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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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Exploring Membership in Black Greek-Letter Sororities and the Influence on Career
Advancement for Black Women in Higher Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Erin Chambers Wilson

May 2021

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my grandmother Marie Allen, who picked cotton to give my mother a life that would allow her granddaughter to now walk in the world with Dr. in front of her name.

It is also dedicated to my grandfather David Chambers whose memory and encouragement served as an inspiration for achievement for my father and now for me.

Finally, this is dedicated to all the Black women that believe in sisterhood and are dedicated to nurturing its power.

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore membership in Black Greek-letter sororities and the influence on career advancement for Black women in higher education. Research has neglected to account for the role that Black Greek-letter organizations play in the development of Black women beyond their undergraduate experience. This research is motivated by two research questions: (1) How do Black women perceive that membership in Black Greek-letter sororities prepared them for career advancement in higher education?; and (2) How do Black women perceive that membership in Black Greek-letter sororities influenced their professional success in higher education? To examine these questions, the study explored the perceptions of 12 Black women holding a membership in one of four Black Greek-letter sororities on the influence these memberships had on career advancement using interpretative phenomenological analysis. The findings from the research show that the impact of Black-Greek letter sorority membership on the career advancement for Black women in higher education is more complex than previously thought. The results, implications for institutions of higher education and Black Greek-letter sororities, and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Black Greek-letter sorority, Black women, career advancement, higher education, sisterhood

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On April 21, 2006, at 8:08 pm on the University of Tennessee Martin campus, I crossed what many members of Black Greek-letter fraternities and sororities affectionately call “the burning sands” or came to the end of my membership intake process. At that moment, 20 Black college women, referred to as *line sisters*, officially became members of the Zeta Lambda Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, one of four world-renowned Black Greek-letter sororities. Line sisters are defined as the members of a Greek cultural organization’s new member class (University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2019). Not only had we become members of a local sorority chapter created to connect and support its members during their collegiate journey, but we had also become lifelong members in an organization where our members would be recognized and respected by over approximately 300,000 women worldwide (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, 2018).

During graduate school and career progression, the membership in the sorority has provided many opportunities to network. Additionally, it has provided the opportunity to create relationships with women worldwide and participate in leadership development experiences. The mere mentioning of membership in the sorority has garnered preferential treatment from strangers who shared one specific thing in common—a sorority membership affiliation.

According to Gardner, Jr. et al. (2014), Henry and Glenn (2009), and Bridget Turner et al. (2017), there exists a lack of Black women in leadership positions in higher education. These positions include assistant directors to executive level management positions, like college dean, president, or chancellor. Additionally, these same researchers found that the low numbers of Black women in these positions could be related to the numerous challenges they face while

working in institutions of higher education (Gardner, Jr. et al., 2014; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Kelly et al., 2017).

Challenges faced by Black women leaders at institutions of higher education have led to difficulty in recruiting and retaining women who could fill the gap at institutions lacking this specific type of diversity in leadership (Holder et al., 2015). According to the 2017 American College President Study completed by the American Council on Education, only 8% of chief academic officers in higher education are Black, and of that small percentage, only 34% are Black women (Bicshsel et al, 2017). The American Council on Education also found that whereas the number of White women in leadership positions at universities has increased, the percentage of Black women in leadership positions has remained stagnant since 2016.

One of the repeated strategies to combat the challenges faced by Black women in higher education was the use of peer groups or mentorship programs. A recent study conducted by Edwards and Ross (2018) indicated that “a lack of guidance and proper support from colleagues or administrators can frequently send a disturbing message, a sign of unwelcomeness, or present an attitude that suggests that the Black faculty and staff do not belong” (p. 155). Whereas these programs should already exist on most campuses, when they do not or are deemed ineffective, some Black women may turn to their affiliations in Black Greek-letter sororities to fill in gaps (Jennings, 2017).

