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Does Gender Matter in Black Greek-Lettered Organizations?

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DOES GENDER MATTER IN BLACK GREEK-LETTERED ORGANIZATIONS?

Donald Mitchell, Jr.

This article explores the salience of gender for African Americans in Black Greek-lettered organizations at a predominantly White institution. An emphasis was placed on the social capital that may be gained through historically Black fraternities and sororities as a result of their single-gender structures. A constructivist phenomenological approach guided the study. The study revealed that the women found gender to be important in establishing relationships in sororities, whereas men de-emphasized the role of gender in their fraternity experiences. The article closes with a discussion and implications of the findings and recommendations for future research.

Scholars have researched the impact of Greek-lettered organizations on student development (e.g., Pascarella et al., 1996; Pike, 2000); academic outcomes (e.g., Long, 2012; Long & Snowden, 2011); women involved in sororities (e.g., Brosi, Foubert, Bannon, & Yandell, 2011; Park 2012); men involved in fraterntities (e.g., Goldfarb & Eberly, 2011; Long, 2011); and, in some cases, the negative effects of fraternities and sororities (e.g., Wilder, Hoyt, Doren, Hauck, & Zettle, 1978; Wilder, Hoyt, Surbeck, Wilder, & Carney, 1986). Still, many of the aforementioned investigations overlook the differences in predominantly White fraternities and sororities in comparison to cultural fraternity and sororities, particularly Black Greek-lettered organizations (Harper, 2008b; McClure, 2006).

Subsequently, a literature base exploring the educational outcomes of Black Greek-lettered organizations (BGLOs) has emerged, and scholars have documented the effects of BGLOs on African American students' experiences during college (e.g., Harper, 2000, 2008b; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; McClure, 2006). Yet, critical analyses of gender in studies including both historically Black fraternities and sororities are limited.

The purpose of this study was to examine students' social experiences in historically Black fraternities and sororities to better understand whether, and in what ways, gender was important in the relationships established within the organizations for students at a predominantly White institution. To explore the importance of gender, emphasis was placed on the social capital that may be gained in BGLOs and the following research question shaped the study: In what ways, if any, does gender have an impact on the social capital gained through African American students' participation in fraternities and sororities?

BLACK GREEK-LETTERED ORGANIZATIONS

There are nine college BGLOs affiliated with the National Pan-Hellenic Council and they are often referred to as "the Divine Nine." The organizations are: Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. The founders of the first eight collegiate BGLOs

were just a generation removed from slavery. At four universities—Cornell University, Howard University, Indiana University at Bloomington, and Butler University—African American students founded the culturally-based organizations amidst the Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) decision upholding a "separate but equal" doctrine. The ninth was founded towards the end of Jim Crow segregation and the Civil Rights era (Dickinson, 2005). Thus, early BGLO members found it important to be advocates for African Americans and realized that the collective efforts within their organizations were powerful and important. They also included service to the African American community as an integral part of their missions, which distinguished them from predominantly White fraternities and sororities (Dickinson, 2005). What follows is a brief synopsis of emperical research examining the college outcomes for students involved in BGLOs.

Co-Curricular Outcomes of BGLOs

Some of the earliest published emperical research on BGLOs was conducted by Walter Kimbrough. In 1995, Kimbrough examined students' college engagement and leadership skills by comparing the self-assessments of African American students in BGLOs to those of non-Greek students. In his analysis, Kimbrough reported that 74.1% of the students involved in BGLOs participated in two or more student organizations and held at least one leadership position as compared to 44.2% of the non-Greek students. In addition, 54.8% of the non-Greek students believed membership in a BGLO would improve their leadership skills and 82% had considered joining a BGLO.

Later, Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) further explored how BGLO membership effected African American students' engagement and leadership development skills. The authors found that even after controlling for high school involvement, a higher percentage of students involved in BGLOs were in student government, academic honor societies, residential hall assistant groups, residential hall governments, Black student groups, and student ambassador groups. Furthermore, students involved in BGLOs were significantly more likely to hold elected leadership positions than non-Greeks. Students involved in BGLOs also self-reported higher leadership potential, as indicated by the Competing Values Managerial Survey Instrument used in the study (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). Researchers have also began to examine the academic outcomes associated with BGLO involvement (e.g., Harper, 2000, 2008b; Mitchell, 2012).

