivity has on the past and present culture within each sorority. It also contributes to the understanding of Black Sorority stereotypes and leadership attainment.

Black Greek Letter Sororities: The History of New Sisterhoods

The purpose of creating Black Greek Letter Organizations was to provide educated men and women with a platform to progress the African American community (Harris & Mitchel, 2007). In *Our Kind of People: Inside America's Black Upper Class*, Graham (1999) concluded, "Black Greek Letter Organizations provided a platform where the most educated African Americans in America discussed ways to fight racism and improve the conditions for less advantaged African Americans" (p. 85). Graham asserted that Black Greek Letter Organizations, along with their efforts, extended beyond the collegiate experience. Collectively, Black Greek Letter Organizations supported the continued push for equality that people of color needed to improve their quality of life. It is through sororities and fraternities that many students experience transformation in developing the whole person: mind, heart, body, and soul (Muff, 2013).

This belief was further supported by Neumann (2007), who expressed that African American women wanted to "carve out a place for themselves" (p. 170), which was necessary for a White-dominated society. Black Sororities quickly organized in an effort to support movements that impacted women such as the Women's Suffrage Movement as well as provided funding for various organizations championing for Civil Rights (Crawford, 2007). The leadership role that Black Sororities play throughout history is significant as they take accountability for their "moral obligation to consider the needs and interests of the entire group and to take the needs of the larger community into account" (Johnson, 2012, p. 90).

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated (AKA), was the first Black Greek Letter Organization founded by nine women at Howard University on January 15, 1908. Brown et al. (2005) asserted that the motto of AKA symbolizes racial uplift for the

African American community through service and education. The perseverance and establishment of AKA represented the beginning of leadership development opportunities for African American women in higher education. The service of the sorority members made a positive impact on the Howard University campus. As a result, more women sought the opportunity to lead in their community as members of the first Black Sorority. Yet, 22 new initiates almost transformed the future of AKA, which was saved by one strong voice, Nellie Quander.

The Founders of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, shared a strong desire to engage in social action that would impact women as well as people of color. Delta Sigma Theta is unique because the 22 founders were originally initiated into AKA. As the 22 women sought various opportunities not provided by AKA, they realized the importance of creating their own sorority. The women of Delta Sigma Theta “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 leaving school” (McKenzie, 2005, p. 341), and, on January 13, 1913, they were founded. In the spring of 1913, the founders of Delta Sigma Theta participated in the Women’ Suffrage March that was held in Washington, D.C.

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated, was the third sorority founded at Howard University on January 16, 1920, by five women. The founders of Zeta witnessed the impact of sorority elitism and the emphasis placed on socializing on the campus. Kerr (2007) contended that Zeta Phi Beta was “the first [Black Sorority] for which members were selected primarily on the basis of academic achievement” (p. 85). Zeta felt the effects of the previously established sororities and combatted it with a transformative perspective. Turner (1952) explained, “The central idea which motivates all of [Zetas]

projects is Finer Womanhood” (p. 156). The motto of finer womanhood resonates with members who recognize that “a race or nation can rise no higher than its women” (Turner, 1952, p. 157).

Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated, was the last sorority to be established on November 12, 1922, at Butler University. Butler University, a PWI, served the purpose of training teachers. The founders of Sigma Gamma Rho were seven mature educators who sought to create an organization that would foster service and fellowship opportunities in addition to encouraging professional achievement in higher education (White, 1974). Unfortunately, today, Sigma Gamma Rho does not receive the strong admiration like the three Black Sororities that precede it. However, Sigma Gamma Rho’s presence at a PWI is important because it echoed the necessity for women of color to find a support group. Membership in the Black Sorority allowed the members an opportunity to negotiate their transition to majority White environments (Brown et al., 2005). Sigma Gamma Rho’s ability to sustain itself outside of the HBCU is significant as the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision would allow Black students to enter PWIs decades later.

Defining Leadership

Leadership is a concept that has numerous definitions and is used broadly. Greenberg (2005) focused on the primary function of leadership in which creativity and innovation are the essential purpose or mission of an organization and the strategy for attaining it. A myth connected to leadership is that it cannot be learned. According to Spralls, Garvin, Divine, and Trotz (2010), anyone can experience leadership that can be developed. The steps of achieving leadership are personal, and no single leader is exactly the same. Popa (2012) asserted that good leaders could affect organizational culture and transform it in line with their vision. Although leadership descriptions may vary, one

common factor is true: Leaders are necessary for change.

Dugan and Komives (2010) asserted, “Leadership is [a] purposeful, collaborative, values-based, process that results in social change” (p. 526). This social change is important not only for creating an environment that is secure and positive, but also allows for future leaders to have examples to grow from and a reference for addressing societal needs. In addition, leaders have the responsibility of not only acting ethically but preparing their collaborators to work in a similar way. Schaubroeck et al. (2012) suggested that the influences of ethical leadership occur both directly and indirectly to immediate collaborators as well as across hierarchical levels. Empowering collaborators to participate in the change-making process will promote a future thinking culture. Nurturing an environment in which others feel open to actively contribute to the transformation of the organization helps progression (Lesesne, 2013).

Most importantly, leadership is building relationships and using those relations to overcome challenges. Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasurbramaniam (1996) contended that the emphasis of relationship in leadership between collaborator and the leader is a mutual understanding. Together, this mutual understanding can impact organizations and empower leaders to do exceptional things. Kempster and Parry (2011) offered that leadership’s key elements are social, process aligned, and relational; therefore, to better understand leadership, these factors must be inclusive. Burns (2002) explained, “Leadership first functions to continuously inspire agents to revisit the ultimate purpose and core value of the system” (p. 48). For individuals who have a particular interest in serving in leadership roles, it is an ongoing opportunity for learning and research evolves as it pertains to understanding the progression of leadership.

Women's Leadership Models

Initial programs established for female leadership development has incorporated male leadership traits. Groves (2005) suggested that women demonstrate emotion and better social skills than male leaders. Unfortunately, for women, emotion is viewed as a feminine trait less desirable in leadership. Yet, that same emotion makes a significant difference between male and female leadership more specifically in the interactions between their collaborators. Leadership roles in the workplace are depicted as being masculine, assertive, dominate, and structured, which is an image not often associated with female leaders.

Allen and Roberts (2011) conducted a study on the difference between female and male leadership styles. According to the authors, male leaders are typically autocratic and task oriented, whereas female leaders are democratic and emphasize a relationship-oriented style. Leadership styles can be used to motivate collaborators and create organizational change. Allen and Roberts argued that gradually the perceived masculinity of leadership roles will be reduced over time as an effect of applying a cultural analysis of leadership. As transformation occurs in work environments and leadership demands become more complex, a shift in thinking will be necessary to accommodate the needs of organizations. As a result of these findings, stereotypical masculine and feminine leadership qualities become androgynous (Bosak & Sczesny, 2011). The ability to execute change on a sustainable basis is achievable if organizations invest in developing their change capacity (Buono & Kerber, 2010). This change capacity may also incorporate how leaders analyze and implement stages of change.

In creating organizational change, a significant obstacle is impacting the way women are viewed as leaders. Kalev, Dobbins, and Kelley (2006) suggested that

organizational changes have a direct impact on weakening obstacles that hinder the success of female leadership roles. Therefore, organizational change contributes to the progress of gender equality and leadership. According to Greenberg (2005), consensual models of leadership must undergo change. Instead of aligning with gender stereotypes leaders should understand which effective styles improve their organizations. Essentially, this means that leaders personalize their experience in creating better relationships, collaborative decision making, and diverse environments (Bosak & Sczesny, 2011). Research demonstrates progression in leadership models for women. This change may encourage more women to participate in leadership roles and to better understand how their qualities can positively impact the organizations they serve. Furthermore, Eagly and Carli (2007) predicted that, with the continued change in leadership culture, women will ascertain roles of authority and influence.

The International Women's Forum conducted a study to recognize female leadership models. Rosener (1990) concluded the research indicated female leaders are most responsive in areas such as transformational leadership. Although identifying leadership styles is important, it does not articulate why female leadership development is important. Furthermore, it is necessary to highlight that female leadership is respected, despite social biases against it. Women who achieve top leadership positions are likely to receive positive feedback from male and female subordinates due to prestige and admiration associated with achieving high positions of leadership. Yet, Eagly and Carli (2007) asserted, "Female leaders encounter difficulties in masculine settings" (p. 6). Women who exhibit strong leadership qualities are seen negatively by their male counterparts and often their female peers. Female leaders are labeled unfairly and taken less seriously by their subordinates, and this can create a feeling of isolation within their

organization. Timberlake (2005) suggested that these environments hinder relationship building and networking abilities for female leaders. These data support the need for further research to be conducted on effective women's leadership models.

Leadership Development Opportunities for Women

Judge and Piccolo (2004) described women as capable leaders who, more frequently than their male counterparts, demonstrate effective leadership styles. However, society tends to give a different depiction of female leaders. In fact, Eagly and Carli (2007) concluded, "Women leaders may manifest a more effective set of leader behaviors mainly because they are more qualified" (p. 5). Researchers believe that leadership development has to play a key role in shaping future leaders, particularly female leaders. Eagly and Carli contended that there is a contradictory message regarding women receiving leadership opportunities with American culture. In exploring leadership styles Eagly and Carli asserted, "Leadership styles are not fixed behaviors but encompass a range of behaviors that have a particular meaning or that serve a particular function" (p. 2). Leaders have to be prepared to adjust their style to adapt to the situation they are handling. For female leaders, the struggle exists to not only fit the perspective of what female leaders should be, but also to attain goals associated with leadership. The result is cross-pressure in which the female leader experiences tension associated with contending in both roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Grove, Kibel, and Haas (2005) reported that leadership developmental results occur over time. These results are represented as steps taken by an individual who may reach challenging outcomes, such as a sustained change in behavior or a new strategy. Leadership development is necessary for creating a transformative learning organization and empowering others. Day and Halpin (2004) asserted that leader development is built

on a foundation of cognitive, socioemotional, and behavioral skills. The authors contend that characteristics such as self-awareness, openness, trust, creativity, and practical, social and general intelligence provide the basis for leadership (Day & Halpin, 2004). As leadership development is encouraged within an organization it permits others to take initiative in becoming change agents. Additionally, Allen and Hartman (2008) acknowledged that the intention of participants will draw knowledge from the source of learning and improve their ability to lead teams, organizations, and change effectively.

Student Development Theory

A primary focus of student affairs professionals is to create a higher learning experience that incorporates student development. Brown (1972) conceded that it is the responsibility of the institution to ensure students receive holistic development as a commitment from the student affairs professionals. The application of sociology and psychology practice guide the services received by students (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). This is particularly clear as the goal is to provide an environment that supports the student growth in an effective way. Researchers agree that development is essential for preparing young adults for society.

Rodgers (1990) defined student development as “the ways that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education” (p. 27). Students spend a significant amount of time in college, therefore it is important that their experiences allow them to analyze various situations, and utilize basic life skills. Jones and Abes (2011) offered a more contemporary definition of student development in which that development denotes a positive change within. This change could include understanding oneself, expressing growth in areas of identity, and simply participating in activities that require rigor.

Student development theory is a philosophy that concentrates on understanding the growth of students and addresses the gaps that student affairs professionals want to know. This theory has undergone almost 50 years of research and reassessing to compose what is now more widely understood as student development. Student affairs professionals are able to analyze how decisions, environment, and organizations impact students' engagement (Jones & Abes, 2011) based on this theory. This is critical as both student affairs professionals and students have a platform to discuss what opportunities for student development exist and what that looks like on a particular campus. Without the engaging of both parties, it is difficult to determine how institutions are impacting students and providing a stimulus for development. Furthermore, the programs and services created for student development are central to providing a comprehensive experience (Jones & Wijeyesinghe, 2011).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1993), personal attributes impact development, which can be designated developmentally investigative characteristics. Specifically, there are four attributes that students experience that influence their degree of development. Patton et al. (2016) acknowledged, "Developmentally instigative characteristics influence how individuals experience environments and how environments respond to them" (p. 42). Therefore, the concept of these attributes expresses how the student is responsible for his or her own experiences and those choices are dictated by involvement. Renn and Arnold (2003) used the developmentally investigative characteristics theory to apply it directly to the student development experience. The authors asserted that, in the first attribute, the student impacts response of the environment. Second, selective responsibility is an exploration of the environment which might result in participating in organizations. Third, students who look for opportunities in leadership or challenging

activities experience structuring proclivities. Lastly, directive beliefs allow the students to analyze their goals and the outcomes in comparison to the environment (Renn & Arnold, 2003).

Institutions that seek to create valuable student development opportunities should consider their student populations needs. An incredible amount of research suggests the importance of student development based on theories. However, professionals should seek answers directly from students to better understand the student's perspective of personal development. Although colleges and universities provide activities to explore leadership, it is essential to include the needs of students and their contributions to design services and programs that will be accessible to them (Cuadrado, Morales, & Recio, 2008). This not only will enhance the student experience, but will demonstrate the institution's willingness to provide lucrative educational and personal objectives that are student centered and satisfy their roles as student professionals.

Leadership Development in Higher Education

The college experience is referred to as one of the most important opportunities of a person's life. This perspective is further explored through the works of McClellan and Stringer (2009), who argued, "Colleges and universities have the responsibility of utilizing educational opportunities to assist in the student development, which contributes to the betterment of society" (p. 11). As students enter into higher education there is an expectation that these institutions will create holistic individuals who will be self-sufficient and impact their communities. These institutions impart wisdom and life experiences that are critical to the student's development. Thomas (2009) maintained universities are responsible for not only progressing thoughtful leaders as evidence of accomplished graduates, but also for producing moral leaders who contribute to social

change. Generally, colleges and universities provide a host of extracurricular activities that encourage student involvement. Many of these opportunities include participation within organizations. Those who engage in a variety of leadership development activities gain experiences helpful for their future careers (Little, 2002).

Typically, male students represent a significant amount of leadership roles across campuses. In a study conducted by Jackson, Engstrom, and Emmers-Sommer (2007), undergraduate students were asked to identify the leader at a conference table in which a male and female sat at opposite ends. In this study, the researchers found that the majority of male student participants identified the male as being the leader. For most participants, it was found that social norms were present, despite the obvious gender biases that would suggest women are less capable of being leaders than men (Jackson et al., 2007). Gender discrimination negatively impacts the way female leaders are viewed.

According to Eagly and Carli (2007), male subordinates consider assertive behavior depicted by female leaders as masculine, therefore rejecting them. The concern with this sentiment is finding a way to validate female students and encouraging them to overcome challenges where their leadership capacities are questioned as a result of gender bias (Griffin, Bennett, & Harris, 2013). Nevertheless, female students must learn to advocate for themselves against discriminatory practices that they experience within the college environment. Kilbourne (1960) contended that stereotypical images of women can impact the way female supervisors are received within management and executive positions even when they are suitable for the roles.

Hickman (2015) conducted research that focused on the expectations of female leaders by male students. Hickman found that young men, who are exposed more frequently to competent female leadership, will reflect more positive views of female

leadership as the norm. Higher education sets the stage for critical leadership development lessons for both male and female students. However, female students must be given a platform that offers equal ability to participate in leadership roles as their male counterparts. Scott and Brown (2006) suggested that perceptions of good leadership “depends both upon exposure to target’s behavior and preexisting knowledge structures regarding the traits that underlie the behavior” (p. 231).

Consequently, female students must view themselves as relevant and capable of serving in leadership roles. Mujani and Muttaqin (2012) contended that female students are challenged with balancing their perception of what acceptable leadership behaviors are when working with male students. In addition, the authors suggest that female leaders within higher education experience difficulty in earning the support of other female students (Mujani & Muttaqin, 2012). This lack of support poses a conflict, stifling the development of female leaders, and strains relationships between groups of women.