Black Greek-letter sororities connections tend to fill in gaps and help Black women employed in higher education institutions find contacts, mentors, and guidance on college campuses. It is crucial to research whether these connections also translate into accelerated career advancement. The attention given to organizations, like Black Greek-letter sororities, will likely not decrease in the years to come due to their positive and negative impacts on their

members (Routon & Walker, 2016). Because Greek-letter organizations remain an integral part of the life of many college-educated Black women, it is critical to understand how Black Greek-letter sororities influence the career advancement of Black women.

Statement of Problem

The underrepresentation of administrators of color in higher education is one of the most important ethical dilemmas facing colleges and universities today (Wolfe & Freeman, 2013). The American Council on Education found that only 8% of chief academic officers in higher education are Black, and of that small percentage, only 34% are Black women (American Council on Education, 2017). Henry and Glenn (2009) attributed this to various personal and professional challenges. Black women encounter these challenges in higher education when they both pursue and take on administration roles. These challenges often include isolation due to being in small numbers, negative perceptions of Black women in postsecondary institutions, and pressure to provide services and support (Gardner, Jr. et al., 2014; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Kelly et al., 2017). Challenges like these, faced by Black women at higher education institutions, have led to difficulty recruiting and retaining women who could fill the gap at institutions lacking this specific type of diversity in leadership (Holder et al., 2015).

Gasman et al.'s (2015) research found historical legacies, prejudice, and racism persisting across predominantly White institutions as barriers for Black women striving to move to leadership positions in higher education. Barnes (2017) listed identity challenges as a significant barrier while Henry and Glenn (2009) found microaggressions as another barrier. Whereas studies have uncovered numerous barriers faced by Black women in top leadership positions in higher education or those working to ascend to prestigious positions in areas of higher visibility, additional research is necessary to study barriers, such as mentorship (Gardner, Jr. et al., 2014) or

peer groups (Henry & Glenn, 2009). As Black women work to gain leadership positions in higher education, it is essential that more research is dedicated to understanding and implementing strategies to combat the barriers they face. Furthermore, as increasing competition and changes occur in global markets, it is economically imperative for higher education institutions to attract and retain Black women (Holder et al., 2015).

Finally, it is essential to explore this area, because the presence of Black women “is crucial for the personal and academic success of minority students for whom they could serve as mentors, role models, and advisers” (Patitu & Hinton, 2003, p. 89). Interacting with Black administrators is important to the student experience. These interactions provide opportunities for students to overcome misconceptions about the intellectual capabilities of minorities, especially Black women (Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of Black women in higher education on the influence that membership in Greek-letter sororities had on their career advancement. The participants for this study currently serve in a professional or administrative position at various public and private universities within the United States. The higher education participants interviewed were members of the following sororities: Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, and Sigma Gamma Rho.

The following research questions guided this study:

Q1. How do Black women perceive that membership in Black Greek-letter sororities prepared them for career advancement in higher education?

Q2. How do Black women perceive that membership in Black Greek-letter sororities influenced their professional success in higher education?

Significance of the Study

This study's findings expand the current literature on the career advancement of Black women in higher education. This study is significant due to the numerous barriers faced by Black women in leadership positions in higher education or those working to ascend to more significant positions in areas of higher visibility at institutions of higher education. As universities look for ways to enhance retention and recruitment of Black women in higher education, this study will contribute to the practice of these efforts by assisting in developing innovative strategies that aid in the retention of this group.

This study's findings will have the most significant implications for higher education organizations. The presence of Black women "is crucial for the personal and academic success of minority students" (Patitu & Hinton, 2003, p. 89). Black women working at universities often serve as mentors, role models, and advisers for students of color, especially Black students (Townsend, 2019). Furthermore, through crucial interactions, they allow White students to overcome misconceptions about the intellectual capabilities of minorities, especially Black women.