Academic Outcomes of BGLOs

According to Harper (2000), after examining the academic standings reports for Greek-lettered organizations from 24 colleges and universities, nearly 92% of the BGLO chapters had lower grade point average (GPA) averages than the overall GPA averages of all students involved in fraternities and sororities at each institution in the study. Later, Harper (2008b) investigated the effects of BGLO membership on classroom engagement in predominantly White classrooms. Harper (2008b) found that the factors that influenced classroom engagement positively were underrepresentation; voluntary race representation; collective responsibility; and engaging teaching styles. The factors that negatively affected participation were forced representation and non-engaging teaching styles.

In a more recent study, I (Mitchell, 2012) qualitatively explored the influences of BGLOs on the persistence of African Americans at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). I found that relationships and connections; increased social lives; organizational work; academic monitoring; and leadership

development influenced persistence in positive ways. Yet, I also noted that other academic outcomes, such as GPA and completed assignments, were negatively affected because of over-involvement.

While the existing empirical research on the educational outcomes associated with BGLOs is generally positive, "what most people know about [B]lack Greek-letter organizations … is limited to two areas: stepping and pledging" (Parks & Brown, 2005, p. 437). Pledging and hazing have been opposed since the early years of BGLOs, but it was not officially banned until 1990. Yet, since the official ban, pledging and hazing have actually increased amongst BGLO chapters (Parks & Brown, 2005).

In sum, the effects of BGLOs on African American student experiences are mixed. There are several documented benefits such as leadership development (Kimbrough, 1995); student engagement (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998); classroom engagement (Harper, 2008b); and persistence (Mitchell, 2012); however, pledging and hazing appear to be negative aspects of joining some BGLO chapters (Parks & Brown, 2005). Harper (2008b) noted that student affairs professionals have used anecdotal evidence, or existing BGLO research that is quite limited in its scope, to advise historically Black fraternities and sororities. Subsequently, there is a need to increase scholarship on BGLOs to assist student affairs professionals who work with BGLOs. Given the documented benefits of BGLOs on student engagement, future research should futher examine how BGLOs influence other educational outcomes and college experiences. McClure (2006) suggested, "As it relates specifically to connecting members to the university, the fraternity can clearly be considered a mechanism of social integration" (p. 1039). Similarly, I would add 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.

Social Capital

Bourdieu's (1986) analysis of social capital places emphasis on the benefits accrued by an individual. Social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). So while Bourdieu recognized the importance of groups in acquiring social capital, he places emphasis on the benefits accrued by the individual, rather than the community (Portes, 1998). Consequently, other scholars have defined social capital using this emphasis on individual gains. Narayan (1999) asserted that to obtain social capital, an individual must be related to others and it is the relationship with others that is to the advantage of the individual. I used Bourdieu's construct of social capital— benefits acquired by an individual—to guide this study. Two other studies are pertinent because they call attention to the relationship between minority student organizations, BGLOs, and social capital.

Harper (2008a) investigated how high-achieving African American male undergraduate student leaders acquire and use social capital at PWIs. Harper defined high-achieving as African American male students with GPAs above 3.0 on a 4.0 scale who had the admiration of their peers, were involved in student organizations, and developed relationships with high-ranking campus administrators. Harper concluded that African American males accessed social capital through leadership in student organizations and engagement in campus activities, particularly predominantly Black and minority-centric organizations.

McClure (2006) focused on historically Black fraternities and how they offer African American men a social network at PWIs. McClure used a social constructionist framework to examine the effect BGLOs had on African American men's college experiences. McClure reported that

BGLOs increased connections to Black history, the campus, and society. In addition, McClure learned that members were able to connect to the college campus through their fraternity, and BGLO membership created social network ties that were valuable to members.

Harper (2008a) and McClure's (2006) studies support how social capital may be gained from BGLO involvement. Yet, their studies were limited to African American men. In addition, empirical studies on BGLOs have not critically analyzed the impact of gender in BGLOs, even when both men and women are included in the study (e.g., Harper, 2008b; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). Thus, this study adds to existing BGLO research by focusing on the salience of gender within historically Black fraternities and sororities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study builds on Lin's (1999) network theory of social capital. Lin's framework highlights the idea that social capital is embedded in resources gained through relationships and defined social capital as an "investment in social relations with expected return" (p. 30). Lin's theory is explained using three key elements: (a) inequalities, (b) capitalization, and (c) effects. First, individuals do not possess the same amount of social capital; therefore, there are inequalities in the social capital possessed. Second, individuals capitalize by accessing and mobilizing social capital. Third, the effects are the returns or the benefits associated with the social capital gained. Scholars have suggested African American men at PWIs gain some form of social capital when they join BGLOs (Harper, 2008a; McClure, 2006). Thus, I suggest that the social capital gained through involvement in historically Black fraternities may exist in historically Black sororities in a similar manner. Ultimately, I used Lin's network theory of social capital as a framework to explore the ways in

which single-gender relationships established in BGLOs might impact the social capital gained within the organizations.