Leadership Training, Education, and Development

The first step to improving the way students understand leadership is by establishing a program or education opportunity for them to learn. Although there is a difference between leadership training and leadership education, both have a significant function in equipping leaders with tools for success. Ayman, Adams, Fisher, and Hartman (2003) agreed that leadership education provides future preparation for a profession, whereas leadership training is a part of leadership education (Allen & Roberts, 2011). In fact, it is important to note that these terms are not interchangeable but can be used to describe the process of learning or redefining the understanding of skills associated with leadership. Many people argue that leadership is a natural innate ability, yet Allen and Roberts (2011) asserted leadership as a teachable quality that can be

learned. As it relates to students, leadership development within higher education sets the stage for preparing them for future opportunities.

According to Ayman et al. (2003), benefits of leadership development are “developing personal growth and potential” (p. 204). As students participate in activities that enhance their leadership development they simultaneously acquire or improve skills necessary to achieve goals. James, Biesta, and Colley (2007) asserted that the process of learning requires skills, knowledge, and practice. Empowering leaders and organization through implementation of skills, knowledge, and practice can encourage development that can enhance the organizations future. Research suggests differentiating between leadership training, leadership education, and leadership development. Haber (2011) contended that activities used to enhance skills and performance is training. Hughey and Mussnug (1997) explained that training is practical and involves hands-on experience. Training can provide new techniques and inspire change within an organization. This experience does not require previous knowledge or skills but can be acquired and is necessary to impact job-related tasks (Truelove, 1992). What is understood is that leadership education improves leadership capacity beyond a particular role, and leadership development addresses progression of leadership capacity within the student (Haber, 2011; Haber & Komives, 2009; Holmes, 1969).

Most importantly, this research supports providing leadership programming in various methods over short or extended time frames. Brungardt (2011) suggested that undergraduate leadership programs highlight outcomes produced through collaboration, critical thinking, and effective communication. Exposure to holistic leadership education supports how students determine which methods work to improve their leadership ability and knowledge during their higher education leadership experiences. Furthermore,

leadership development prepares students to deal with real organizational concerns.

According to Pratt (2008), adjusting plans, time lines, or objectives based on observations can help to accomplish goals. Using Pratt's perspective not only provides an opportunity to prepare for unexpected obstacles, but also encourages leadership to understand and implement flexibility. Learning how to overcome obstacles fosters a sense of achievement that students need to be effective leaders.

Are Greek Letter Organizations Synonymous for Leadership?

Scholars have taken a particular interest in researching Greek Letter Organizations to better understand their relevance in the lives of college students. In the 1980s, higher education professionals spent a significant amount of time questioning the role of fraternities and sororities (Kimbrough, 1995). Several studies about Greek Letter Organizations within the next decade would argue that there is no direct correlation between participation and leadership development or significant indications of values provided by these organizations. McMurtrie (2015) expressed that sororities and fraternities do not promote tolerance of others and, therefore, do not encourage diversity. This is demonstrated through their inability to work collaboratively with other organizations or by ongoing conflicts.

As previously mentioned, Greek Letter Organizations hold a prestige and authority that is often criticized and challenged but is unmatched. Contrary to these critiques, Miller (1973) concluded that members of Greek Letter Organizations exhibit positive traits displayed throughout their college career. Furthermore, Mathiasen (2005) asserted that sororities and fraternities represent a distinguishable and dominant part of student culture. This elitism suggests that participation allows only members to work on leadership skills that are necessary for their lives after college. Other researchers argue

that Greek Letter Organizations have no negative impact on the college community. This research supports Greek Letter Organizations and member participation.

Marquardt (2011) contended that organizations assist in establishing responsibility, rewarding contributions, and working cohesively with like-minded objectives. According to Abowitz and Knox (2003), Greek Letter Organizations offer social and political influence. As a result of their involvement across various areas, Greek Letter Organizations are credited for their ability to uplift communities and participate in national efforts toward change. Yet, the future of these organizations is dependent on the students who commit to their core values and missions. Garvin, Edmondson, and Gino (2008) explained that the viability and continued success is determined by the progression of change, where the change is a result of the organization's ability to function cohesively.

Gallup and Pursue University Index Study

Gallup-Purdue index and Greek letter organization membership research.

The 2014 Gallup-Purdue research gathered data about the correlation between Greek Letter Organization membership and the college experience (Lumina Foundation, 2015). The data collected in this study came solely from the North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) and NPHC organizations. Of the participants, 16% held membership in Greek Letter Organizations during the undergraduate years. The survey concluded that members of the NIC and NPHC Greek Letter Organizations showed a higher level of well-being across all categories than nonmembers. Almost 60% of Greek respondents felt their greatest well-being was in the area of purpose.

Approximately half of the respondents reported their social well-being as thriving. On average, Greek members were found to be higher in financial well-being than

nonmembers. Members and nonmembers of Greek organizations had a 6% difference in community well-being; however, it was concluded that networking contributed to the opportunities for Greeks to engage more in the community. Physical well-being showed Greek members as happier and thriving than nonmembers by a small 3% margin. Overall, the survey concluded that members of Greek Letter Organizations viewed their well-being significantly higher than graduates who were nonmembers.

The survey addressed prominent collegiate experiences for the fraternity and sorority members. These experiences included emotional support, experiential and deep learning, alumni attachment, student loans, entrepreneurship, and preparation after graduation. In comparison to their nonmember counterparts, fraternity and sorority members shared that they “strongly agree[d] that their institution prepared them for life after college than all other college graduates” (Lumina Foundation, 2015, p. 9). According to this research, participants of Greek Life Organizations were pleased with their undergraduate experiences and also expressed an overall strong well-being post-graduation.

Gallup-Purdue University index research: Success after graduation. The employee engagement research focused on college graduates with an emphasis on examining success post-graduation. The universities placed the data in an index that would “provide insight into the relationship between the college experience and whether college graduates have great jobs and great lives” (Lumina Foundation, 2015, p. 3). The objective of the research was to compare the difference in the well-being of members in Greek Letter Organizations to non-Greek members. Over half of the participants in NIC or NPHC organizations were full-time employees. The survey used to collect data in this research study was called the Gallup-Healthyways Well-Being 5 View. The Gallup-

Healthyways Well-Being 5 View addressed five categories: purpose well-being, social well-being, financial well-being, community well-being, and physical well-being. The survey asked 10 questions in which responses ranged from thriving to suffering (Lumina Foundation, 2015). The survey concluded that individuals who were members of Greek Letter Organizations had an overall higher level of well-being in comparison to non-Greek graduates. Lastly, 37% of sorority and fraternity participants felt they were prepared by their institution for life after graduation, whereas 27% of non-Greeks did not.

Conflict with the Gallup-Purdue index research. This research did not include the specific experience or success after graduation of NPHC members. The experiences of minority Greek Letter Organization and their well-being in higher education differed from their White Greek Letter Organization counterparts. Minority success after graduation was not clearly identified by this research despite “key demographic characteristics including gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status” (Lumina Foundation, 2015, p. 8). The NIC and NPHC membership is generally extended to predominantly White undergraduates. However, Hughey (2010) argued that minority students do join White fraternities and sororities. Unfortunately, without a breakdown of race or ethnicity in the Index, it is difficult to determine what percentage of NIC and NPHC members were actually minorities and what their responses were. Consequently, the research conducted by Severtis and Christie-Mizell (2007) on Greek Letter Organization membership 6 years earlier found that membership in NPHC organizations increased the likelihood of minorities graduating more than NIC members. Therefore, the absence of data on the experience of NPHC Greeks and success after graduation in the Gallup-Purdue study further supports the argument that minorities lack representation in various aspects of higher education.

Black Greek Letter Sororities: Experiences and Female Peer Leadership

Mitchell (2014) concluded in his exploration of Black Greek Letter Organizations that “students involved in historically Black Fraternities and Sororities during their college experience gain a form of social capital as a result of the social integration these organizations provide” (p. 22). This example of social capital described by Mitchell suggests that the benefits associated with belonging to a group are significant to the individual who participates. Collectively, research on Black Greek Letter Organizations discussed the benefits of inclusion, leadership, and awareness shared by people of color who seek membership within their college experience. Mitchell asserted that Black Greek Letter Sorority members find their all-female groups empowering and a source for identifying role models.

The sorority experience provides its members the possibility to exhibit self-confidence needed in a male-dominated world. In fact, as the sorority encourages leadership, it reduces members’ insecurities that “lead women to refrain from leadership positions” (Bosak & Sczensy, 2011, p. 266). Giddings (1988) described the responsibility of sorority members as being leaders, having role model qualities, furthering the organization’s mission, and strengthening the sorority’s presence. These long-term objectives are essential to the function of Black Greek Letter Sororities in providing “members with peer as well as professional and social support” (Hernandez, 2011, p. 212). Understanding one’s leadership abilities is essential, and having the appropriate skill sets to accomplish tasks and guide others directly impacts the success of teams and the organization. Steward (2011) argued that instances involving transformation, obstacles, and new initiatives are opportunities to demonstrate leadership skills and grow capabilities.

Harwood and Burnham (2015) asserted that leadership is the perception of others but true leadership is what one does when no one is present. Sorority members who hold themselves accountable for demonstrating positive leadership traits set the standard for future members. According to McIntyre (1984), role models are significant in the development of moral character. This moral character should guide the way Sorority members work to achieve their organizational goals, in addition to their growth as female leaders. Winkle-Wagner (2010) suggested that future research on minority women student success can discuss the role of peer relationships and how “Black women uniquely create and use these relationships in college” (p. 55). Therefore, if attention is given to observations of leadership behaviors, sororities of Black Greek Letter Organizations can work toward overcoming stereotypes and look to cultivate greater leaders and role models among collegiate women.

Responsibilities of Membership: Stereotypes Are a Serious Matter

The negative critique of Black Greek Letter Sororities is that they fulfill stereotypes, display exclusive behaviors, and focus too much on superficial aspects of belonging to a sorority. To be more precise, Black Greek Letter Sorority members often earn the bad reputation of being letter wearers, buying their friends, and putting on facades. Whetten and Mackey (2002) contended that an organization’s image creates a position that is necessary for establishing a connection with an audience. These images can have a significant impact on the way women of color in Black Sororities are viewed. The organizational image is important; however, it is unclear how images directly impact a Black Sorority member’s leadership experience.

Shields (2004) explained, “The past and present experiences influence the perceptions of and the possibility for future experiences” (p. 8), and, because

organizations can have multiple images, they adapt with their audience. For example, at campus events, members may exhibit behaviors that highlight the positive qualities of their organization. Yet, a closed event attended by nonmembers may not provide the same experience as members may not feel obligated to display a particular organizational image. Hernandez (2011) asserted, “Members are keenly aware that sorority membership requires women to at all times serve as representatives of their respective organizations” (p. 212). This awareness is an accepted responsibility for members, who understand that their commitment to join is much greater than themselves. Hernandez brought awareness to what may be considered pressures of membership that are unseen by nonmembers. These types of pressures can restrict members from being authentic and solely perform in a way they feel is necessary to uphold the sorority’s image.

Patton, Bridges, and Flowers (2011) explained, “Membership in historically Black Greek Letter Organizations provide benefits to affiliated students” (p. 115). At the same time, the member’s elaborate portrayal of Greek life is reminiscent of the elitism once prevalent a century ago at Black institutions. Hernandez (2011) asserted, “Members differentiate themselves from independents by claiming that they have distinct qualities and characteristics that few others in their communities possess” (p. 225). This behavior can be both alluring and off-putting for those who do not understand the Black Greek culture.

The appearance enforcement study of Hernandez (2011) revealed important implications about the way members feel obligated to uphold specific behaviors, stereotypes, and images associated with their sisterhood. For women of color in Black Sororities, members “assert and cultivate an identity that defies the pervasive, negative images of black women (Hernandez, 2011, p. 215). In many ways, millennial members of

Black Sororities play into the negative stereotypes particularly in areas of colorism, harsh selectivity beyond membership criteria, and petty yard beef. Some contend that these conflicts have changed the way Black Greek Letter Organizations are viewed and respected.

Black Sorority Mentorship

Mentoring among women of color is valuable and can shape the way young women develop as leaders. Davis (2009) contended that mentorships are especially critical for minority women as they need to establish networks for support. Within Black Greek Letter Sororities, the experience of mentorship between a prophyte and neophyte can be resourceful. Zellers, Howard, and Barcic (2008) contributed mentorship as a resource that decreases separation and helps socialize members within a new organization. Sorority members can benefit most from the mentorships they receive from graduate members who are removed from college life and well into their professional careers. Crawford and Smith (2005) suggested that mentorship can facilitate opportunities that open doors to circles unattainable.

The perception of many Black Sorority Graduate chapters is active members are financially capable of sustaining the lifestyle associated with membership. Realistically, beyond the collegiate experience, Black Sororities are expensive. A lot of money goes into funding programs for leadership development, political engagement, outreach activities, regional conferences, Boule, and local chapter events planned. As a result, time and the financial commitment of young women who seek mentors are often exposed to opportunities that make their experience in a Black Greek Letter Sorority advantageous.

In the relationship between the mentor and mentee, the learning objectives and experiences offer practice with the result of positive reinforcement and encouragement.

Not all women of color in higher education or within Black Sororities experience mentorship. Yet, when an opportunity for mentorship occurs, minority women are more likely to serve as mentors (Griffin & Reddick, 2011). In fact, creating culturally sensitive mentoring experiences for women of color in higher education is beneficial (Lee, 1999; Winkle-Wagner, 2010). The opportunity to develop personally and professionally will have long-term benefits and, through the sorority, can be reciprocated toward a new member needing guidance and support.

That type of mentorship is a value relationship that can develop young women of color to be exceptional leaders and propel them within their social and professional organizations (Crawford & Smith, 2005). The social and professional benefits suggested are apparent as Black Greek Letter Organization members have diverse educational and professional backgrounds. This thought process contributes to the ongoing development of members both personally and professionally. Supporters of mentorship relationships argue that “for minority professionals to be successful, their mentors must be fully engaged in a variety of developmental roles and also be aware of the challenges race can present to their protégés career development and advancement” (Wyche, 2008, p. 189).

Career Development Models for Minorities

Career development and leadership development are equally important benefits of Greek Letter Organizations. Research conducted by Cheatham (1990), Thomas and Alderfer (1989), and Wells and Jennings (1983) addressed the need for career development models specific to minority men and women. Cheatham asserted that research on career development excludes minorities and ignores “the distinct historical, sociocultural, and sociopsychological experiences of minorities” (p. 334). Furthermore, Cheatham concluded that it is critical to consider the impact that race has on determining

career paths. The Heuristic Model of African American Students' Career Development contends that there are Africentric values and Eurocentric values that can benefit minorities when used accordingly to progress in career development. Cheatham's model is viewed as uplifting minority people and conveying the message of resilience as a result of experiences shared among people of color (Cheatham, 2012).

Thomas and Alderfer (1989) focused on career development for minority people in the workplace. The researchers specifically addressed how people of color are disproportionately underrepresented in leadership roles within organizations. They concluded that Whites in White-dominated organizations held higher positions to minorities, who often held low-status jobs that were a direct reflection of the social relations between Whites and people of color (Thomas & Alderfer, 1989). This lack of opportunity would lead to more challenges for minority people to attain better positions and career mobility within the workplace. The Wells and Jennings (1983) hypothesis would support the previous findings of Thomas and Alderfer on organizational equality for minorities.

The Wells and Jennings (1983) hypothesis articulated the obstacles faced by people of color in the attainment of job mobility. The researchers argued that minorities are deprived of resources readily available to Whites creating a restriction within the organization. As a result of this, success parameters are present that benefit a small percentage of minorities ultimately creating a strain in opportunities to move toward leadership positions. Wells and Jennings contended that the model presents a false perception that people of color will experience organizational acceptance and success, although "forces are mobilized to stunt [minority] careers" (p. 41). The Wells and Jennings hypothesis creates awareness to how inequality hinders people of color from

reaching their greatest potential and success within organizations. Working to remove those barriers prepares a space for people of color to achieve personal and professional goals that will create more fulfilling life experiences.