Whereas numerous theoretical foundations for research surrounding the retention of Black women in higher education exist, this study aids in the identification of new gaps in prior research. The study participants providing data about the impact of membership in Black Greek-letter sorority on career advancement in higher education foregrounds further development in this area.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to Black women who are members of one of the four Black Greek-letter sororities and currently employed in administrative or professional positions at

selected private and public higher education institutions. I am a member of one of the Black Greek-letter sororities; therefore, this study did not include those sorority sisters or Greek-letter sisters who had personal relationships with me, and they were not invited to participate in the study. However, I did disclose being a member of a Black Greek-letter sorority to participants, but I did not disclose my specific sorority membership to them.

Summary

Recruiting and retaining Black women in administrative roles in higher education institutions remains a challenge for many universities worldwide. These entities must have the ability to develop new strategies that might aid in retaining this group. With a better understanding of how membership in Greek-letter sororities influences Black women's career advancement, universities might have the ability to see increased success in retaining Black women in higher education leadership roles despite documented challenges they face in the workplace.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This qualitative study is designed to explore Black women's perceptions in higher education on the influence that membership in Greek-letter sororities has on their career advancement. The lack of knowledge by professionals toward the understanding of historically Black Greek-letter organizations makes this research imperative (Gunn, 2015). Black Greek-letter organizations, specifically sororities, have provided Black women with a safe space to gain leadership skills, safe-havens from many of the difficult challenges encountered in higher education both as a student and a student affairs practitioner, and a vast network of other women around the world with a shared purpose and vision for success. Therefore, understanding the experiences and perspectives of Black women is vital to creating strategies to support an increase in the number of these women serving in administration roles in higher education institutions.

This literature review begins by addressing the theoretical framework that guided this study. It explores the role Black women have played in higher education. It also examines the challenges Black women face in the workplace, especially in higher education institutions. This literature review delves into the rich history of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, and Sigma Gamma Rho sororities for Black women. Finally, it will look at creating social capital through membership in Black sororities and gaps in research concerning Black Greek-letter sorority membership and postgraduation career trajectory.

Conceptual Framework Discussion

This study utilizes Collins's (2000) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* as the basis for its conceptual framework. Collins (2000) outlined specific ways in which Black women are marginalized in higher education, emphasizing the necessity of Black women obtaining positions of power. Collins (2000) stated the following:

Taken together, the supposedly seamless web of economy, polity, and ideology function as a highly effective social control system designed to keep Black women in an assigned, subordinate place. While Black women historians, writers, and social scientists have long existed, until recently these women have not held leadership positions in universities, professional associations, publishing concerns, broadcast media and other social institutions of knowledge validation. Black women's exclusion from positions of power within mainstream institutions has led to the elevation of elite White male ideas and interests and the corresponding suppression of Black women's ideas and interests in traditional scholarship. (p. 5)

Black Feminist Thought focuses primarily on Black women's experience and how they must be empowered to be aware of their right to interpret their realities and define the things they experience. According to Lindsay-Dennis (2015), "The guiding premise of this perspective is that 'academic knowledge' and 'everyday experiences' should guide researchers' theorizing about Black women" (p. 509). Furthermore, Collins places Black women's knowledge and experience within gender, class, and racial oppression. With four main principles, concrete (real) experience as a criterion of meaning, use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, an ethic of caring, and an ethic of responsibility, Collins helps provide connotations for Black women's lived experiences.

Guided by these ideas, it is my hope this study contributes new evidence by collecting data that explores Black women's experience in higher education from the aspect of membership in Black Greek-letter organizations. Black women appear subjected to indirect, systematic oppression, which further contributes to Black women's underrepresentation as administrators in higher education institutions. In this study, using Collins's perspectives helped illuminate how

the broadly shared experiences framed within a racial, gender, and industry influence how Black women advance in their careers. Born out of necessity and innovation, Black feminist studies can be considered a survival strategy that helps Black women preserve their experiences and provide prescriptions for improvement (Bazen, 2018).

In the development of a study, it is critical to focus on possible challenges. In general, Black feminist thought encompasses the unique feminist perspectives of Black women who feel the feminist movement ignored their overlapping identities and failed to acknowledge the systemic racial oppression endured by Black women (Lindsey, 2019). Thus, the possible challenges for researchers using this body of knowledge and perspective as a framework should be explored. According to Clemons (2019), “Qualitative researchers who utilize Black feminist thought are challenged to organize a legitimate piece of work that could celebrate women’s work in their communities, function as a critical ethnographic piece that is not exploitative, and promote the further emancipation of Black women” (p. 6).