METHODOLOGY

I used a phenomenological approach to conduct this study. Phenomenological studies explore and interpret the lived experiences of the participants and synthesize the commonalities of their collective experiences (Merriam, 2009). Brown, Stevens, Troiano, and Schneider (2002) stated, "Qualitative methodology is useful in exploring and describing the experiences of college students, especially when little is known about the phenomenon under study" (p. 173). In many qualitative methodologies, the researcher is "the primary instrument of data collection and analysis assumes an inductive stance and strives to derive meaning from the data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 29). Some scholars suggest that the researcher brings assumptions and biases into the study when conducting qualitative research and help co-construct research findings (Charmaz, 2006). For instance, I am a member of a historically Black fraternity and an advocate of BGLOs. Because of the knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions I brought to the study—or my positionality—and because I co-constructed the research findings through my interactions with the participants, I consider the study a constructivist phenomenological study.

Constructivist theorists "do not attempt to be objective in their data collection or analysis, but instead seek to clarify and problematize their assumptions and make those assumptions clear to others" (Edwards & Jones, 2009, p. 212). I wanted to empirically and holistically explore the relationships between social capital, gender, and BGLOs membership, allowing for thoughts and feelings to be included. I also wanted the data to be information-rich, as I was undertaking a study where a phenomenon has not been fully explored. For these reasons, I decided that a constructivist phenomenological

approach and using a social capital framework was appropriate for exploring the research question.

Sample

I selected the participants in the study through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a non-random selection of a small sample of cases; this sampling technique yields insight, not generalization, and the cases are information-rich (Merriam, 2009). More specifically, I employed criterion sampling. Criterion sampling is choosing cases that meet certain criteria (Merriam, 2009). In this study the participants had to (a) self-identify as African American, (b) be a member of a historically Black fraternity or sorority, and (c) attend a PWI.

The participants were students at a large, public, predominantly White research-intensive university located in the Northeast region of the United States. The university enrolled approximately 35,000 students, with approximately 11% of the students identifying as African American and 51% as men. I recruited participants by introducing the study during a National Pan-Hellenic Council meeting. I explained to the group that I wanted to explore the ways in which the relationships within their organizations influenced their college experiences at a PWI. I followed-up with each BGLO, and a total of seven women and five men participated in the study. They were all members of one of four BGLOs—two fraternities and two sororities. Length of BGLO membership ranged from one academic semester to two academic years. Eleven participants were seniors and one was a junior.

Data Collection and Analysis

I collected data through focus groups and a series of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. Each student participated in one of four BGLO focus groups; each focus group was comprised of members from a single BGLO. I further explored the experiences of eight of the students—four men and four women—through a series of one-on-one interview sessions, eventually, conducting a total of 24 one-on-one interviews. I collected and analyzed the data through a process called theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Throughout the theoretical sampling process, I used themes that emerge from previous data (i.e., the initial round of interviews, focus groups) to develop questions for the next round of data collection; this was done until no new themes emerged from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

I analyzed the data by reviewing the transcripts, audiotapes, and my research journal. Transcripts were created from the audiotapes of the interviews and focus group sessions and then matched with the audiotapes for accuracy. My research journal consisted of my notes throughout the study. The emergence of concepts was a result of the open coding process; open coding is an analysis where the researcher identifies emerging concepts from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

To ensure trustworthiness, I used the criteria credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Merriam, 2009). The techniques I used to ensure trustworthiness were including an audit trail, which is raw data from the study (e.g., direct quotes from the participants); conducting member checks through a culminating focus group with the eight one-on-one interview participants; triangulating the data by comparing the findings to existing literature and conducting both focus groups and one-one interviews; and, monitoring my biases by documenting my thoughts throughout the study and by conducting member checks. I have also provided detailed information on the participants, the setting, and the procedures used in the study to ensure transferability, and I spent seven months interacting and building relationships with the participants.