Career and Leadership Development for Black Sororities

Membership in a Black Sorority can change the life experience of women by exposing them to leadership and career opportunities. Members of Black Sororities place emphasis on providing “the leadership and professional skills to uplift their communities” (Hernandez, 2011, p. 215). Typically, the community they influence the most is the student body. The influx of new students provides an opportunity for seasoned members to exercise leadership qualities in guiding and influencing students’ first experiences in their new environment. These interactions provide nonmembers the ability to engage and witness the perceived status of belonging to a Black Greek Letter Organization. Today’s Black Greek Letter Organizations have evolved to include more complex attributes and activities that differentiate them from one another but still demonstrate historical characteristics.

Oaks, Duckett, Suddeth, and Kennedy-Phillips (2013) found that ethnicity is critical to understanding leadership development. In fact, the authors concluded that African American students engage in leadership as a vessel for social change, whereas social change was the original catalyst for these organizations. When a sorority hosts a program for the student body, the participants are viewing them as organizers, leadership figures, and facilitators of the program. The sorority members are engaging them in a way that is informative but also aligns with a national platform or activity to bring awareness of a social need that they can report back as having achieved on the community level.

Black Sororities are expected to provide student engagement activities that target female student ranging from socials, forums, or community service events. Aside from these activities, there is very little knowledge about their leadership development possibilities. Grove et al. (2005) asserted that leadership development considers the growth of each individual who seeks leadership training, in an effort to generalize the benefits of participation. Without the guidance of colleges and universities providing strong leadership development for Black Greek Letter Sorority members, there is no way to ensure they will learn any of the necessary skills to lead beyond their undergraduate years. In addition, the lack of leadership development programs for Black Sororities creates a learning gap for women of color who wish to use their experiences as leadership reference.

Without adequate resources to engage and provide leadership education, minority women cannot take full advantage of the benefits they gain as part of the NPHC. Members of the same organizational council typically share similar leadership characteristics. Therefore, exposure to career and leadership development for Black Sororities may have a larger reach equipping minority women for leadership roles and skills specific to their needs. The question still remains: How does membership in a Black Sorority prepare minority women for leadership beyond graduation? Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) asserted that Black Greek Letter Organizations and their reinforcement of higher education can create a unified personal and professional goal for minority advancement within society.

Professional Success of Minority Women

The research of Gasman (2016) on perceptions of female career success in South Africa adds to the literature that represents professional minority women. The study

collected data from 300 women in higher education and business professionals. Six influential factors traditionally associated with success were introduced to the participants and included “demographics, career barriers, personality traits, cultural factors, external and internal support” (Gasman, 2016, p. 311). The researcher concluded that, of the 300 respondents, there was an overall high level of aspiration despite the participant’s self-perception of being successful or unsuccessful. Seventy-one percent of the respondents expressed an interest in a higher position within the organization, whereas 61% of the successful participants desired more growth. Consequently, the researcher determined that two major factors were most influential to the perceived success of professional minority women. Culture and career barriers have significant relationships on career success of women. Culture is a critical variable in this research because it demonstrates a significant impact on the experience of minority women. Gurin and Epps (1975) asserted that culture contributes to a social awareness, which has an influence on how individuals and groups understand success. These data align with prior research that indicates glass ceilings contribute to the barriers experienced by women (Beal, 2016; Johns, 2013).

Minority women continue to accomplish professional success despite overwhelming discrimination and systematic racism. Much of this is part of establishing a plan, which Wilson (2014) explained is a critical part of overcoming success for minorities and permits organizations to recognize them for their abilities and potential leadership roles. However, the overall success of minority women can be challenged if they are not able to gain recognition, or exposure to positive career outcomes (James, 2000; Parks-Yancy, 2006). Therefore, it is critical for minority women to continuing providing themselves a space that fosters growth and achievement.

Participation in a Black Sorority during the undergraduate career of a minority

woman can help to shape her outlook on the future and personal perception of success. Women in Black Sororities spend a significant amount of time together, in and outside of the academic environment. Through the development of their bond, the exchange of experiences and expectations molds their outlook on who they will become. Thomas and Alderfer (1989) argued, “The career aspirations and life chances of minority women are significantly impacted by many factors” (p. 143). Furthermore, the Black Sorority creates a direct network to professional sisters who can help minority women to aspire to their goals. Many members are able to use their knowledge and networking to assist them in achieving professional success in their career fields. It is not uncommon for sorors to look out for one another, as helping each other is a common theme of phenomenal women.

Phenomenology As a Method of Explaining Experiences

Phenomenological methodology represents the expression of experiences. These experiences are part of daily interactions that inspire self-reflection. According to Van Manen (2014), experiences can be described and named according. A significant part of this method is allowing participants to provide details about their feelings and thoughts associated with the phenomenon. The flexibility of phenomenological research and the adaptability of its methods to ever-widening arcs of inquiry is one of its greatest strengths. Phenomenology contributes to understanding lived experiences of people and through narration can uncover meanings (Plakhotnik, 2016).

Hoy (2009) suggested that, through phenomenology, “we want our interpretations of the past to be taken as true, and not as the result of a voluntaristic rewriting” (p. 97). This research study implemented descriptive phenomenology, in which the researcher must avoid personal biases and increase open-mindedness. An assumption within

descriptive phenomenology is that people have similar experiences encompassed within a phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) contended that the Greek word phenomenon means to expose or appear. Through phenomenology, the researcher seeks to expose the similar experiences of women in Black Sororities based on their daily interactions.

Phenomenology explores beyond an opinion about the experience and reveals a meaning that could have lifelong influence (Hayes, 2014; Price, Jewitt, & Brown, 2013).

Summary

Women of color within Black Greek Letter Sororities have a unique experience that reflects an exclusive membership as well as a journey through higher education and personal maturation. Research reveals the establishment of Black Greek Letter Organizations as the catalyst which provided a support system and voice to the African American community. Through the decades of fighting for equality economically and academically, Black Greek Letter Sororities identified and developed female leaders who would serve as role models and historical figures within their sororities and across various communities.

The literature review sets the platform for themes present in Black Greek Letter Sororities today. Although the research provided in this chapter demonstrates an exterior foundation of awareness, it simultaneously represents a void in prior findings related to the experiences of minority women and leadership development opportunities within Black Greek Letter Sororities. Minority women in Black Sororities made an impact that would set the stage for work perpetuated by their respective sisterhoods. Black Sororities continue to grow in popularity and status and adapt to their institutions of higher learning as well as members. Overall, Black Sororities have evolved to meet societal needs and to secure their legacies within the United States. However, the leadership emphasis within

Black Sororities has changed and millennial members lack the necessary skills to become torchbearers.

Despite research that indicates women are successful leaders and change agents within organizations, there is an overwhelming truth that women of color are excluded more from leadership opportunities than their White female counterparts. The marginalization of women of color in leadership roles is stifling and perpetuates a false message that minority women have made minimal contributions in the realm of leadership. Consequently, it is unclear how an overwhelming amount of women do not experience leadership or professional development opportunities. This disadvantage creates an obstacle in attaining leadership roles that are critical for upward mobility in various aspects of life. Therefore, the exposure to adequate leadership development programs must be provided to reduce the gap of female leaders, specifically women of color.

Leadership experience is necessary to provide women with the skill sets and training for equally competitive leadership roles in the future. Reflecting on the leadership experiences of women in Black Sororities is critical for understanding what valuable skills are learned and developed. Colleges and universities that provide leadership development to members in undergraduate chapters will contribute to the increase of minority women in leadership roles and provide real-world practices that are needed to enhance their personal and professional development in leadership capacities. Understanding the experiences of graduate members and their exposure to leadership development is significant. Women who join Black Sororities are often challenged with upholding their individual identities while simultaneously representing their organization. For many women who graduate and venture into new careers their leadership skills are

critical in assimilating into a new environment, and immediately taking action to fulfill their part. This study was designed to create a space for identifying the benefits of Black Greek Letter Sorority membership and leadership development for personal and professional success.

Research Questions

The following research questions were established to guide this applied dissertation:

1. Does the undergraduate membership experience in a Black Greek Letter Sorority cultivate self-awareness for minority women? If so, how?
2. What types of undergraduate membership experiences in a Black Greek Letter Sorority are most significant for empowering women of color?
3. Does the Black Greek Letter Sorority experience create a sense of responsibility for demonstrating positive leadership qualities? If so, how?
4. Did members of a Black Greek Letter Sorority find their undergraduate experience with leadership development to be valuable in preparation of their current careers?
5. Does membership in a Black Greek Letter Sorority play a role in the personal success of minority women professionally? If so, how?
6. What professional or personal benefits exist as a result of networking for members of a Black Greek Letter Sorority?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

A qualitative research design was utilized in this study to explore the lived experiences of Graduate members of a Black Greek Sorority. The research focused on how undergraduate membership transitions women into leadership roles after graduation, as Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) suggested that exploration of minority women and their experiences in higher education remains a critical discussion. This study granted the researcher an opportunity to hear directly from members and contribute to the literature by providing a voice to minority women who represent a part of the marginalized Greek culture that student affairs practitioners and researchers seek to understand. The researcher explored the lived experiences of graduate members who joined the Sorority at a southeast undergraduate chapter to gain insight into the personal and professional success of its members. There is scarce evidence that supports how membership in a Black Greek Letter Sorority contributes to minority female leadership development or personal and professional success. This chapter provides information about the qualitative approach, research procedures for data collection, theoretical frameworks applied, and purposeful sampling that was implemented in this study.

Qualitative Phenomenological Approach

This research study was conducted using a qualitative phenomenological approach. A major benefit of the phenomenological approach is a clear and precise account of experiences and related meanings. Historically, Black Greek Letter Sororities have a distinct culture which shapes the way its members relate to their experience. Smith (2011) asserted that Edmund Husserl, founder of phenomenology, emphasized research that focuses primarily on experiences of participants. Through phenomenology,

researchers are restricted from applying personal biases. The researcher should refrain from bringing in nongiven past knowledge. This is critical as the exploration of lived participant experiences is synthesized to communicate their shared experience.

Understanding those shared experiences is core to the phenomenon. However, opposing perspectives argue that phenomenology fails to address the social context of lived experiences. Despite those critiques, phenomenology's strength provides descriptive and interpretive meaning in regard to lived experiences (Schwandt, 2007).

Several factors impacted the variation of member experiences and this ranged from the duration of participation within the Sorority, and how those experiences are revealed within individual leadership interactions. The implementation of a phenomenological approach for this study was an appropriate design to understand the distinct social and leadership development experiences within a Black Sorority. The researcher engaged in active listening throughout the interview process and gained a wealth of knowledge about the participant experience and the leadership development from the perspective of members. The researcher ensured participants felt empowered to give authentic accounts of the experience. The researcher took detailed notes about observations made from the members' verbal and nonverbal behaviors to describe overall climate of the interviews. Consequently, the researcher described in detail the exchange of the interview to include posture, tone inflection, and nonverbal cues.

Qualitative research focuses on developing understanding through description, identifying patterns, and revealing themes. Creswell (2012) concluded that qualitative research allows the observer to directly engage in the phenomenon and collect data from individuals who share similar experiences. The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of a specific sample; therefore, qualitative methodology was a

critical method to achieving the desired research goal. This method is often used to explore the how and why of systems and human behavior that governs these behaviors. More specifically, the use of qualitative research in this study presented a rich narrative about the personal and professional success of graduate sorority members by implementing two data streams an online questionnaire (see Appendix A) and one-on-one interviews (see Appendix B).

The investigator of this study is a member of a Black Greek Letter Sorority and graduate member initiated into the southeastern undergraduate chapter. The researcher identified with the collegiate experience because of familiarity with the culture and motivations in addition to behaviors shared by participants (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenological approach opens discussion specifically geared toward experiences associated with membership in a Black Sorority in which women of color engage and interact within their collective sisterhood to reflect on their leadership development. Creswell (2012) asserted that individuals have a desire to belong and share an affiliation. This study implemented phenomenology to identify the leadership foundation of the undergraduate chapter and how leadership development through participation in this Sorority fostered professional and personal success after graduation.

The results of this study contribute to existing literature that addresses the exclusion of minority women from discussions surrounding the benefits of Greek Letter Organization membership. Additionally, this research empowered minority women to express their understanding of leadership as it pertains to their individual experience and perception of success. Furthermore, this research allowed participants to reflect on their lived experience as leaders in a Black Sorority and articulate what, if any, benefits emerged because of membership. The interpretation of the experience was looked at by

the researcher with sensitivity toward that phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

Participants

The target population of this research study involved graduate minority women initiated into an undergraduate chapter of a Black Greek Letter Sorority at a southeast university. Participants were a minimum of 21 years old, identified as minority women, and were not current members of the undergraduate chapter of the Black Greek Letter Sorority. The undergraduate chapter of the Black Greek Letter Sorority initiated a total of 247 members in over 20 years. The study implemented purposeful sampling, which is nonrandom sampling that allows a smaller sample size to produce information-rich data through insight. The undergraduate chapter name and the university where the chapter is located was not identified. The target population was accessible due to the researcher's membership in the chapter and the Black Greek Letter Sorority. Creswell (2013) argued that consideration should be used in selecting participants and sites based on their ability to produce rich information.

There were no perceived benefits for participants in this research study and no financial compensation. The participants were encouraged to be open to interpret their experiences as members in a Black Greek Letter Sorority for this study. The researcher did not determine the potential benefits to each participant. However, each participant had an opportunity to share personal experiences with others at their discretion. There may be an opportunity for this research to add to existing literature on experiences of minority women, as well as Black Greek Letter Organizations. This study allowed for new perspectives in areas of leadership development, minority female leadership, and the success of women in Black Greek Letter Sororities.

Data-Collection Tools

Data collection was completed using two qualitative streams: online questionnaire and one-on-one interviews. The researcher's first stream of data were collected via a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions delivered via an online questionnaire. The online questionnaire captured the demographic information of 58 participants, the year that participants joined the sorority, occupation, motivations for joining, and leadership experience. Creswell (2012) asserted, "The advantage of this style of questioning is that your predetermined closed-ended responses can net useful information to support theories and concepts in the literature" (p. 220). The online questionnaire guided participants through a series of closed-ended questions to gather data on the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with presented topics in the study. The use of open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate on their responses and provide more clarification than closed-ended questions permitted. The researcher analyzed both closed and open-ended responses of each online questionnaire completed. Creswell contended that, when analyzing the open-ended questions, researchers can look for overlapping themes and count a number of times themes are identified from participant responses.

The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews to gather the second stream of qualitative data. The criteria for selecting interview participants consisted of identifying members who completed the online questionnaire. Interviews permitted the researcher to extract data that reflected the participant's detailed experiences. The researcher requested that participants complete the interview using three proposed methods: face-to-face format, via telephone, or by Skype. The researcher did not audio record during data collection. These interview options provided convenience to the participants and allowed

the researcher flexibility. Creswell (2012) shared that phone interviews are convenient for participants who are geographically dispersed and unable to meet in person. The same convenience was available to participants who select to interview by Skype. In this study, interviews had the advantage of collecting information that will aid in developing related themes that can generalize the experience of minority women in this Black Sorority in the southeastern United States.

Although interviews can be time consuming and costly to a researcher, they were a significant part of the data-collection process. One-on-one interviews were great for “participants who are not hesitant to speak, who are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably” (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). The interview consisted of preapproved open-ended questions, and the researcher recorded the data using an approved data management form. These open-ended questions were intended for the use of extracting pertinent information about participant membership experiences within the sorority. The more participants were willing to share the richer the data. Creswell (2012) contended that the researcher is able to assume various roles throughout the process of data collection. The researcher determined that the data collected from participants supported understanding sorority contributions, female leadership roles, and the impact of Black Sororities on personal and professional success. The researcher accomplished this by analyzing the data management forms.