Black qualitative researchers who utilize Black feminist thought have many things to consider. For example, “Black women researchers must consider their geographic rearing location, gender, race, class, and ability, along with other interrelated factors that play a crucial role in developing and shaping our experiences and the experiences of our participants” (Generett & Jeffries, 2003, p. 3). While the researcher may have an idea what participants would potentially say, each interview question must carefully allow participants to explicitly comment on their lives and work as a Black woman.

Black feminist thought is guided by understanding Black women’s historical experiences with the intersection of race, class, and gender. Through this perspective, we can see Black women’s work legitimized in new ways (Clemons, 2019). Clemons (2019) reminds us that

“Black women’s narratives can be utilized in such a way where we see whole people in our actual complexities” (Clemons, 2019, p.11). Employing the perspectives of Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework for this study allowed me to validate Black women’s lived experiences as sorority members with their experiences in administrative roles in higher education institutions.

Heterogeneous Collectivity

Collins’s (2000) *Black Feminist Thought* brings to light that Black women and their experiences can be described as a heterogeneous collectivity. The connection in experiences among this group manifests in a group knowledge or standpoint (Collins, 2000). Collective belief is a practice of Black feminist thought and influences Black women’s everyday lives. According to Collins (2000), Black women have generated alternative practices and knowledges that have been designed to foster Black women’s group empowerment. These practices, including the creation of Black Greek-letter sororities, were necessary due to the Black women being members of an oppressed group (Collins, 2000). While navigating oppression, Black women can foster a safe place to connect with each other in groups, according to Davis and Afifi (2019).

In addition to the creation of groups, Black women affiliate with each other through a Black female communication discourse. Research shows that this communication is laden with idiosyncratic sociocultural and historical properties (Houston, 2000). Consistent with other scholarly notions, it has been found that culturally derived phrases, words, and colloquialisms can serve as identity markers in Black women’s everyday conversations (Brown, 2012; Hughes & Heuman, 2006; Niles Goins, 2011). These identity markers invoke solidarity and identification with the social group. Solidarity and the belief that Blacks have common interests and should support one another has long permeated Black women’s political philosophy (Collins, 2000)

Black Greek-Letter Sorority Members in Higher Education

Although Black women are making significant strides in the realm of academia, the cost of this success, both socially and emotionally, is rarely recognized in research (Patton et al., 2017). The child of former slaves, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, was recorded as one of the first Black female presidents of a higher education institution. A member of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority, she used her platform to advocate for Black people's education, a highly controversial subject during the 1940s. Despite threats from the Ku Klux Klan, she implored Whites to no longer see Black people, especially Black women, as inferior and appealed to them to open educational doors for Blacks. According to Alexander (2010), "Today, the 'doors' of education have been pried open because of trailblazers such as Bethune" (p. 195).

Another Black female trailblazer in higher education was Lucy Diggs Slowe. A founding member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Slowe made significant contributions to women's higher education. Leading the founding of the National Association of College Women (NACW) in 1924, she ensured the organization primarily concerned itself with the educational experiences of Black college women (Hevel, 2015). Additionally, as Howard University's first dean of women, she persevered and fought back against struggles that many women, including Black women, face in the workplace, like sexism, efforts to belittle accomplishments, pay equity, and discrimination. No stranger to Black women's challenges in higher education, Alice Dugged Cary, a charter member of the second chapter of the Zeta Phi Beta sorority, made her mark on higher education history by becoming the second principal of what is known today as Morris Brown College. Joining the fight for knowledge equality, she also served as Atlanta's first Black librarian at the first public library branch accessible to Blacks under segregation (Trace, 2015).