Each one-on-one interview participant has been assigned a pseudonym using the first names of African American (s)heros.

Table 1 provides demographic information for the one-on-one interview participants. Focus group participants are referred to as "participants" throughout the findings section because they were not assigned pseudonyms.

Table 1

Interview participants (N = 8)

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	GPA	Classification	Legacy Member
Malcolm	21	Male	3.5	Senior	No
Amiri	21	Male	3.7	Senior	No
Oprah	21	Female	3.1	Senior	No
Madam	21	Female	3.1	Senior	No
Robin	21	Female	3.4	Senior	Yes
Sean	20	Male	2.4	Junior	No
Debbie	21	Female	3.3	Senior	No
Huey	22	Male	2.9	Senior	No

The findings higlight how the men in the study de-emphasized the role of gender in their fraternity experiences, whereas the women in the study found gender to be important in establishing relationships in sororities.

"It's No Big Difference": Gender Salience in Black Fraternities

While the men in the study found value in the relationships established through fraternity membership, they did not believe gender was an important component of the relationships established. The men generally overlooked any importance of fraternities being single-gender student groups. Sean explained how, as Black men, he and his fraternity brothers share experiences. Nevertheless, he then went on to explain that even though they share experiences, the fact that they are involved in single-gender groups is not important, and they could gain just as much being involved in co-ed organizations:

I don't think [gender is] so important…I mean we all relate in the same way [and] cope with the same issues that men do. But as opposed to being in a [female or in a co-education group], I don't think it would be a big difference. Because regardless, we're all in the same [organization], all have the same goals, [and] the same interests. So, I don't think that [being in a co-educational group versus a fraternity] would really matter too much.

A focus group participant explained:

I feel like it's no big difference [in fraternities and sororities]. Being a man [rather than a woman], and being affected by relationships [established in fraternities versus sororities]. If we were females in a sorority, I'm sure it would be the same way [as if you were a male in a fraternity]. [They have] the sisterly figure [where we have the brotherly figures]…So I don't think it's different.

Another focus group participant added that gender was not important in his college experience, and everyone's experience at the institution, regardless of gender, was equal. He stated, "Here, everybody's on the same playing

field. Nothing is different because you're a man or woman. Everything is on the same playing field, no matter what."

As illustrated by the quotes above, the men who participated in the study generally overlooked gender in the relationships established in fraternities. Three of four one-on-one interview participants and both fraternity focus groups confirmed this finding. Yet, when reflecting on race, the participants identified race as important components of their fraternities and believed racism existed on the campus; all four one-on-one interview participants and both fraternity focus groups confirmed this findings.

While the men generally agreed that gender was not important in the relationships established, Amiri viewed things differently; he was the only negative case in the study as he found gender important in the social relationships established in historically Black fraternities. During our initial meeting, he shared that he believed that because fraternities are single-gender groups, they serve as a special support group for Black men on a White campus:

> The brotherhood, the all-[male] gender aspect, just having that support group of Black males, which is kind of rare at on a PWI [is important]. I just feel like that [Black male support] helped the most, cause I guess I was struggling more with being a Black male on a predominantly White campus more so than with academics.

Amiri also shared that the connection with Black men in fraternities was important because some members served as role models for Black men and fellow fraternity members. He believed that these types of role models were more important than celebrities:

> [J]ust the role modeling thing [is important]; just having examples, visible examples; and it's not people you don't know, its people that you know on a

personal level. So you see the good and the bad of everyone [in your fraternity].… I think that's a better role model than some political figure or some celebrity you don't really know.

Amiri, who articulated the importance of identity throughout the study, joined his organization in particular because of the non-conforming identities he prescribed to his organization. In the end, Amiri found value in the single-gender nature of his group, while the other participants overlooked any value added; the men further confirmed the finding in the culminating focus group that included all the one-on-one interview participants. Nevertheless, the men did find value in the relationships established within their respective fraternities, generally, or without regard to gender.

"It's Always She, and I Like That": Gender Salience in Black Sororities

In comparison, the women in the study found the single-gender relationships gained in their sororities to be extremely important. The women stated they joined historically Black sororities intentionally because they were joining a predominantly Black and all-female group. They believed that sororities allowed them to operate in "safe spaces," which they considered rare on a predominantly White campus and within co-ed organizations. In addition, the women believed that their shared experiences as Black women amongst sorority sisters, whom they often referred to as role models, were important in the spaces created through sorority involvement. These findings were confirmed by all four one-on-one interview participants and in both sorority focus groups.