The researcher adapted questions from a 2013 study conducted by Dr. Patience Bryant entitled *The Impact of Colorism on Historically Black Fraternities and Sororities*. Bryant’s qualitative research implemented a phenomenological methodology to explain the lived experiences of male and female members of Black Greek Letter Organizations as they encountered colorism within the African American community in America. In

addition to the research questions extracted from the previous study, this study's instrument included the following questions:

1. What is your definition of leadership (Burns, 2002)?
2. Do you consider yourself a leader? Why or Why not (Scott & Brown, 2006)?
3. How has membership in your organization developed you into a leader (Mitchell, 2014)?
4. How do you think society describes minority women as leaders?
5. How do you describe minority women as leaders?
6. Do you believe that membership in a Black Greek Letter Sorority contributed to your personal success (Lumina Foundation, 2015)?

Procedures

An extensive review of the literature using keywords Black Greek Letter Sororities, career success, leadership, experiences, personal success, and women of color were examined to design this research study. Creswell (2012) contended, "You conduct a literature review to document how your study adds to the existing literature" (p. 80). Researching literature set the stage for understanding significant contributions made that impacted racial uplift and longitudinal community advances in politics, civil rights, education, art, and various other fields. By reviewing previous literature, the researcher worked to identify gaps that suggest further areas of research within minority Greek life. The researcher contacted the Sorority's Headquarters to determine if the verbiage for members was accurate. Dissecting the recommendations from the literature in addition to reviewing the sorority's national website was effective and supported the need for a study in Black Sorority leadership experiences.

The Institutional Review Board process took place at Nova Southeastern

University and was approved on June 26, 2016. The Institutional Review Board is a composition of faculty who work to ensure the protection of participants (Creswell, 2012). Through investigation of the southeast university's Institutional Review Board, it was concluded that no additional Institutional Review Board permissions were needed for graduate participants. The dissertation committee, in addition to the Institutional Review Board Committee of Nova Southeastern University, approved the proposal for this study. The researcher began recruitment immediately following the approval of the study. This study did not utilize a research site or participants at a research site.

The graduate members were contacted through social media and communication applications. There were no required permissions or guidelines for posting correspondence to the chapter's graduate members. The recruitment process was a duration of 2 weeks to maximize the length of time participants could express interest in the proposed study. The researcher provided an electronic participation letter for the online questionnaire that outlined the consent process and how to contact the primary investigator to participate in the interview. The purpose of the online questionnaire was to capture data from a large group of members and to have a general understanding of shared experience as an undergraduate in the Black Sorority.

The online questionnaire was available for 7 days and consisted of 12 questions. The initial four questions collected demographic information and indicated sorority involvement. Questions 5 through 8 addressed the participant's previous knowledge of Black Greek Letter Organizations and pursuing membership in the sorority. Questions 9 and 10 gained insight into the participant's perception of leadership as an undergraduate. Questions 11 and 12 addressed personal leadership and the success of members in Black Greek Letter Sororities. All respondents received a message of gratitude regarding their

participation concluding the questionnaire.

Once the online questionnaire concluded, the researcher identified five respondents to interview from the completed online questionnaires. The criteria for selecting eligible participants was based on the elaboration of questionnaire answers, length of membership in the sorority, professional career as indicated in the questionnaire, and leadership experience. The purpose of this criteria was to diversify participants and collect data from a range of members. In addition, two alternate participants were selected for the study and were selected for interviews. Concluding the verification of participant criteria, the researcher emailed electronic correspondence to participants with attached consent form.

The consent form was required to collect additional data from participants during the interview process. The researcher contacted participants by telephone to explain the consent form and consent process and reviewed it again prior to each interview. The researcher shared with participant's information about who might see this research so that participants can make an informed decision about their involvement in the study. The participants reviewed the consent form that outlined confidentiality, participant role, associated risks, and storing and discarding of data. The researcher received a printed and signed consent form prior to the interview. Throughout the analyzation of the data, the researcher contacted participants regarding clarification of data received during the interview process.

A pseudonym was assigned to each participant interviewed using a created name bank of 15 names. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym that had a different first letter and was not an abbreviation of the participant's given name. The interview participants and Black Sorority were referred to by pseudonyms for the protection of

identities. According to Creswell (2012), participant identities should remain confidential. The interviews consisted of five minority women who met the eligibility requirements to participate in the study. This sample size was selected because phenomenological studies can have a minimum of six participants (Creswell, 2012; Green & Thorogood, 2009; Morse, 1995).

As literature suggests, there are empirical rules associated with determining sample size for qualitative research studies. The researcher of this study concluded that five participants would be a sufficient sample size. Mason (2010) conducted research on sample size and saturation in doctoral studies using qualitative interviews and found that a significant number of participants used sample sizes with multiples of 10. Consequently, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) asserted that saturation “provides little practical guidance for estimating sample sizes for robust research prior to data collection” (p. 59).

Participants were informed via writing by the researcher the available methods for conducting interviews. The researcher requested that participants determine the desired method of the interview within 7 days and return the signed consent form by email to the researcher. The researcher used both alternates because members did not confirm their participation in the allotted time frame. Participants were provided interview confirmations in advance. All interviews were conducted at the convenience of the participants. The interviews were completed over the course of 2 weeks based on the availability and willingness of participants to share their experiences.

The length of the interviews lasted approximately 2 hours consisting of six preapproved questions. During the interview, notes were taken on the interview protocol, which had the same probing questions to clarify or expand on ideas (Creswell, 2012).

Each interview protocol had the participant's pseudonym listed. Throughout the interview, notes about the participant's behavior, appearance, and physical gestures were made. Preto (2011) argued, "The absence of mutual comprehension could cause an impoverishment of the narration" (p. 74). Five one-on-one identical interviews were conducted in a clear and concise manner using phrases and terms that were identified within the Black Sorority culture. The researcher observed that, during the face-to-face interviews with Nichole and Cayden, they were fashionable, polished, and fluent. The third face-to-face interview and two Skype interviews were more relaxed in attire, informal, and straightforward. Prior to the interviews, the researcher built rapport with the participants and then discussed the interview protocol.

According to Creswell (2012), the role of the researcher is not to make predictions; rather, the researcher should be "interested in whether the findings of a study support or modify existing ideas and practices advanced in the literature" (p. 81). The participants responded to six open-ended interview questions about their involvement and leadership experiences as undergraduate members of the sorority. These questions addressed how the Black Sorority contributed to their present-day success. In Question 1, participants defined the word leadership. For Questions 2 and 3, the participants identified leadership qualities as well as described views of minority women in leadership. Question 4 incorporated probing questions for the participant to elaborate on personal leadership experiences within the Black Sorority. Question 5 inquired about membership benefits in the Black Sorority. Lastly, Question 6 collected perspectives about the correlation between membership and personal success.

Captured data were recorded on the interview form, and keywords were noted to assist in recollection of participant thoughts and ideas for analysis. The interview

questions were presented in sequential order to the participants. The participants were given adequate time to contemplate the questions and form responses. Significant nonverbal observations were made as participants answered questions. Broaders and Goldin-Meadow (2010) contended that gestures are pervasive in communication. The researchers asserted, “Speakers and listeners are typically not conscious of gestures” (Broaders & Goldin-Meadow, 2010, p. 624). However, the gestures provided clues to participant feelings and ideas.

The researcher used probing questions where appropriate to extract further explanation of experiences. Throughout the interview, the researcher summarized the responses of participants to assess if the data accurately reflected the member’s experience. The researcher implemented member checking by reviewing data collected with participants to determine if the researcher accurately communicated the participant’s perspective. The researcher offered an opportunity for participants to contribute additional information or confirm collected data. The members were very enthusiastic about their participation in the study and the research and wanted a follow-up with the study results.

The data obtained in this research study is stored in an electronic folder on the researcher’s personal laptop computer. All access to the data is restricted to the researcher on a password-protected laptop. To ensure anonymity, the files were placed in a folder without identifiers to the research study. The stored information was not easily connected to respondents a result of data cleaning. All participants were assigned a pseudonym for the study, but the researcher did not reveal the pseudonym to the participant. At the conclusion of 3 years, the electronic folder containing the participant interview protocol, participant consent forms, and related data forms will be permanently deleted from the

personal laptop using a commercial software.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with the online questionnaire at the conclusion of 7 days and continued throughout the interview process, member checking, and coding of the data. The researcher concluding each interview reflected thoroughly about the experience, the interpretation of the participant experience as a member, as well as the personal reflections of the interaction. The researcher conducted hand analysis of the collected data to create readily accessible files. The data underwent a preliminary exploratory analysis which familiarized the researcher with the information. A primary reason for coding the data were to create a format that would provide a clear understanding of the information. The researcher began the coding process that identified patterns and themes visible across the data for the online questionnaire and participant interviews.

Coding is where the selection of specific data will occur that addresses the themes outlined in the data (Creswell, 2012). Initially, the investigator implemented open coding which considered phrases, descriptions, and words found from the participant interviews that reflected experiences of representation, leadership, and membership within the Sorority. The investigator then identified first codes found in the participant interview transcript. These words included “sisterhood,” “empowering,” “leadership or leader,” “minority women,” “confidence.” Second, the investigator considered phrases that expressed the need for women of color to “continuously prove themselves” or “experienced forms of disrespect.”

The codes were then used to find meanings and similarities throughout the data. The researcher grouped together emerging themes that outlined specific experiences shared by participants. Descriptions were written in details to thoroughly capture the

essence of the experience. The researcher implemented data-management grids for the online questionnaire and interviews. The data grids helped the researcher to analyze the responses by providing categories for emerging themes, similarities, and differences. The researcher analyzed interviews, online questionnaires, and comparison of questionnaires and interviews using the data grids.

To represent findings, the researcher constructed a demographic table that was used to describe information about each participant. The data were reported as a narrative discussion “to summarize, in detail, the findings from their data analysis” (Creswell, 2012, p. 255). Within the narrative, the researcher inserted direct quotes from the interview and wrote vividly. Lastly, the interpretation of the phenomenon was discussed. The researcher used the discussion to summarize findings of the study and to offer a reflective moment for the researcher, as well as include comparisons from previous research. Lastly, the researcher shared limitations associated with the proposed study and offered suggestions for future research.

Ethical Considerations

One of the most important ethical considerations of this study was maintaining the integrity of the Black Greek Letter Sorority, ensuring the protection of participants, and accurately articulating the experiences of minority women. Creswell (2012) asserted, “Ethical issues in qualitative research can be described as occurring prior to conducting the study, at the beginning of the study, during data collection, in data analysis, in reporting the data, and in publishing a study” (p. 57). First and foremost, the founders of this Black Sorority deserve credit for the work they did to establish a sisterhood and carve out a space for women of color. To be respectful of their life’s work and accomplishments in cultivating this organization was a primary concern. Oates and

Dalmau (2013) asserted that ethics is awareness of universal principles that determine right from wrong. Black Greek Letter Organizations have worked diligently to preserve their histories and to contribute to an improved quality of life for people of color.

Although the Black Sorority was given a pseudonym, the essence of the organization was embodied through each participant. This research did not include the first Greek letter of the organization's name or any affiliated nicknames.

Second, creating a safe space for members to share their experience in an authentic way required a significant amount of vulnerability. Members of Black Greek Letter Organizations are held to standards that fulfill their social and service duties, accurately sharing the member experience contributes to this member responsibility. This Black Sorority's graduate members are actively engaged in the community and professionally. Therefore, actively listening and accuracy was imperative to give individual insight into the sorority experience. According to Jäckel, Roberts, and Lynn (2006) personal interviews can result in socially desirable answers rather than actual opinions. Participants had no problem answering questions and offered elaboration without being probed when they felt passionate about a subject. There were no issues of oversharing, and the participants were extremely candid about their experiences both within the Black Sorority and professionally.

Trustworthiness

The researcher was knowledgeable about the local and national work of the organization. The interview was conducted in a clear and concise manner and each interview was conducted using the interview protocol. The researcher established rapport with each participant which was instrumental not only in creating a comfortable environment but reinforcing the role of the researcher. necessary to remove any barriers

or feeling of intrusiveness. Sometimes, discussion of Black Greek Letter membership can cause tension, and the researcher was respectful to not include information the participants shared off the record relating to their experiences.

Qualitative researchers (Krefting, 1991; Morrow, 2005) conclude that trustworthiness represents the steps taken by the researcher to ensure the participant experience is authentically recorded. The researcher addressed four components of trustworthiness in this research study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Krefting, 1991). The researcher established credibility with the participants by demonstrating adequate knowledge of the sorority and by implementing member checking. Participants determined if the researcher accurately communicated their experience based on the interview. The researcher then demonstrated transferability through use of rich descriptions during the data analysis process through review of field journals, interview protocol, and data management grids. Dependability of the research study identified and explained changes that occurred throughout the study. The researcher worked through confirmability by ongoing checking of the data, and the researcher addressed biases found within the research study.

Potential Research Bias

The most prominent bias present in the study involved the researcher's affiliation with the undergraduate chapter and Black Greek Letter Sorority. To overcome potential biases, the researcher refrained from expressing personal opinions or reflecting personal experiences associated with undergraduate membership in the sorority. The researcher was cautious to keep the participant focused on related topics within the interview. Participants were open to express themselves or their perspectives authentically. To further reduce the potential for research bias, the investigator requested that participants

review the data for accuracy and representativeness (Creswell, 2012). Member checking by the researcher ensured the integrity of the information collected. The researcher established a boundary with the participants and did not participate in Sorority activities or events during the study. Creswell (2012) discussed how “prolonged interaction with participants [may cause the researcher] to adopt their beliefs and even become an advocate for their ideas” (p. 211).

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This research study emphasized the leadership experiences of minority women within a Black Greek Letter Sorority. This study provided further research on the dynamics of the undergraduate experience and leadership development within a Black Greek Letter Organization. This study further investigated the implication of professional and personal success affiliated with membership in a Black Sorority. Minority women who joined a Black Greek Letter Sorority as undergraduate members were the subject of this research study. A qualitative phenomenological methodology was used in the two-stream data-collection process, which included an open-ended online questionnaire and one-on-one interviews.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how membership in a Black Greek Letter Sorority impacts the leadership experiences of graduate sorority members and their personal and professional success after graduation. Additionally, this research study sought to add to literature about Black Greek Letter Organizations and to specifically create a space for minority women to share their leadership experiences as members of a historical organization. This chapter will present views that address the research questions of the study.

The researcher recruited 59 members who joined at the undergraduate chapter of the Black Sorority. A total of 58 members met the research requirements and successfully completed the online questionnaire. Of the 58 online respondents, five members were interviewed for this study. The qualitative data collected incorporated two critical processes: an online questionnaire that contained both closed and open-ended questions and one-on-one interviews. The researcher reviewed the data streams to identify themes

and patterns that contributed to the responses in the study. Although the data presented in this study provided insight into six unique undergraduate chapter experiences, the information does not represent the leadership experiences of all minority women within this chapter of the Black Greek Letter Sorority. Furthermore, the information does not represent leadership experiences of the collective membership of the sorority, nor is it generalizable to all the NPHC sororities. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that this research study represents the significant experiences of the participants who contributed.

In the southeastern United States, there are 52 undergraduate chapters located at public and private 4-year institutions. The undergraduate chapter selected for this research study is located at a public university in the southeastern United States. The chapter was chartered in the 1990s and has a total of 247 members as of Spring 2016. The online questionnaire was completed by 58 graduate members of the chapter, with one respondent who started but did not complete the online questionnaire. The researcher asked members to identify the year they were initiated into the sorority. This chapter had a total of 22 groups of women initiated as members, of which 16 groups of initiates were represented in this data collection ranging from 1990 to 2016.