There is no lack of evidence that Black women, especially those with memberships in Black Greek-letter sororities, have worked in pivotal roles in higher education. Black women like Bethune, Slowe, Cary, and countless more catalyzed the increase of Black women seeking instruction at higher education institutions. Participating in American higher education for more than a century, Black women have made great strides towards occupying their rightful place within academia, despite facing many personal and professional challenges (Henry & Glenn, 2009).

Challenges in the Workplace

Black women's place in the workplace has been long documented over time. The research found detailing Black women's challenges in the workplace and especially when working in higher education institutions has grown exponentially. One significant challenge is negative stereotypical beliefs about who they are as individuals. Yoder et al. (1996) found White women were treated with stereotypic overprotection in contrast with Black women who deal with denigrating stereotypes as welfare recipients and beasts of burden. This is important to note since the social realities in higher education organizations are shaped by the behavior of its members (Lewis, 2016). These types of stereotypes provide identity challenges for Black women.

Identity challenges can become barriers to the success of Black women. According to Herbert (2012), "These stereotypes range from caricatures of the mammy to the matriarch to the growing popularity of the educated Black bitch" (p. 100). Additionally, Black women's response to stereotypes is essential since responses can be interpreted as a lack of being a team player. When Black women are categorized as not team players, this hurts their chances for career advancement.

According to Kelly et al. (2017), another challenge encountered by Black women in higher education includes being required to provide services and support. For example, “Components of the tenure process include teaching, scholarship, and service, and Black faculty reported an unusual burden of service in the form of appointment to several university committees or student advising load” (Kelly et al., 2017, p. 308). Many Black higher education administrators and professionals face increased pressure to provide services and support to Black students because it helps them thrive. However, time not spent on research activities and service are not always seen fondly during tenure and promotion processes (Kelly et al., 2017).

Tokenism is also a challenge for Black women in the workplace. Black women in higher education institutions are often expected to provide insight for all Black people because Black administrators are often represented in smaller proportions in comparison to their White counterparts (Valverde, 2003). In addition to being forced as a representative for an entire diverse group of people, their academic and career achievements are discounted. This is due to assumptions they were chosen for the position based on their skin color and not their merits. This double minority status leads faculty and students to view Black women scholars as less capable, leading to fewer full-time, tenured positions for Black women faculty, and Black women’s assumptions as affirmative action recipients incapable of graduate-level work (Walkington, 2017).

It is not uncommon for Black women in higher education to face racial and sexual discrimination. Thus, they experience a myriad of stressors in the workplace. A study conducted by Hall et al. (2012) revealed five underlying themes of stressors when Black women face racial or sexual discrimination in the workplace. These stressors included “(a) being hired or promoted in the workplace, (b) developing relationships with coworkers and mentors, (c) dealing with

racism and discrimination, (d) being isolated and excluded and (e) shifting or code-switching to overcome barriers to employment” (Hall et al., 2012, p. 213).

Black Women in Leadership Roles in Higher Education

Despite challenges, representation of Black women among higher education administrators has slowly risen. A report titled “Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education” published by the American Council on Education (2016) found a less than 3% increase in Black women serving as university presidents. The data shows the rate rose from 5% in 1986 to 7.9% in 2016. The report showed that nearly two-thirds (60%) of higher education professionals are women, but of those women, less than 23% are Black or other ethnic minorities (Bicshsel et al., 2018). As Black women become higher education administrators, their presence positions them to influence practices and policies to support their success as administrators (Jean-Marie & Lloyd-Jones, 2011).

Additionally, a more diverse leadership group in higher education administrators “often yields more fully deliberated decisions made from multiple perspectives and experiences resulting in deeper and wider considerations of ever-changing students, schools, and the world at large” (Surna, 2018, p. 52). Having more Black women in leadership roles in higher education positively affects other Black women, but they are among the groups of racially diverse higher education leaders essential to providing an effect on student learning and overall success (Holder et al., 2015).