During one focus group, a participant referred to her sorority's focus on women as "powerful." She further explained how her sorority references just women in publications:

> I like, I really actually love, how it's an

all-women group. I think it's really empowering that everyone in our organization is a woman. Everything is done by us and when we talk about the national president we say, "She." Everything in our books says, "She." There's no he, and I'm so happy because I hate reading stuff and it's the generic he, or a s/he. It's always she, and I like that.

Oprah explained that she felt that sororities were empowering because they were independent organizations, and not extensions of fraternities:

It's empowering that we have our own thing. The sorority is not just a little auxiliary of the fraternity. You're a part of a Greek-lettered organization that is for women and that's not the same thing as a Black Greek-lettered organization that's for men. It's almost [like the founders] respected [sororities enough] in saying that [they're] not just part of [fraternities].

The women felt a sense of empowerment and pride because they were associated with an organization just for women, founded by women.

Shared experiences were also important in the single-gender relationships established through sorority involvement. Many of the women mentioned how, as African American women, they share certain experiences and being involved in a sorority with other women who share those experiences is important; this was confirmed in all four one-on-one interview sessions and both focus groups. Robin explained how her sorority is different from co-ed organizations, particularly the Black Student's Union, because of the experiences she shared with her sorority sisters:

We've all gone through the same things. We can sit down [and] we all have the same exact stories. If not the same, a derivative of something similar, but we have all been through at least one thing exactly the same; [becoming a member of our sorority]. And the fact that we made

it through that together, we should be able to make it through everything else together. And the [Black Student's Union] ain't got nothing on a line sister because they weren't there when the times were hard. They weren't there when I was crying. They weren't there when one of my line sister's grandmother passed away. [The Black student union] wasn't there for that. So it takes a different type of person; I think it takes a sister to actually be that drive and motivation for me.

Later in the conversation, she discussed the differences between being a woman and a man:

I think a female goes through things differently than a male does whether it's a co-ed line [or group]. I still think the female experience is completely different than the male experience. I'm going to continue to say that because a female goes through things completely different than males do. So gender is important because [a sorority sister or woman is] coming from a similar background as me. We come from similar hardships. We come from similar heartaches and similar pains.

Because all the women identified as Black women, the women stated they shared common experiences and created deep bonds. The bonds were helpful as they navigated the campus.

The women also found that being involved in a historically Black sorority with women who were educationally and professionally motivated helped them move towards their educational and professional goals; this was confirmed in all four one-on-one interview sessions and both focus groups. In our final conversation, Madam explained how seeing her sorority sisters achieve was a motivation to persist towards graduation:

I guess just having a group of women around you that is interested in the same things, they're on the same path to graduating, and going on to getting their master's degrees, or [attending] law school, [or attending] medical school. So

I think it's just good to have that positive influence around you. It's helped me just stay on track with graduating.

Madam added how being in a co-ed group could change those dynamics, as motivation could become more of a competition:

I think just being around a lot of like-motivated Black women also helps. And instead of being in a co-ed group, I guess just seeing women move towards graduation and you just want to be a part of that. You don't want to be left behind. And then with [co-ed groups], it's more competition because males, I guess sometimes you might think that they might get a job before you do, or they might get accepted into law school or med school before you.

Being involved in historically Black sororities served as academic and professional motivation for the participants. They could see themselves in professionally established members, and they did not feel a need to compete with each other, but rather encourage each other.

As gender was clearly important for the women in the study, during a focus group session, a member of one sorority even went on to talk about the importance of fraternities for Black men on predominantly White campuses. She believed that Black men on predominantly White campuses have it hard because of certain stereotypes. She also explained that fraternities are important in assisting Black men in navigating White campuses:

I think that fraternities are great for Black men. I think they do a lot. Because if you're not an athlete here at this school, I feel like sometimes the Black men on this White campus doesn't always know [their] place and [they] can really get lost. I think it's much worse for them just because they are really at the bottom of the totem pole, as far as the way they're looked at just because of what other Black men are doing out in the world. So I think

that fraternities really give some kind of guiding light to people who don't really have a place yet here.

In sum, gender was salient for the women in the study. One sorority member even articulated there was value in Black fraternities for African American men on predominantly White campuses; her sentiments were confirmed by all the other women during the culminating focus group. Furthermore, the importance of the intersection between race and gender was evident as the women shared their experiences as Black women within their sororities. The single-gender relationships within sororities also positively influence professional and academic achievement.