Demographic Information

Online questionnaire participants. Fifty-eight members completed the online questionnaire. The breakdown of online questionnaire participants included seven groups initiated in a fall semester and nine groups initiated in a spring semester over the span of the chapter's existence. Appendix C presents the 58 participants and the collected demographic information. The participants identified their membership status in the sorority, in which 54% of respondents were active graduate members in the Black Sorority, and 46% were not active at the time of the research study. Active membership

included general membership or membership in a graduate chapter. The occupations of the members varied with a total of 55 responses. Gamson, Louison, and Barnes (2008) stated, “The largest share of members is employed in the field of education, followed by law, business, medicine, and social service professions” (p. 191). Four members did not report their occupation. Of the responses, approximately 56% of members were educators, legal, or health professionals. However, 44% of respondents reported occupations that ranged from business, accounting or finance, human resources, government, human services, law enforcement, and hospitality-related fields.

Interview participants. Five one-on-one interviews provided the second data stream for this research study. The selection criteria included the length of membership in the sorority, leadership experience, and professional career. Each participant responded to six open-ended questions about their individual experience with leadership development as a member of a Black Greek Letter Sorority. All participants joined the same Black Sorority while enrolled as undergraduates at the southeast university. All participants had a bachelor’s degree and were 21 years of age or older. The interview participants were recruited through use of GroupMe communication application and the chapter’s private Facebook group. Members contacted the researcher to participate in the online questionnaire and interview process. Interviews were conducted in a one-on-one format or via Skype platform. Participants were provided individual sessions to discuss the consent form. To maintain the confidentiality of participants, a pseudonym was assigned from a name bank and anonymity was emphasized. The researcher selected to provide a brief introduction of each participant.

Zora. Zora is a first-generation university graduate. She attended the southeast university and joined the Black Sorority in her junior year. She earned a bachelor’s and a

master's degree. Zora resides in the northeastern United States where she works in the marketing and public relations field. Zora served in several leadership capacities as an undergraduate, including secretary, and ran for the position of Undergraduate Member at Large. Professionally, she experienced several leadership roles in her career. Zora explained that critical components in leadership are relationships and the ability to work well with others.

Cayden. Cayden earned her bachelor's degree from the southeastern university and joined the sorority her senior year. Cayden did not participate in a leadership role as an undergraduate as she graduated soon after becoming a member. She is employed at an insurance company in the southeastern United States and has held professional leadership positions. As a leader, Cayden expressed for her to be an effective leader sometimes it required stepping back and fully assessing a situation to better understand how she can articulate what she wants of others.

Nichole. Nichole is a charter member of the undergraduate chapter at the southeastern university where she earned her bachelor's degree. During her time as an undergraduate member, the chartering sisters were hands on in the development of the chapter, thrusting them into several leadership positions. Nichole lives in the southeastern United States and is employed in a leadership role at an insurance company. She identified that there are few minority women in leadership capacities where she works. Nichole believes that leadership encompasses many elements and personal change is a key to successful leadership.

Bailey. Bailey earned a double bachelor's degree from the southeastern university. After graduation, she pursued a master's degree. She works at a nonprofit organization in the southeastern United States and has held leadership positions at the

organization where she has been employed for 10 years. Bailey indicated she enjoys teaching leadership development to youth. As a leader, she embraced the ability to be self-confident in her decision-making abilities, which was learned throughout her undergraduate experience.

Olivia. Olivia attended the southeastern university and earned a bachelor's degree. Olivia has two master's degrees and is pursuing a terminal degree. An educator by profession, she lives in the northeastern United States and worked abroad at the time of the research study. She joined the sorority during her sophomore year and held the chapter office of Historian. Olivia reflected that one of her challenges as a leader was to be less hands on when delegating tasks to others and give them an opportunity to learn.

Findings for Research Question 1

Does the undergraduate membership experience in a Black Greek Letter Sorority cultivate self-awareness for minority women? If so, how? Two questions from the online questionnaire provided data for this research question. These questions asked the extent of agreement or disagreement with Statement 7 (In joining the sorority, I wanted acceptance or tolerance) and the extent of agreement or disagreement with Statement 8 (I felt like I fit the mold of the sorority). Both interview and online questionnaire participants demonstrated a collective self-awareness prior to joining the Black Greek Letter Sorority but felt that membership did help to provide new platforms to develop confidence, exposure, and form bonds. Interview participants indicated they felt a connection to women through the undergraduate experience who shared similarities and offered a support system of minority women in the sorority. This was important to the members as they contemplated how negative stereotypes and the social views of minority women impacted them personally and professionally.

The findings from this research suggest that some minority women seek membership having a strong sense of self-awareness while others develop self-awareness after joining the Black Sorority. This is especially critical as young adult women understand challenges which shape their perspective of the world around them. This outcome was supported by data from the online questionnaire, which revealed that self-awareness was a result of family and friend interactions, knowledge of the Black Sorority, and a personal desire to be a leader. The relationship between self-awareness was not only as a result of membership in the sorority but daily life as a woman of color sharing similar experiences. The concept of self-awareness can further be described by the armoring process. According to Bell and Nkomo (1998), minority girls benefit from armoring and supports a sense of self-awareness and beauty to combat the degradation of minority women in society. The mere existence of Black Greek Letter Sororities represents the practice of armoring for women of color back to the 1900s. Recognizing how the founders of Black Sororities were challenged socially with racial macroaggressions makes this concept both real and relevant to women of color today.

In Black Sororities, undergraduate members are exposed to women who may share similar life experiences, as well as backgrounds fostering a sentiment of support and belonging. Therefore, membership in a Black Sorority for many women is an opportunity to not just celebrate individual success but to engage with like-minded women pursuing their dreams and aspirations together. Many undergraduate women viewed the accomplishment of joining a Black Sorority as a part of that self-awareness whereas others did not. Twenty-eight percent of questionnaire respondents disagreed that acceptance and tolerance was a factor in joining the Black Sorority. One respondent stated, "I had a pretty healthy self-esteem so I didn't need validation, but I was an only

child for a long time so I wanted to be a part of a larger group of women. Another participant indicated, “I truly wanted to just be a Pearl. I wasn’t looking for acceptance from anyone. I didn’t look at the Sorority to give me more importance as it relates to others perspective of me.”

Approximately 26% of respondents indicated they joined the sorority for acceptance or tolerance. For those who joined for acceptance, there was a need to find a space of inclusivity and support. This support was often in lieu of small family structures, and the experience of sisterhood and lifelong connections. The recollections of Bailey and Cayden of their undergraduate experience spoke to the self-confidence gained after becoming a Pearl. Bailey explained that, prior to joining, she was shy and insecure. However, the sorority provided a space for her to become more confident and see herself differently. Cayden pointed out that the belief that, when we help each other to aspire and obtain goals, we are encouraging and supporting our sisters.

To further address self-awareness, it is important to understand the effects of stereotyping women of color. Holder, Jackson, and Ponterotto (2015) contended that stereotypes “create a sense of invisibility” (p. 165). A significant challenge for minority women is overcoming social stereotypes which can have long-term effects and disadvantages. Historically, stereotyping has impacted minorities and their access to resources which continues to be common practice into the 21st century. Ghavami and Peplau (2012) found that women of color are often stereotyped by superficial aesthetics, assumed behaviors such as aggression and promiscuity, and are seldom described as positively as their White female counterparts. Thus, women of color not only have to overcome damaging stereotypes individually but also as a unified group.

Black Sororities are commonly associated with stereotypes that perpetuate

colorism and often unfairly identify the women who join. Consequently, Black Greek Letter Sororities have developed reputations for not only adhering to stereotypes but perpetuating them in their membership. Additionally, these stereotypes can suggest that each organization has a specific type of mold, and all members are the same. However, the use of stereotypes cannot accurately define the diversity of women within Black Greek Letter Sororities or the contributions of these organizations. Therefore, it would seem that stereotypes and fitting the mold of a Sorority would be counterproductive to women of color who seek to join.

The online questionnaire addressed the need to Fit the mold of the Black Sorority. When asked if the respondents initially felt they fit the mold of the Sorority, the answers varied. Thirty-four percent of respondents agreed they did fit the mold of the Sorority. Twelve percent felt they did not fit the mold. Yet, Collins (2000) contended that women of color experience self-negotiation based on their own self-awareness and how others view them. As a result, minority women may find it challenging not only to be true to oneself but to also fit in. Fitting the mold of the sorority was largely associated with physical aesthetics such as long hair or skin complexion with few mentions of leadership as the sorority's mold.

Questionnaire respondents were very vocal in expressing their opinions about the Sorority's mold as it pertained to their membership. One participant stated, "I didn't know if I fit the old school typecast back in 1994, but again I didn't need validation and was going to fit the mold one way or the other. Another reported the following:

I did not fit the mold of what the Sorority as a whole is known for. I was brown complexion with a short haircut and not brighter with long hair. My demeanor was more reserved but not bougie or stuck up.

One participant stated, “At first I did [fit the mold], but then early on I realized that I was a bit different than everyone and wanted to follow my own rules. Another indicated, “My Sorority has a reputation for having members who were very ladylike and girly and that wasn’t me at all. I don’t think I fit the mold of the stereotypical member.” Despite the fact that not all participants felt that they fit the stereotypes of the sorority, it did not stop them from seeking membership. These data brought forth an interesting perspective about self-awareness and also shed light on how Black Sororities can have both positive and negative effects on the way women of color view themselves.

Findings for Research Question 2

What types of undergraduate membership experiences in a Black Greek Letter Sorority are most significant for empowering women of color? The online questionnaire asked the following: Why did you decide to join a Black Greek Letter Sorority? The participants selected a maximum of three responses. The data revealed three major findings. First, the Black Sorority experience represented a supportive space and an opportunity for friendships. Second, members felt it was critical to give back through acts of community service. Third, the Black Sorority provided a network of like-minded women.

Of the respondents, 85% indicated that friendship or support was the reason for joining. These data suggest that minority women join Black Sororities primarily for the sisterhood. The researcher observed in all five interview participants a strong connection to the friendship and support they gained as a result of joining the Black Sorority. Long (2012) asserted that Greek Letter Organizations “provide an intimate community within the larger campus context and by providing opportunities for members to meet new people, establish close relationships, empathize with others, and resolve interpersonal

conflicts respectively” (p. 23).

The participants expressed that sorority sisters offered continuous encouragement and support both academically and professionally within the sorority from the undergraduate experience to graduate membership. The desire for friendship and support was consistent throughout the responses. Participants shared information about how they were empowered by this support was reiterated by Nichole and Cayden. Nichole felt that the sorority gave her three lifelong sorors who were in her life prior to joining, but it was the sorority experience that solidified their real friendship. Cayden further elaborated on the sisterhood by sharing that sisters are there through all situations. They become your confidant and women you can depend on when you do not have anyone else.

The second highest response was community service at 64%. Community service is embedded in the Black Sorority. Serow and Dreyden (1990) conducted a multi-institutional study on the service involvement of students at southeastern institutions. The study concluded that Sorority membership and academic performance was positively impacted by participation in community service. Consequently, Black Sororities historically have played a proactive role in addressing the needs of minority communities and serving as advocates on issues that impacted them. Hernandez and Arnold (2012) asserted, “Acceptance into a Black Sorority implied that one’s college education would be used for service to others” (p. 663). Bailey noted that, through the sorority, the act of serving all was important and also categorized them as leaders.

Service remains at the core of the Black Sorority and a significant part of why they continue to thrive today. Research conducted by Long (2012) supports community service as a significant undergraduate experience and concluded that 51% of sorority members participate in community service. Community service for the undergraduate

chapter of the Black Sorority included educational programs as well as community outreach both stemming from the sorority's platforms. Black Sororities have a vested interest in developing the community around them and providing a venue for volunteerism (Shelton, 2008), which is crucial for leadership. The concept of community service was more prominent in the online questionnaire than the participant interviews.

Networking represented 55% of why members joined the Black Sorority. Participants shared that the sorority offered access to college-educated minority women through networking. Networking was often categorized as academic or employment opportunities and the ability to obtain personal resources. Online questionnaire and interview participants expressed that access and visibility of graduate members allowed the undergraduate members to not only reach out for assistance in securing academic opportunities but also in seeking employment. Online questionnaire respondents identified how membership in the Sorority bridged several gaps socially and professionally.

Zora discussed networking during relocation to new cities as a way to meet new sorors who could help her navigate unfamiliar territory. Her membership in the sorority helped her to feel less alone and made her transitions easier through networking. The belief that networking was valuable to members was also prevalent in questionnaire responses. One participant stated, "Membership in a Black Sorority is a form of networking." Another reported, "Networking often helps build success; therefore, I believe that being Greek helps with networking. I also believe being successful leads to becoming Greek through a graduate chapter."

Findings for Research Question 3

Does the Black Greek Letter Sorority experience create a sense of responsibility

for demonstrating positive leadership qualities? If so, how? The following three questions provided data for this research question:

1. What did you know about historically Black Greek Letter Organizations before you joined in college?"

2. The questionnaire requested the extent of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: During my undergraduate experience, members of the sorority were recognized as leaders on campus.

3. The questionnaire requested the extent of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: During my time as an undergraduate member, the sorority was viewed positively by others.

Sixty percent of online questionnaire respondents strongly agreed that the Black Sorority was recognized as being campus leaders. These data were supported by early research conducted by Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998), which concluded that, based on involvement. "it is logical to expect that Greek-letter organizations provide their members with greater opportunities to practice these skills and subsequently develop a higher level of leadership ability" (p. 103). As a charter member, Nichole articulated that she enjoyed being a person who could develop new ideas which helped her to learn accountability. Beyond that, learning accountability was part of decision making and realizing how to overcome challenges based on decisions which was critical in Nichole's professional career. Additionally, 55% of respondents agreed that the sorority was viewed positively by others. Online questionnaire responses indicated that this undergraduate chapter held student leadership positions, such as President, Miss Southeast university, President of Black Student Union, cheerleader, founding President and Second Vice President of the National Council of Negro Women southeast university

chapter, NPHC, and more.

Fourteen questionnaire responses indicated that exposure to Black Greek Letter Organizations through family members, mentors, and even media prior to joining influenced their decision to seek membership. They also considered family and mentors to demonstrate positive leadership skills. The responses suggested that members considered themselves “high achievers and leaders on campus and in the community.” For the respondents who discussed prior knowledge of the Black Sorority, they held the perspective that the Black Sorority embodied positive leadership. Therefore, any ambition of joining the Black Sorority signified a shared understanding that members should exhibit the characteristics already affirmed by the sorority.

Sixteen respondents knew very little or nothing about Black Sororities prior to joining. Several members indicated that their desire to seek membership was after entering college and “interacting with members of the sorority” or “through participation in non-Greek organizations.” These data suggest that members who were not knowledgeable about Black Sororities formed their perspectives on leadership and the organizations as a result of involvement with its undergraduate members. Furthermore, they perceived a prerequisite for joining or maintaining membership in the Black Sorority as demonstrating positive leadership skills.

Not only did these accomplishments bring a positive light to minority women, but it simultaneously created a platform for the undergraduate members to be viewed as role models, and solidified the prestige of the Black Sorority at the southeast university. Consequently, if prospective members were seeking membership into the Sorority, they understood what types of leadership qualities the undergraduate chapter wanted as a reflection of its current members. These leadership roles were only a few examples of

how the undergraduate chapter demonstrated positive leadership qualities on their campus.

Findings for Research Question 4

Did members of a Black Greek Letter Sorority find their undergraduate experience with leadership development to be valuable in preparation for their current careers? The following two questions provided data for this research question:

1. Why did you decide to join a Black Greek Letter Sorority?
2. The extent of agreement or disagreement with the following question: Do you consider yourself a leader?