History of Black Greek-Letter Sororities

The founding members of the first Black sororities were no strangers to racism or stereotypical views of sexism. Black sororities were organized when mainstream society subjected Black women to rejection because of their skin color and having to prove their

capabilities in the collegiate world (Johnson, 2019). Black women in these sororities were considered extraordinary since they could pursue higher education when a college education was not easily accessible to African Americans. From challenges faced by early Black college students, the need arose to organize a support system, the horizontal ties known as sisterhood (Johnson, 2019). The year 1908 marks the monumental formation of the first Black sorority named Alpha Kappa Alpha.

Alpha Kappa Alpha's history began on January 15, 1908, in Washington, D.C., on the campus of Howard University. According to Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority (2018), "Together with eight other coeds at the mecca for Negro education, Ethel Hedgeman crafted a design that fostered interaction, stimulation, and ethical growth among members and provided hope for the masses." Alpha Kappa Alpha has graduate chapters in the United States, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Germany, Japan, Liberia, the Bahamas, Dubai, Canada, Bermuda, and South Korea. It consists of 1,018 graduate and undergraduate chapters, which equate to approximately 300,000 members worldwide. With the motto, "By Culture and By Merit," Alpha Kappa Alpha members still stand firm on the bedrock of the rich legacy of servant-leadership that epitomizes the sorority to this day, evident by the global reach of its programs, laser-focused on the health, wealth, family, education, human rights, and parity issues that concern its constituents (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, 2018).

The second Black sorority created was Delta Sigma Theta. Twenty-two collegiate women founded Delta Sigma Theta on January 13, 1913. Founded on the campus of Howard University, similarly to Alpha Kappa Alpha, they endeavored to promote academic excellence and aid those in need. With over 200,000 current members in more than 1,000 collegiate and alumnae chapters

worldwide, the organization is a sisterhood of predominantly Black, college-educated women (Wiggins, 2018).

Like both the Alpha Kappa Alpha and Delta Sigma Theta sororities, Zeta Phi Beta sorority was also founded on the campus of Howard University. Founded January 16, 1920, Zeta Phi Beta's constitution mirrored that of their brother organization (Phi Beta Sigma), thus creating the first and only constitutionally bound organization (Cooper, 2018). Zeta Phi Beta has chartered hundreds of chapters worldwide, has a membership of more than 100,000, and takes pride in its continued participation in transforming communities through volunteer services from members and its auxiliaries (Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, 2019).

The fourth and final Black Greek-letter sorority is the Sigma Gamma Rho sorority. Unlike its three predecessors, this sorority was established in Indianapolis, Indiana, at Butler University on November 12, 1922. The organization's mission is to enhance the quality of life for women and their families in the United States and globally through community service, civil, and social action (Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, 2019). With over 85,000 members worldwide, Sigma Gamma Rho follows the slogan, "Greater Service, Greater Progress."

With the membership of Black Greek-letter sororities increasing yearly, it is critical to understand how this specific peer group plays a role beyond the college experience. Alpha Kappa Alpha, founded in 1908, started with 16 members and in 2019, had a membership of nearly 300,000 members. Delta Sigma Theta's membership has grown from 22 in 1913 to a reported membership of nearly 200,000 members (Wiggins, 2018). The Zeta Phi Beta and Sigma Gamma Rho sororities each began with a membership of fewer than ten women but now have more than 100,000 and 85,000, respectively. These women make a lifetime commitment to continue the legacy of building social capital and uphold the strong ideals of education, integrity,

public service, and activism (Johnson, 2019). Therefore, it is imperative to see if this commitment is seen in the building of beneficial social networking and Black sisterhood that provides the ability to move into administrative positions in higher education.

Creating Social Capital Through Black Sorority Membership

McKenzie (2008) examined social capital within Black organizations. The research showed that Black organizations exert a bridging influence on their participants. This bridging influence refers to “connections among individuals’ social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000 p. 19). According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources that are linked to membership in a group that provides its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital. The collectivity-owned capital provides a credential entitling members to relationships that exist and are sustained by material or symbolic exchanges that help maintain them (Bourdieu, 1986).