DISCUSSION

Studies exploring social capital for African American college students tend to focus on men (e.g., Harper, 2008b; McClure, 2006). In addition, BGLO studies that have included both men and women have not explicitly included a critical gender analysis (e.g., Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Harper, 2008b). In this study, I intentionally brought focus to gender and any gender differences that might emerge during the study.

The men in the study generally did not find gender to be important; however, they did find race as important in the relationships established in their respective BGLOs. So while there was social capital within the fraternities, they did not attribute it to the single-gender nature of the groups. Their invisible privilege as men might have influenced their answers. Furthermore, social role expectations, gender performance, or "cool posing," which are all descriptors for African American males acting according to prescribed masculinities may have also influenced their answers (Dancy, 2011; Harris, Palmer, & Strove, 2011; Sallee & Harris, 2011). Furthermore, my positionality—identifying as Black, male, and Greek-affiliated—might have

influenced their answers. Or perhaps, gender is genuinely not important to them in historically Black fraternities, as they did acknowledge race was salient as an identity marker. Dancy (2007) suggested that all-male African American programs should look for ways to involve women because the men in his study "received an informed sense of cultural understanding within these diverse cultural spaces" (p. 304). As the men in this study de-emphasized maleness in fraternities, they might have been confirming Dancy's recommendation.

When asked about the importance of gender in Black sororities, the women in the study articulated that they found value in being in an all-female affinity group and articulated that the single-gender group affected their college experience and professional and academic goals; the women found social capital in the sororities with regard to gender. Perhaps, societal gender inequalities played a role in the women's emphasis on gender?

The intersectionalities of their social identities, particularly, their experiences as Black women increased their awareness of gender salience. Ropers-Huilman and Winters (2010) define intersectionalities as "unique perspectives, social institutions and identities [that] are created by the ways in which intersecting identities and related social structures create fluid and complex 'wholeness' in and among individuals and groups" (p. 38). Historically Black sororities served as "intersectionality-based" social support systems that helped the women navigate a PWI. The women in the study highlighted that programming and support specifically for Black or minority women might be useful on college campuses.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

As a researcher, I was involved in both the data collection and analysis processes; therefore, there is a possibility that I could have influenced results due to researcher subjectivity and biases. While this was a potential limitation in the study, I reduced the possibilities of researcher bias or subjectivity by using an audit trail and through member checks. Utilizing the aforementioned research techniques along with the criteria to establish trustworthiness serves as evidence that the study was rigorous and well-designed. Furthermore, through member checks I found that the findings were consistent with the lived experiences of the participants. I am confident that the findings add to BGLO scholarship as critical analyses of gender within BGLOs have been largely unexplored.

FUTURE RESEARCH

I offer the following recommendations for future research. First, I recommend replicating this study with a larger number of participants to see if the themes and concepts that emerged in this study are consistent at similar institutions. Second, studies examining the influence of institutional context (e.g., Historically Black Colleges and Universities, different geographical locations) on gender salience in BGLOs might be useful. Third, scholars have examined the effects of African American faculty and staff members (e.g., Cuyjet, 2006) and African American peers (e.g., Harper, 2006) on college outcomes. Still, the influences of the interpersonal relationships established between African American men in single-gender support groups (e.g., the Minority Male Community College Collaborative [M2C3] at San Diego State University, the Huntley House at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities), and how those peer relationships influence college outcomes need further exploration. Finally, studies examining the intersectionalities of identities should be further explored, as race and gender were important for the women in the study. Many studies examine students through one facet of a student's identity (e.g.,

race, gender, sexual orientation). Increasing research on the intersectionalities of identities and their impact on the experiences of college students would be beneficial as postsecondary institutions would be better prepared to serve all students.

Conclusion

Within this study, I shared the lived experiences of 12 students through focus groups and a series of one-on-one interview sessions. Their stories were presented to illustrate the role gender has in the relationships established in BGLOs at a PWI. The findings in this study indicate that gender is salient in the social networks established in Black sororities at predominantly White institutions, influencing the women's persistence, while the men generally de-emphasized the importance of gender. As higher education institutions become increasingly more diverse, it is important for researchers and practitioners to ask these types of questions as the experiences of college students differ because of intersecting identities and by institutional contexts.

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