Participants of the online questionnaire listed leadership and career development as reasons for wanting to join a Black Greek Letter Sorority. Research has indicated that higher education should be a place where students experience leadership development. Leadership development had a response rate of 49% from the online questionnaire. Leadership development was best defined through the perspective of the interview participants. All of the interview participants described some level of leadership development as a part of joining the Black Sorority. Nichole indicated a significant amount of her leadership development was through the chapter chartering process. She recalled as undergraduates their task of creating a foundation.

Although they had access to the graduate sponsoring chapter, they knew they were setting the precedence for the undergraduate chapter. Zora recalled her leadership development when she ran for Undergraduate Member at Large, an opportunity that would have catapulted her into a leadership role in the Sorority. Ibarra, Carter, and Silva (2010) argued that leadership development assists women in advancement toward leadership mobility. Through similar first experiences as undergraduate members, women

understood the importance of leadership development and the impact it had not only on them but future members.

Professional development had a response rate of 36% from the online questionnaire. All of the interview participants related their current professional development to their undergraduate experience. They sighted activities such as chairing events, public speaking, collaborating with members and nonmembers, as well as the operational aspect of participating in the undergraduate chapter. There was no specific discussion of sorority-related professional development opportunities offered as undergraduate members. However, this Black Sorority does have an annual undergraduate program where members attend for the purpose of learning new skills to take back to their respective chapters. The skills and abilities fostered through the undergraduate experience contributed to the way the women approached their own careers. Bailey demonstrated significant growth in professional development as it related to joining the Black Sorority. She explained overcoming her fears of disappointing others or overextending herself beyond her limitations. For Bailey, this was a concern personally and professionally, and the sorority taught her to exhibit more self-care and restraint. Additionally, her experiences taught her the value of taking initiative rather than waiting on others and doing extra work to improve her skills professionally.

Despite both online questionnaire and interview participants citing leadership and career development as reasons for joining, there was no evidence that members experienced development outside of participation in the undergraduate chapter. The results affirm the conclusion made by Long (2012) that Greek Letter Organizations are “not more effective in developing the management and career skills, given that the organizations promote career preparation as a benefit of membership” (p. 24). It was

clear that members of the Black Sorority exhibited high levels of involvement as undergraduates; however, no discussion of university-related leadership or career development opportunities were mentioned by any of the 58 participants.

Findings for Research Question 5

Does membership in a Black Greek Letter Sorority play a role in the personal success of minority women professionally? If so, how? The online questionnaire asked the extent of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: Black Greek Letter Sorority members experience more professional or personal success than nonmembers. The online questionnaire responses varied significantly, and approximately 28% of the respondents were undecided if Black Sorority membership was a factor in the professional and personal success of minority women. However, 26% felt Greek membership was a factor in success, and 16% did not. Overwhelmingly, the interview participants felt that being members of the Black Greek Letter Sorority did not contribute to their individual definitions of personal or professional success. One participant stated, “Members are not more or less professional than nonmembers, but I believe certain skills and values become ingrained in us that assist in making us more professional.”

Similar to the questionnaire responses, the interview participants agreed that membership did not elevate them above nonmembers and that they experienced success as a result of their contributions to their careers and lives. The interview participants were grateful for the relationships and opportunities fostered as a result of membership, but they saw themselves as individuals first and members second. There was no sense of entitlement as a result of membership but a collective appreciation for the undergraduate and graduate experiences that contributed to their work ethics. Nichole felt that benefit of membership was helping other sorors achieve their professional goals.

Olivia explained that, despite her independence, membership in the sorority was impactful and encouraged her to seek graduate membership when the time was right. However, professionally, Olivia cited that she had not received any employment opportunities as a result of membership in the Black Sorority. Cayden expressed that her happiness comes from God first as opposed to the sorority. She emphasized that the sorority did contribute to her success, but it was not the primary reason why she feels successful as an individual. Lastly, Zora felt it was fair to recognize the positive contributions that the Sorority had on her life despite issues of the organization. The data from both the online questionnaire and interview participants revealed that Greek membership had several benefits but had no significant impact on the personal or professional success of minority women.

Findings for Research Question 6

What professional or personal benefits exist as a result of networking for members of a Black Greek Letter Sorority? A common theme among the interview participants was the ability to receive mentorship from graduate sorors, which was a direct result of sorority networking. They shared the critical role mentorship played in shaping their understanding of the organization as well as providing accessible minority female role-models. Research conducted by Levinson (1978) indicated “a mentor is one of the most significant experiences in young adulthood, mentors play an essential role in the development of protégés self-esteem and work identity” (p. 113).

Interview participants articulated the role of graduate sorors as mentors that demonstrated positive leadership roles for them. The interview participants discussed their different experiences and interactions with their mentors. Zora recalled her experience with mentorship while in the undergraduate chapter. Zora explained that she

had a soror who was assigned her mentor from the graduate chapter. She observed that others had mentors who were not active and engaged but her mentor was a den mother. Her mentor invited her over for dinner and encouraged her when she decided to run for Undergraduate Member at Large helping her with preparation.

As undergraduate members become graduate members, they inherit the mentor role and become the leading example for undergraduate sisters trying to find their place in the sorority. Graduate members may feel responsible for nurturing and developing the undergraduates so that they not only learn from their missteps but can help the undergraduate chapter continue to thrive. The interpersonal and mentorship relationship is critical for both undergraduate and graduate sorority sisters. It connects them together as a vine and allows them to continue developing as leaders and recognizing the potential of one another. Bailey hoped younger sorors knew she was available to them; despite not being able to be there for everyone, she considered her role as an older soror her duty. This sense of duty is explained through the belief of paying it forward within the sisterhood.

Cayden felt similarly that mentorship is what creates better leaders by developing the individual and investing in someone else. She noted that mentorship helped her to understand her strengths and to gather knowledge from someone with experience who could help her. Sometimes this mentorship was less formal and really just about giving sound advice. The informal mentoring relationship often found within Black Greek Letter Sororities is equally significant in fostering sisterhood. Despite the fact that the informal mentorship relationships are not managed, structured, or formally recognized by the organization, these relationships are genuine and reiterate the support and friendship of the sorority.

Research has indicated that mentoring provides career benefits, and the mentorship relationship between a graduate and undergraduate member can prepare her for the future. For minority women, mentorship can help provide skills that assist in reducing the disparities faced in professional settings. Ramaswami, Dreher, Bretz, and Wiethoff (2010) contended that mentorship can have a positive impact on career outcomes. Mentors can provide insight into organizational culture, provide opportunities for exposure, and enhance the mentees sense of self-confidence. Lillis (2012) and Pyne, Scott, O'Brien, Stevenson, and Musah (2014) asserted that the presence of mentorship within an organization helps to build longevity and this is applicable both to the organization and overall professionalism. The findings in this study support benefits associated with networking specifically resulting in mentorship within the Black Sorority.

Summary

Online questionnaire and interview participants expressed a wide range of self-awareness, which addressed several issues such as identifying as minority women, belonging to a Black Sorority, and recognizing their worth as individuals prior to gaining membership. Despite the individual reasons for joining the Black Sorority, membership creates a platform that provides minority women with the ability to develop as they matriculate throughout the organization and the college experience. Undergraduate minority women need groups that provide “a source of support, strength, and encouragement that enables them to persevere in often stressful and competitive academic environments” (Gregory, 2001, p. 131).

For many participants, the Black Sorority served the vital purpose of providing the sisterhood and support, emphasizing service to the community, and establishing continued network opportunities for the undergraduate members. The participants’

primary exposure to leadership development as undergraduates was through Sorority membership. Interview participants provided evidence of leadership development through interpersonal skills such as improved communication, teamwork, and completion of tasks. However, no specific career development was cited as part of the undergraduate experience.

Major Themes

The findings of this research study explored participants' perceptions of personal and professional success. The study identified individual motivators that extend beyond membership in a Black Greek Letter Sorority. The participants articulated several organizational benefits experienced through undergraduate membership. Leadership development was identified as a learned skill within the Black Sorority. This finding supports longitudinal impact on members' personal and professional lives. The participants expressed the need for continued support and development in their leadership capacities to combat negative stereotypes of minority women, and overcome professional challenges.

The essence of helping each other was demonstrated in three emerging themes in which membership in the Black Greek Letter Sorority was instrumental in developing leadership skills advantageous across personal and professional environments. The objective of this research was to understand the individual personal and professional success experienced by the participants and to describe those experiences as minority women in leadership roles. The examination of the participant's data revealed three major themes: (a) navigating negative stereotypes of minority women as leaders, (b) empowerment and visibility of minority women, and (c) self-discovery through the Black Sorority.

Navigating negative stereotypes of minority women. The interview participants identified that society has a role in the perception of minority women. Zora reflected how words such as leadership and minority are seldom associated with one another in society. Cayden reaffirmed the idea that society places a negative connotation on African American women as leaders through labeling. Labeling leads to projecting negative stereotypes on minority women such as having an attitude or an incompetent leader compared to their nonminority counterparts. This is a concern as qualified minority women are often overlooked for leadership positions. Consequently, minority women are disproportionately seen as not the best person for leadership roles despite the time and effort they exert to prove differently.

Nichole expressed that minority women in leadership positions are seen as “bitches.” She identified ways that nonminorities behave toward women of color in leadership roles. A negative experience in leadership is often described as an unspoken vetting process which takes place for women of color to gain respect in leadership capacities. This vetting process can be used to challenge and demean the work of minority women. It is not a fair practice that should be used to gain acceptance or build relationships. However, overcoming the vetting experience becomes a necessary part of gaining respect from peers and collaborators. Nichole felt that a challenge of navigating negative stereotypes of minority women was proving worth to others before business could begin. Olivia shared the belief that people view women of color as unapproachable especially in leadership roles that can create conflict within the work environment. These ideas suggest barriers experienced by minority women in leadership roles. They find their professional abilities questioned because of social biases and negative stereotypes that affect the level of respect shown within a professional environment.

Empowerment and visibility of minority women. Empowerment and visibility of minority women in leadership is necessary. The interview participants described the importance of seeing minority women achieving their goals and making space for others to follow. Zora spoke to the empowerment by describing the sense of pride in seeing strong and effective minority female leaders. Collectively, the participants acknowledged minority women as resourceful and innovative by nature and tendency. The concept of innovation was a result of lack of access to opportunities and thinking outside of the box to achieve goals. The participants demonstrated an immediate admiration and respect for minority women in leadership and identified those women as role models. The empowerment of minority women is important to create support systems in marginalized spaces. Having a support system is a coping mechanism that creates a protective shield over minority women when they are faced with challenges in professional settings. That same empowerment is used to motivate minority women and help them grow in personal and professional opportunities as described by Nichole.

Visibility is critical in changing the perspectives of women of color in leadership. Minority women have to work exceptionally harder to be seen as competent and recognized for their contributions. Some of the more prominent female leaders despite the work they do are villainized for speaking up. However, through their efforts, they gain the support of minority women because of their fearlessness and visibility. Visibility also means that each minority woman is different and should be respected as such. Women of color can benefit from using their platforms to effect positive change and represent the diversity of their talents and skills. However, a lot of work still needs to be done within professional settings that exclude women of color which can be damaging. Zora expressed this invisibility factor in the way people assume her white male

counterpart should be addressed in business matters when she is the decision maker.

Across many industries, minority women are receiving accolades for their work as valuable contributors. These women are proving to be educated and qualified with the ability to accomplish goals and set new directions. The continued presence of minority women in leadership positions has a strong implication for change. It brings a sense of pride and excitement to see women of color advancing in leadership roles traditionally dominated by white males. The impact of seeing minority women in a decision-making capacity is inspiring to others who seek to achieve similar accomplishments. Bailey described these women as the trendsetters and role models that make a difference in the lives of others.

Self-discovery through the Black sorority. Interview participants of this study agreed that membership in the Black Sorority was an overall positive experience. Black Greek Letter Organizations are highly revered in the African American community. The respect bestowed on these organizations can be seen in both personal and professional environments. The interview participants cited a specific connection to the Sorority and their personal growth while in the undergraduate chapter. Zora reflected on how she experienced not feeling comfortable at a Pan-Hellenic sorority event where she was one of the only persons of color. This incident speaks to the realization that minority women seek spaces where they are represented and feel included.

The Black Sorority offers minority women an opportunity to understand themselves and develop. Through trial and error, members discover what works in academic, professional, and social settings. They learn to multitask and prioritize their lives and make important decisions that will impact them beyond their college experience. More so, these experiences are lived with women who become sisters and

lifelong friends that see them through ups and downs. All participants articulated the important of strong bonds and sisterhood as benefits of joining the Sorority and contributed to their growth in some capacity. These relationships became a critical form of family and support provided by the Black Sorority while at the southeast university.

Lastly, the Black Sorority undergraduate experience helped members to understand real world challenges associated with being women of color in their self-discovery. The participants reflected on their interactions within the Sorority and in the academic setting to learn how to present themselves to others. Additionally, they discussed the importance of embracing their diversity within the student body of the southeast university and finding a safe to explore and develop as young women of color. This was especially important as minority women who join Black Greek Letter Sororities must make the decision of who they want to be and how their undergraduate experience will shape their lives and help them to define their own success.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The participants of this study were women who embodied leadership and attained professional and personal success on their own terms. This study recognized their collective achievements exclusive and inclusive of their sorority membership. The researcher acknowledged the experiences as well as barriers expressed by the participants to authentically understand these minority female leaders. The participant's cooperation in revealing their experiences can contribute to the development of female members of this chapter, and toward diversifying the leadership development opportunities for undergraduate members of Black Greek Letter Sororities. The findings of this research emphasized the success of minority women, leadership, support, and networking. These findings aligned with the research of Pully and Wakefield (2001), who concluded that "acceptance of change, continuous learning, self-empowerment, sense of purpose, personal identity, personal and professional networks, reflection, skill shifting, and financial relationship" (p. 9) guide leadership.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate how membership in a Black Greek Letter Sorority impacts the leadership experiences of graduate sorority members and their personal and professional success after graduation. This chapter summarizes results and provides recommendations on future research on Black Greek Letter Sorority leadership development opportunities. The following six research questions were the origin of this study:

1. Does the undergraduate membership experience in a Black Greek Letter Sorority cultivate self-awareness for minority women? If so, how?

2. What types of undergraduate membership experiences in a Black Greek Letter Sorority are most significant for empowering women of color?

3. Does the Black Greek Letter Sorority experience create a sense of responsibility for demonstrating positive leadership qualities? If so, how?

4. Did members of a Black Greek Letter Sorority find their undergraduate experience with leadership development to be valuable in the preparation of their current careers?

5. Does membership in a Black Greek Letter Sorority play a role in the personal success of minority women professionally? If so, how?

6. What professional or personal benefits exist as a result of networking for members of a Black Greek Letter Sorority?

Review of the Methodology

This research study was conducted using a qualitative phenomenological methodology. A phenomenological approach was most appropriate for this study, as it allowed participant experiences to be extracted authentically and in their viewpoint. This qualitative study of a historically Black Greek Letter Sorority contributes to the replication of prior studies that seek to understand the experiences of women of color within these organizations. This research included 58 graduate minority women, all members of a Black Greek Letter Sorority who joined while at a southeastern university. The researcher's use of replicated questions with adaptation from a previously conducted study suggests an opportunity for cross-validation related to specific experiences associated with membership in a Black Greek Letter Organization, such as aspirations for joining, the experience of joining, and success and leadership following graduation. The participants were identified through a private social media page and GroupMe

communication app that included all members who were initiated into the undergraduate chapter. Participation requirements were provided to ensure members were eligible and were (a) a graduate member of the Black Greek Letter Sorority, (b) identified as a minority woman, and (c) age 21 or older.

An online questionnaire and one-on-one interviews were used for the data collection process. Interviews were conducted in person, via telephone, or through Skype platform. The graduate members were provided a participation consent letter for the online questionnaire, and, for those selected for interviews, a second participation consent form was distributed. The interview protocol followed questions approved by the Institutional Review Board of Nova Southeastern University. Each participant was provided an opportunity to review the consent form with the primary researcher. The researcher requested that signed consent forms be submitted prior to the interview. The research instrument was introduced by restating the purpose of the study. The participants responded to questions that were approved by the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board.