Developing professional contacts and social capital can be incredibly crucial to one’s ability to move higher in their chosen career field. Social capital “involves existing connections or ties among group members, as reflected by the frequency with which they share certain types of information or are connected and know one another” (Linuesa-Langreo et al., 2018, p. 903). In addition to providing an atmosphere where friendships are created, Black sorority members also gain and develop professional contacts, leading to bonds that last their entire lifespan. Black sororities are valuable in generating social capital for their members, serving as an intersectional support system, and providing students with a sense of community and belonging (Greyerbielh & Mitchell, 2014).

Professional contacts made by Black Greek-letter sororities often transition into mentor relationships, which Gardner, Jr. et al. (2014) list as critical to Black women’s success in higher

education. Mentorship programs created by higher education institutions require participants to develop a relationship built on personal and professional trust that starts by providing the mentor/mentee dyad the opportunity to get to know one another (Lynch-Alexander, 2018). Unlike traditional mentorship programs, membership in the same Black Greek-letter sorority accelerates the relationship development process by providing a firm foundation for building social capital quickly. Membership opens the door for Black women in Black Greek-letter sororities to take advantage of Bourdieu's social capital model. Bourdieu's social capital model provides strong evidence tying social capital to a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition and connections is integral (Bourdieu, 1986).

Career Development for Black Women

Understanding the lived experiences of Black women as they navigate career development is critical. It is difficult for Black women to grow their careers alone (Smith et al., 2019). Smith et al. (2019) found that Black women need commitment and support from their organizations to advance. Their findings also indicated that important sponsors—those who “protect, prepare, and push” them—are critical facilitators in the success of Black women in their career development (Smith et al., 2019).

In a study exploring the impact of professional counterspaces on Black women in Student Affairs, West (2019) noted that because Black women still exist at the intersection of being a gendered and racial minority in higher education professional settings, they continue to suffer consequences related to achieving professional success. The underrepresentation of Black women as they pursue careers in higher education severely disadvantages these women because their intellectual accomplishments and professional contributions are often overshadowed by their diminished societal status (Henry, 2010). West (2019) emphasizes, like Smith et al. (2019),

that mentoring relationships, expanding professional networks, and professional development activities play a pivotal role in Black women's career development. These activities help Black women pursue professional goals more aggressively and, in some cases, move them closer to the realization of new career advancement goals (West, 2019).

Leadership Development in Black Greek-Letter Sororities

Black Greek-letter sororities have been a part of college campus cultures around the United States for over a century. Members of these organizations, like Toni Morrison (Alpha Kappa Alpha), Shirley Chisholm (Delta Sigma Theta), Zora Neale Hurston (Zeta Phi Beta), and Dame Mary Eugenia Charles (Sigma Gamma Rho) have been on the forefront of social change and stood as recognized leaders throughout history. Black sororities have continuously used leadership development as an essential and guiding principle of the organizations. Furthermore, they claim to instill and influence members' leadership skills (Routon & Walker, 2016).

Each of the four Black Greek-letter sororities has elaborated on how they facilitate leadership development for their members. Alpha Kappa Alpha indicates that one of their oldest official leadership programs, called "Leadership Fellows" was created explicitly "to facilitate and provide educational and professional leadership development for sorors" (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, 2018). According to the organization, members receive training focused on leadership development, professional career development, and personal development.

Delta Sigma Theta also provides leadership development education to its members. Their training encompasses the use of individual and group activities, case studies, and discussion questions designed to support members' leadership training needs. The organization reveals that the leadership development focus has been dictated by the organizations' desire to provide

insight into effective leadership behaviors for sorors both in the organization and within their communities (Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, 2013).

Leadership development training is not just limited to members of Alpha Kappa Alpha and Delta Sigma Theta. Zeta Phi Beta also offers leadership training to Black women holding membership in the organization. Dr. Mary Breaux Wright, the sorority's 24th international president, confirmed the organization's leadership development focus stating, "Leadership and training are fundamental components of any organization. . . . Our goal is to create better leaders for the world" (Wright, 2015, p. 2). Wright (2015) describes their Zeta leadership program as "composed of leadership modules, to provide members with an enhanced skill set that will propel them to be successful as they matriculate from college, motivate employees, and make positive changes throughout our communities" (p. 2).