Probing questions were used to extract additional information. After the collection of data from interviews, the data were analyzed. Concluding the interviews, three themes emerged: (a) navigating negative stereotypes of minority women as leaders, (b) empowerment and visibility of minority women, and (c) the Black Sorority undergraduate experience is unique. These collective themes represented the experience of graduate members in a Black Sorority as they explore leadership development as a factor in their personal and professional success. Leadership development for minority women in a Black Greek Letter Sorority was the aim of this study. This study used the Black feminist theory (Hill-Collins, 1990), as well as student development theory

(Rodgers, 1990). This research contributes to current literature that addresses the absence of data pertaining to Black Greek Letter Organizations and the benefits of membership. More so, the information gathered through this study specifically focused on the graduate members' perceptions of success as a result of exposure to leadership development in an undergraduate chapter of a Black Sorority.

Discussion of the Findings

The participants of this study were graduate members of a Black Greek Letter Sorority who joined at a southeastern university. The participants identified as women of color who were initiated between 1992 and 2005. Of the five sorority members, the breakdown of undergraduate participation found that two were members of the undergraduate chapter for 0 to 2 years and three were members of the undergraduate chapter for 2 to 4 years. Lastly, the age range of participants was 32 years of age to 45 and older.

This study asked six core research questions that focused on the participants' undergraduate experience with leadership in the sorority and individual benefits of membership. Additionally, the questions asked about the participants' self-analysis of personal and professional success as a result of membership in the Black Sorority. These questions were used to determine if the participants felt that they experienced adequate leadership development opportunities within the sorority that prepared them for life after graduation. Through data collection, three themes developed: (a) navigating negative stereotypes of minority women as leaders, (b) empowerment and visibility of minority women, and self-discovery through the Black Sorority.

Navigating negative stereotypes of minority women. Minority women are challenged with overcoming stereotypes that create obstacles in their personal and

professional lives. Stereotypes do not surprise women of color but they do have a lasting impact on the way they are treated. Addressing stereotyping of minority women brings awareness to the harms associated with this practice. Understanding how minority women navigate life despite stereotyping is important for those who experience it daily as well as for individuals who perpetuate stereotypes. Research highlights the disparities faced by minorities but specifically toward women of color. Stereotyping is often done subconsciously to form ideas about people. The careers and work relationships of minority women are impacted by race-based stereotyping.

Minority women are expected to exhibit less self-confidence but also to censor their behaviors to prevent aligning with stereotypes of who they should be. Often, achieving that goal is done through a coping mechanism called shifting, which is used by women of color to adapt to their work environment. Women experience shifting by changing the way they think of things or expectations they have for themselves. For some, this can include focusing solely on the workplace relationships but being careful not to abandon their personal identities. Allison (2010) suggested that minority women engage in shifting to include changes to their speech and image to counter stereotyping at work. However, it is important to understand that minority women work exceptionally hard to achieve success despite systematic challenges. Women of color seek opportunities to provide a platform for themselves and others who face similar personal and professional barriers. Women of color cannot be expected to constantly struggle to debunk unnecessary myths about who they are.

Second, minority women are disproportionately faced with adversity when seeking leadership opportunities. Historically, the makeup of most organization leadership is traditionally white male. Institutionalized discrimination has played a role in

minimizing the opportunities for minority women to not only be considered for top leadership but to thrive successfully in these roles. More so, it is difficult to support the belief that only white males have the characteristics to hold leadership positions, especially when research suggests this belief is false. Organizations should address the concerns of race and stereotyping and approach the discussion by encouraging diversity and inclusion. Seeing individuals for who they are challenges personal assumptions and biases, encouraging people to see beyond stereotypes. For individuals who have the privilege of not seeing color, they overlook individuals who should be recognized for their cultural differences. It is appropriate to acknowledge cultural differences and provide opportunities to minority women who are qualified to lead successfully.

The deficiency of minority women in leadership positions creates discussion about organizational culture and limited opportunities. An overwhelming amount of research asserts that organizations play less of a role in supporting female leaders through training and leadership development. Moor, Cohen, and Beerli (2015) argued, “The majority of trailblazing women reached their high-ranking positions with minimal organizational help” (p. 7). Diversity is a competitive advantage and placing women in leadership positions allows organizations to benefit not only from their leadership styles but also their contributions. Stevens, Plaut, and Sanchez-Burks (2008) argued that organizations that implement diversity and uniform access to opportunities will experience success. There is a growing presence of minority women in academic and professional environment. This helps to develop candidates for leadership positions making it difficult to exclude them. Research on effective leadership supports that minority women succeed in leadership because of their adaptive skills (McGlowan-Fellows & Thomas, 2005). Therefore, incorporating more women of color in leadership

roles could have significant benefits for organizations (Jogulu, 2010).

Empowerment and visibility of minority women. Women of color must empower themselves through self-definition to exude their own self-value. This research study created a space for women of color to embrace who they are first and foremost and realize that there's no right or wrong way to unpack what it feels like to be misrepresented, marginalized and misunderstood. This research exposed the way that minority women are faced with proving and justifying their existence or space. Women of color should use their knowledge and abilities to affirm themselves and help to empower other women to feel the same.

Minority women experience invisibility within their professional careers. Invisibility includes but does not limit questioning the abilities of minority women in specific roles, perpetuating stereotypes toward them, intellectual bias, or attempts to undermine their credibility. Torres, Driscoll, and Burrows (2010) argued that assumptions about the intelligence of minority women as surprising further highlights their experiences of invisibility. Invisibility removes women of color, but reclaiming that space is critical to changing the experiences of minority women. Combating invisibility empowers minority women to not to be silenced or to have their abilities questioned. Removing the barrier of invisibility will permit positive action such as "critical networks of influence in the workplace" (Holder et al., 2015, p. 165).

Self-discovery through the Black sorority. The existence of Black Sororities on college and university campuses is essential to women of color. Institutions of higher learning should recognize that Black Sororities have continued to provide critical resources such as community, and support (Bartman, 2015; Greyerbielh & Mitchell) to their members. The undergraduate experience is a significant time for minority women to

engage in academic and social settings. The findings of this research indicated that the Black Sorority fostered a sense of self-determination and self-definition (Collins, 2000) to successfully navigate as women of color.

Establishing a personal sense of self-value and understanding can simultaneously be fostered through the academic environment. Mentorship facilitates holistic development, including the awareness of how mind, body, and spirit contribute to the overall well-being of minorities. Institutions of higher learning can provide intentional development opportunities to assist students, particularly minority women, for future careers. Banks (2009) argued, “We must offer more support for these achievers, create stronger support networks, and establish new programs of service to meet the diverse needs of [minority women]. No one service, one approach, or one program can meet their needs” (p. 63).

Theoretical Framework

According to Campbell and Stanley (1963), cumulative wisdom is an essential part of research as it encourages conflicting theories. This research study sought to reveal trends through comparison of previous research as well as to develop new findings. This study applied both Black feminist theory and student development theory within the context of understanding the participant’s undergraduate experience. The Black feminist theory permitted the researcher to identify how the minority members understood what was expected of them in relation to their membership and the perpetuation of their Sorority legacy. The participants’ responses to their identity as minority women described a responsibility that was consistently discussed through the data collection process. The student development theory demonstrated how these participants were able to mature in various aspects of their student career. Their undergraduate experience did

allow them to grow and provided exposure to both social and learning activities as a result of their involvement.

However, beyond the Black feminist theory and student development theory, a third theoretical framework emerged, which was intersectionality. Within this research, intersectionality included race, gender, and social class, which was intricate in explaining the experiences of the Sorority members beyond identity (Jones, Abes, & Magolda, 2013). The participants' experience shed light on intersectionality and the impact it has on their identity. It is not possible to understand experiences of minority women without considering intersectionality. The participants expressed feelings about what it felt like to be minority and women and how that impacted them both personally and professionally. Most importantly, this study asked the participants to recall a number of experiences as they related to them in diverse social context, such as a woman of color, sorority member, or professional. Therefore, the presence of intersectionality was critical to how they understood leadership and how their identity impacted them professionally. Lastly, intersectionality demonstrated how women affiliated with multiple groups experienced marginalization even in movements designed to further social justice and institutional change, such as the Black Sorority (Baugh & Barnes, 2015; Sindell & Shamberger, 2016).

Challenges and Limitations

This study collected data from 58 members of the Black Sorority who joined at the undergraduate chapter. An initial limitation was getting participation from the graduate members. Many members were reluctant to participate until they saw chapter leaders and seasoned sorors getting involved and encouraging participation in the research study. A critical part of the data collection from the online questionnaire was a

result of sorors advocating for the researcher. Initially, members were hesitant and very few responses were collected. On the first day of the data collection process, the research study was introduced to the Facebook Group and GroupMe communication application. The researcher considered possible threats to the validity of the study and worked to accurately represent the data collected. To address threats to validity, the researcher reviewed studies that spoke to the experiences of minorities within Black Greek Letter Organizations. The researcher was cognizant of personal biases, experiences, and relationships with members of the research study. The researcher anticipated a more diverse group of interview participants; however, most of them were from the same initiation year and semester.

Ninety people viewed the post in the private Facebook group, but only six members participated. On the second day of data collection, 10 responses were recorded and an edit to the post was made to clarify the requirements of participation. It was suggested by a member to indicate “participation is needed from all members of the chapter excluding current undergraduate members.” On the third day, a second post was created in the Facebook group encouraging members to complete the survey, and 21 responses were received. On the fourth day, the survey was posted directly to the GroupMe communication application as suggested by a member, and 15 responses were collected. On the fifth day, seven responses were received. No survey responses were received over the sixth and seventh day, which fell on a holiday weekend. This challenge presented a critical observation for the researcher in areas of support among minority women.

Second, the target population proved to be a limitation because it did not represent the leadership experiences of graduate members in the southeastern United States or of

the Black Sorority as a whole. Therefore, expanding the target population to include members of the Black Sorority who joined at other chapters would be beneficial. Increasing the target population to other graduate members of the Black Sorority within the southeastern United States would open opportunities to learn about the leadership development at various institutions. It would also expose the researcher to chapters that have been in existence longer and possibly reach a more diverse demographic of members.

Third, this study excluded members from three of the Black Greek Letter Sororities, all of which have undergraduate chapters at the southeastern university. As this research study focused on the experiences of graduate members from one Black Sorority, its results did not demonstrate population validity. Narrowing the target population to one Black Sorority diminished the opportunity of exploring the holistic leadership development experience of all Black Greek Letter Sorority members. The exclusion of the other NPHC sororities skews data regarding leadership development as some undergraduate chapters in Black Sororities may have more involved student leaders than others.

Lastly, time and duration of the study presented two challenges as it was completed over the summer and within 30 days. Conducting research over the summer semester was difficult not only for the researcher but the participants. During the interview process, a participant moved, and another was out of the country with limited Internet access. The duration of the study made it difficult to determine the extent to which Sorority members experience leadership development over time or achieve their desired level of personal or professional success. To overcome the challenge of time, it would be beneficial to complete this study during an academic semester in which the

researcher might have access to more graduate members due to sorority activities. Measuring the personal or professional success of members over time would be better suited in a longitudinal study.

Overall, the interview process was enjoyable because participants were eager to share their experiences of joining the sorority and leadership development. Although personal interviews were filled with small talk (Irvine, 2011), the researcher was cautious to keep the participants focused on related topics within the interview. The interviews were conducted over a period of 2 weeks. The researcher conducted four interviews in the first week and two in the second week. The researcher spent an average of 2 hours with each participant. The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. The availability of participants proved to be a challenge, as two participants requested to conduct the interview on the same day at different times, but both were successfully completed.

Conclusions

A collective review of the literature, research studies on Black Greek Letter sororities, and interviews contributed to the conclusions obtained throughout this process. The initial research questions were answered and the findings substantiated.

Research Question 1. Does the undergraduate membership experience in a Black Greek Letter Sorority cultivate self-awareness for minority women? If so, how? Research conducted on Black Greek Letter Sororities expressed that the Black Sorority undergraduate experience does assist in cultivating self-awareness for minority women. Hurtado and Carter (1997) contended that the Black Sorority reinforces belonging among minority women. The support system provided by the Black Sorority suggests that minority women succeed as a result of sharing resources and uplifting one another. The

Black Sorority builds confidence not only among members, but also demonstrates that women of color are uniquely bound together and those ties can provide comfort, understanding, and security. Participants shared experiences of how joining the Black Sorority helped them personally and propelled them into leadership roles as new members. More specifically, participants felt that representing the Black Sorority was also part of fostering a sense of self-value and pride.

Research Question 2. What types of undergraduate membership experiences in a Black Greek Letter Sorority are most significant for empowering women of color? The researcher considered how the personal motivation for joining a Black Sorority represented the ways minority women sought and cultivated empowerment individually and among one another. Participants shared that friendship and support, community service, and networking opportunities provided the most significant experiences for minority women empowerment. Black Sororities began as small social organizations that assisted women of color with their adjustment to higher education. Consequently, they continue to be a support system and set the example for female students throughout their undergraduate matriculation.

Experiencing friendship and support within the Sorority has lasting impacts on women of color. More specifically, this information is consistent with research indicating that friendship as a support system was most instrumental for women of color. Additionally, the existence of community service and networking had a significant impact on the participants of this study. Long (2012) asserted, “Sorority members reported a high sense of belonging and peer interaction as a result of their fraternal experience” (p. 23). The emphasis of peer interaction is important for building interpersonal skills. Research conducted on career success identifies strong interpersonal

abilities as a factor for success (Myers & Larson, 2005; Shermersheim, 1996).

Community service fosters a desire to help others and to use collaboration as a tool toward that goal. Black Greek Letter Sororities are traditionally part of great acts of service and civic engagement. They have used their voice for over a century to impact change locally and globally. Black Sororities receive credibility for services they provide, but often they change their communities daily and go unnoticed for their contributions. For over a century, Black Sororities have answered the call to advocate for women's rights, challenge inequality toward minorities, promote education in their schools, engage in social and racial issues, and even rally for presidential candidates. Black Sororities continue to stand up even when there are voices who challenge their existence, causes, and actions. Yet, this is what makes Black Sororities leaders within the community. Consequently, undergraduate members are encouraged not only to get involved but to lead in efforts toward change. Therefore, participating in community service compliments leadership development for minority women as is an important part of the undergraduate experience.

Previous studies suggest that Black Greek Letter Sororities provide an abundance of networking opportunities for its membership. The participants of this research study expressed that networking was an equally important aspect of joining the Black Sorority and existed beyond the undergraduate chapter. The sisterhood aspect of Black Sororities is directly connected to the networking experience. Members can always find a Soror or lean on the shield in time of need as a result of the established network of the Sorority. Furthermore, the networking of the sorority can build bridges and assist members with ascending to new places academically or professionally. Not every member will experience the same outcomes as it relates to networking, but it is important to know that

personal networking can be just as beneficial to members as professional networking. Simply put, the networking experience can be traveling from one city to the next while knowing there is a sister or a Soror opening doors to meet new people. Each member uses their network to establish relationships and creating opportunities for others who may come along in the future.

Research Question 3. Does the Black Greek Letter Sorority experience create a sense of responsibility for demonstrating positive leadership qualities? If so, how? The Black Sorority helps minority women not only take on leadership opportunities within their organization but to see themselves as leaders in their personal and professional lives. Undergraduate membership builds confidence in minority women, encouraging them to communicate, organize, implement, and execute tasks for chapter operations as well as social activities. The direct benefits of taking part in those activities suggests that women of color are practicing the leadership and interpersonal skills they will need immediately following college. Black Greek Letter Organizations are recognized for their community service to minority communities, however, there is no direct correlation between professional development to mentorship activities (Berkowitz & Padavic, 1999; Phillips 2005).

Participants of this research study expressed a need to demonstrate positive leadership qualities on their campus and represent the Black Sorority well. This undergraduate chapter of the Black Sorority has often had a small to medium chapter membership. As a result, most members were placed in leadership roles and worked to fulfill the positions as needed. Learning to work in small groups helped build confidence not only in the individual but the undergraduate chapter. Setting standards and following successful leadership models ensured that future members could continue the work of the

chapter.

Research Question 4. Did members of a Black Greek Letter Sorority find their undergraduate experience with leadership development to be valuable in preparation for their current careers? The participants of this study associated most leadership development experiences as they related to activities within the undergraduate chapter of the Black Sorority. The findings of this research did support that the undergraduate experience helped to prepare members for current positions by developing skills in areas of leadership, communication, organization, and interpersonal skills within the organization. Despite not receiving leadership and career development opportunities from the academic institution, the participants expressed that their undergraduate experiences chairing events, holding officer positions, and being seen as campus leaders were beneficial to them in many ways. This finding is important because, although leadership development is considered a benefit of Greek Letter Organization membership, career development is not emphasized throughout Greek Letter Organizations and they are not synonymous.

Research Question 5. Does membership in a Black Greek Letter Sorority play a role in the personal success of minority women professionally? If so, how? The findings of this study did not support membership in a Black Sorority having definitive outcomes on the success of members personally or professionally. Participants shared that there were some aspects such as leadership development that might contribute to the professional success of members. However, online questionnaire and interview participants felt that Black Sorority members are just as successful professionally as nonmembers. They did not place more emphasis on their success because of their membership; rather, some expressed that the skills learned did factor into their abilities to

adjust to professional settings.

Research Question 6. What professional or personal benefits exist as a result of networking for members of a Black Greek Letter Sorority? Overall, the participants expressed networking in many different ways which included meeting new Sorors and mentorship. Greek Letter Organizations represent a strong network of individuals who have access to diverse resources. One of the greatest benefits of networking for Black Sorority members is the sisterhood. The Black Sorority created an internal network that helps members navigate. Mentorship was an intricate part of the networking process for women in the Black Sorority.

The experience of mentorship not only empowered women of color but allowed them to receive coaching to become emerging leaders who have already accomplished several career goals (Holder et al., 2015). Black Greek Letter Sororities were founded by women of color who lived in a time when their presence was challenged and unwanted. Much like today, minority women face those same obstacles when overcoming biases and negative stereotypes against them. Fortunately, the resilience of minority women is woven into the fabric of America and minority women continue to carve out a significant space and serve as leadership role models for their successors.

It is important to emphasize that membership in a Black Sorority is not the only way minority women engage in or acquire leadership skills. Members should consider how their individual and collective behaviors create and/or perpetuate false perceptions of these historical organizations. Equally important, prospective members should understand that joining for the wrong reasons will not provide desired results. Academic excellence, service, and personal growth are a primary benefit of joining and everything else is an added bonus. Be prepared to do the work that is called for. The participants of

this study agreed that joining the Black Sorority allows minority women to focus on individual needs, learn something about who you are and who you want to become. When joining a sorority, you lose your individual identity and become a part of the whole, using your representation of these organizations for good and impact positive change wherever you can.

Black Greek Letter Sororities provide members an opportunity to gain valuable leadership skills which are helpful for professional careers. However, there is no evidence that membership equates to success either personally or professionally. Not all members experience the same level of undergraduate involvement and not all skills will be transferable. Furthermore, success is individual and everyone defines it differently. Making good decisions is extremely important because decisions can contribute to success. Simply, what members put into the undergraduate experience will impact the takeaway.

It is important to listen to the voices of minority women and not ignore their experiences. Historically, minority women have been in some of the most difficult leadership positions and have used their inherent talents to overcome significant obstacles. The notion that minority women are not capable of leading has been debunked numerous times. Research suggests that most leadership positions are occupied by white males. Therefore, White men can have a positive influence on the culture of their organizations by recognizing the value of minority women and supporting their efforts to assume leadership roles. Women of color should not have to compromise their own values to be given opportunities, and they are not obligated to do so. If organizations want to thrive they should look for ways to diversify their leadership and be open-minded to change.

Lastly, the individual journey of learning and developing into a leader is a personal experience that should be shared. Self-motivation is a vital part of creating personal and professional success. Leadership is about moving up and reaching back. Reach back and mentor, establish a relationship with Sorors within the organization so that mentorship is available. Within the professional environment, foster an opportunity for mentorship and development among colleagues. Growing as a professional is an investment and opens the door to new opportunities. Leaders should not be afraid to place the needs of others first, and, by that example, we help each other.

Implications

The implications of this study support minority female leadership and the need for future research. The first goal was to highlight the undergraduate Black Greek Letter Sorority experience in empowering and providing a voice to minority women. Helping one another goes beyond the undergraduate experience. It means seeing sisters through the happiest of times or worst moments. Finding comfort in the sisterhood and leaning on the shield with the belief that sisters are forever. The second goal was to increase the visibility of minority women in leadership roles. The outcomes demonstrate that Black Sororities continues to be a community of support and space for minority women to celebrate their magic. The Black Greek Letter Sorority experience places value on following the footsteps of founders as well as etching out spaces for minority women to exhibit their leadership. For example, numerous factors, such as personal motivation, campus environment, as well as identifying as a minority Greek member, impacted the way members experienced leadership opportunities. These elements contributed to minority women's perspectives of personal and professional success.

Although, this study did not address the collective chapter experiences of graduate

members, or the Black Greek Letter Sorority, nor all the Black Greek Letter Sororities, it provided rich data about the experiences of a specific group of women in the Black Sorority their success after graduation. All of the participants expressed how the Black Sorority was a meaningful experience in their lives and how those experiences and relationships continue to shape them as women. The results of this research study revealed that Black Sororities are as relevant today as they were in the 1900s.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Eight recommendations are provided to increase the visibility of minority women in leadership roles. The first set of recommendations encompasses the knowledge and experience gained as members in an undergraduate chapter of the Black Sorority. The second set of recommendations identifies ways to empower women of color to assert themselves within the professional environment and seek leadership opportunities. Black Greek Letter Sororities must continue to revise and provide leadership development programs for undergraduate membership. The emphasis of leadership development will establish a foundation that can be duplicated both in an academic and professional setting. Black Greek Letter Sororities can improve mentoring both formal and informal programs for undergraduate members. The mentorship experience should emphasize the importance of career and leadership focused training.

Graduate members of Black Greek Letter Sororities should look for opportunities to provide professional networking opportunities to undergraduate members. Exposure to professional opportunities will help newly graduated Sorors become acclimated in their fields. Teaching them the skills they need to attain leadership positions cannot be effect unless there is a door they can enter. Undergraduate chapters of Black Greek Letter Sororities should participate in leadership and career development programs provided by

the academic institution. If there are limited opportunities at the institution, members can consider regional and national programs that focus on leadership and career development.

Within the professional environment, minority women should be intentional and confident in their ambition to seek leadership roles in which they are qualified.

Stereotyping exists and the biases of others do not represent self-worth or measure the aptitudes of minority women. Therefore, it is critical to identify and overcome barriers to aspire to professional goals. Minority women should maintain strong personal and professional support systems. Support goes a long way in reinforcing positive beliefs between individuals and can make the professional environment more tolerable. The presence of women who understand the struggle being real is not just a colloquialism, as it applies to their lives and the desire to occupy limited leadership roles. Consequently, minority women should aggressively pursue leadership opportunities in an effort to ascend within their organization. A thorough review of organizational policies should be considered to incorporate diverse professional environments. Identifying ways to encourage qualified candidates to apply based on their knowledge and skillsets should be a priority. Lastly, organizational culture plays a role in the way minority women are viewed and eliminating unfair stereotypes about minority women can have a lasting impact.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study, in addition to current literature, provided several recommendations for future exploration of Black Greek Letter Sororities and leadership development. The first recommendation is replication of this study. Replication could provide research on leadership development and membership in four specific ways. The first involves the inclusion of graduate participants from all four Black Greek Letter

Sororities to increase the number of participants and diversify the undergraduate experience beyond one specific sorority. A second consideration can be made to study subjects that are Black Greek Letter Sorority Graduate members from HBCU undergraduate chapters. Black Greek Letter Organizations are highly revered at HBCUs, and their Greek experiences may differ from Predominately White Institutions. Third, as Black Greek Letter Organizations have exemplified values of inclusion it would be beneficial to study the experience of nonminority members in Black Greek Letter Sororities. Lastly, to better understand the extent to which people associate Black Greek Letter Organizations with leadership, further research might explore leadership development of Black Greek Letter Organization from the perspective of nonmembers.

Additional ways to contribute to the research topic include a comparative study to explore the leadership development opportunities for undergraduate members of Black Greek Letter Sororities at PWIs and HBCUs. A comparative study might provide insight into the implementation of student development programs based on institution type. This is critical to understanding where Black Greek Letter Organizations have the most access to resources that contribute to personal and professional development. Another comparative study may include assessing the mentorship programs of Black Greek Letter Sororities and Black Greek Letter Fraternities. This would allow researchers to identify which Black Greek Letter Organizations utilize mentorship programs and ways that mentorship relationships empower members.

A longitudinal study is recommended to assess leadership development for undergraduate members of Black Greek Letter Sororities. This research can explore the benefits of engaging in leadership development over a specific time frame. For example, this study can investigate if members of a specific undergraduate chapter in a Black

Sorority feel more prepared for leadership roles if they are exposed to leadership development throughout their undergraduate matriculation. A longitudinal study can investigate leadership development for undergraduate members in Black Greek Letter Sororities in a different region over a period of time. Researching different regions allows the investigator to review other college and university programs and identify the long-term impact of those opportunities for leadership and career development for Black Greek Letter Organization members.

Lastly, to contribute to the literature of work on this topic, research can focus on understanding the perceptions and definitions of professional and personal success from the undergraduate member point of view. The definitions of success may vary which can highlight the diverse perspectives associated with success and how to obtain it. A study can also be conducted to examine the executive leadership of Black Greek Letter Sororities and their perceptions of personal and professional success. This type of study would help identify how the executive leadership of Black Sororities determine what programs are most beneficial to members.

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Appendix A
Online Questionnaire

Online Questionnaire

1. What is your age range? 21-26, 27-32, 33-38, 39-44, 45+ (please select one)
2. What semester/year did you join? (Fall/Spring) _____
3. Are you currently an active member of the Sorority? Yes or No
4. What best describes your career field? a) Education, b) Legal Professional, c) Health Professional, d) Other (if other, please indicate your career field).
5. What did you know about Historically Black Greek Letter Organizations before you joined in college? – (RQ1, RQ6).
6. Why did you decide to join a Black Greek Letter Sorority? – (RQ1, RQ2, RQ6). Please select up to 3 responses that best describe your experience:
 - a) Networking
 - b) Professional opportunities
 - c) Friendship/Support
 - d) Community Service
 - e) Leadership Development
 - f) Other (if other please explain).
7. Please tell me the extent of your agreement or disagreement with this statement:
 - In joining the Sorority, I wanted acceptance and/or tolerance– (RQ1, RQ2). Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
Please elaborate on your response.
8. Please tell me the extent of your agreement or disagreement with this statement:
 - Initially, I felt like I fit the “mold” of the Sorority. – (RQ1)
Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
Please elaborate on your response
9. Please tell me the extent of your agreement or disagreement with this statement:
 - During my undergraduate experience, members of the Sorority were recognized as leaders on campus. – (RQ1, RQ3)
Strongly agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
10. Please tell me the extent of your agreement or disagreement with this statement:
 - During my time as an undergraduate member, the Sorority was viewed positively by others. – (RQ1, RQ3, RQ5)
Strongly agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
Please elaborate on your response.
11. Please tell me the extent of your agreement or disagreement with this statement:
 - Do you consider yourself a leader? – (RQ3, RQ4)
Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
Please elaborate on your response.
12. Please tell me the extent of your agreement or disagreement with this statement:
 - Black Greek Letter Sorority members experience more professional and/or personal successful than non-members.
Please elaborate on your response. (RQ5)

Appendix B
Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What is your definition of leadership? – (RQ3, RQ4)
2. How do you think society describes minority women as leaders? -(RQ1, RQ3)
3. How do you describe minority women as leaders? -(RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4)
4. How has membership in your organization developed you into a leader? – (RQ1, RQ3, RQ4, RQ5)
 - What specific leadership skills have you gained from being a member?
 - What lessons have you learned about yourself as a leader?
5. What personal benefits did you experience by joining a Black Greek Letter Sorority? –(RQ1-6)
 - What specific benefits did you gain from undergraduate membership?
 - Were there specific benefits gained that apply to you professionally?
6. Do you believe that membership in a Black Greek Letter Sorority contributed to your personal and/or professional success? –(RQ5)

Appendix C
Participant Demographics

Participant Demographics

Respondent	Age	Semester/Year Joined	Professional Career
1	21-26	Fall 2014	Education
2	27-32	Fall N/A	Accountant
3	39-44	Fall 1996	Legal Professional
4	27-32	Spring 2007	Health Professional
5	27-32	Spring 2007	N/A
6	39-44	Fall 1999	IT Professional
7	39-44	Fall 1999	Legal Professional
8	33-38	Fall 1999	Education
9	21-26	Spring 2012	Education
10	27-32	Spring 2005	Legal Professional
11	33-38	Fall 1999	Health Professional
12	21-26	Fall 2010	Education
13	33-38	Spring 2005	Education
14	27-32	Spring 2005	Health Professional
15	27-32	Spring 2007	Legal Professional
16	27-32	Spring 2005	Tax Specialist
17	33-38	Spring 2005	Education & Social Service
18	27-32	Spring 2007	Human Resources
19	33-38	Fall 2003	Hospitality & Event Management
20	33-38	Spring 2005	Human Service
21	33-38	Fall 2003	Education
22	27-32	Spring 2007	Health Professional Student
23	39-44	Spring 1993	Education
24	27-32	Spring 2005	Federal Law Enforcement
25	21-26	Fall N/A	Hospitality
26	33-38	Spring 2002	Government/Municipality
27	27-32	Spring 2007	Health Professional
28	21-26	Fall 2010	Accounting/Finance
29	21-26	Spring 2016	Health Professional
30	21-26	Fall 2014	Business Systems Analyst
31	33-38	Spring 1998	Education
32	45+	Spring 2014	Education
33	27-32	Fall 2008	Legal Professional
34	21-26	Spring 2012	Health Professional
35	39-44	Fall 1992	Insurance
36	21-26	Fall 2014	Education
37	33-38	Spring N/A	Health Professional

38	45+	Fall 1992	Digital Arts
39	33-38	Spring 2005	State Government
40	21-26	Fall 2014	Health Professional
41	21-26	Fall 2014	Health Professional
42	21-26	Fall 2014	Business
43	21-26	Spring 2016	Psychology Mental Health
44	33-38	Spring 2000	Health Professional
45	21-26	Spring 2016	Health Professional
46	21-26	Fall 2014	Law Student
47	21-26	Spring 2016	Hospitality & Event Management
48	27-32	Spring 2012	Human Resources
49	33-38	Spring 2005	Education
50	39-44	Fall 1999	Education
51	27-32	Spring 2007	Compliance
52	21-26	Spring 2012	Education
53	39-44	Spring 1994	Education
54	33-38	Spring 2002	Government
55	27-32	Spring 2005	Technology
56	21-26	Spring 2012	Marketing Research
57	27-32	Spring N/A	Education
58	27-32	Spring 2005	Law Enforcement
59	27-32	Spring 2005	Accounting

Note: The above table represents the respondents of the online questionnaire who were all initiated into the undergraduate chapter, identified as minority women, over the age of 21.