Sigma Gamma Rho's leadership training consists of similar practices to their peer organizations. The organization claims to provide its members "opportunities to develop their unique talents through leadership training and involvement in sorority activities"(Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, 2019). In addition, "sorority activities provide an atmosphere where friendships and professional contacts are developed which often lead to bonds that last a lifetime" (Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, 2019, p. 1). The organization outlines one of its guiding principles as its dedication to facilitating an environment where members assist each other in personal and professional success.

Gaps in Research

Scholars have long-established the positive effects of social capital, values derived from resources embedded in social ties with others that characterize the structure of opportunity and action (Zúñiga & Scherman, 2017). Social capital, built through social networks, like sororities,

is critical to studying career trajectory. Social networks are an essential variable that explains career issues, such as career satisfaction, success, and development (Fryczyńska & Ivanova, 2019). However, little research has been published about Black Greek-letter sorority membership and postgraduation career trajectory or advancement.

Black Greek-letter sorority membership and postgraduation career trajectory is not the only area with limited published research. Countless studies focusing on sorority membership and both academic and student success outcomes have been published. Proponents for sorority membership often argue that these organizations foster positive relationships with other students, provide a connection to the college, and promote increased engagement (Bowman & Holmes, 2017). Despite this, very few studies have been published about sorority membership beyond graduation from college.

Whereas little research has been conducted about sorority membership beyond college graduation, especially for Black women in higher education, many researchers have supported a need for further exploration. Biddix et al. (2018) suggest that more research is essential to validate claims about sorority membership benefits in their multi-institutional study. Mitchell et al. (2017) echo that sentiment by recommending research that might be explored using various methodological approaches to explore what Black women gained from being a member of a Black Greek-letter sorority (Mitchell et al., 2017).

Further research on sorority membership benefits is also a common theme found in research recommendations of studies conducted on college students' career development who were members of sororities. Sampson et al. (2015) suggest future research should investigate sorority membership's longitudinal outcomes. This could be achieved by assessing the career

development level of first-year students who become members and collecting follow-up data as an alumnus ten years later (Sampson et al., 2015).

Summary

The lack of Black women in leadership roles in administration in higher education is a critical issue and is amplified by increasing attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the field (Holder et al., 2015). Understanding both Black women's roles in higher education and the challenges they face in the workplace is critical (Kelly et al., 2017). Other researchers have widely documented the types of challenges throughout literature. However, these challenges must be addressed because having more Black women in leadership roles in higher education is essential to providing overall success in student learning (Surma, 2018)

Furthermore, current research provides evidence that social capital can be vital to one's ability to move higher in their chosen career field. However, a continuation of research into Black women's Greek-letter sorority membership and career advancement in higher education will help justify increasing visibility of sorority affiliations to combat barriers to retaining Black women administrators and professionals in the higher education field. The following chapter will provide information outlining the method of inquiry for this qualitative research study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

I designed this study to explore the influence membership in Black Greek-letter sororities has on the career advancement of Black women working in administrative roles at higher education institutions. This chapter provides a framework for the qualitative research design and methodology for this study. Included are the following subtopics: research design and method, population, study sample, (d) data collection and data analysis, ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations, and summary. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

Q1. How do Black women perceive that membership in Black Greek-letter sororities prepared them for career advancement in higher education?

Q2. How do Black women perceive that membership in Black Greek-letter sororities influenced their professional success in higher education?

Research Design and Method

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was the research methodology I used for this study. This qualitative research method proved beneficial as a form of methodology, allowing me to explore the various perspectives and experiences of participants, and determine how they impacted their thoughts on the influence their membership in Black Greek-letter organizations had on their career advancement while working in higher education. According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), the qualitative approach focuses on people's experiences from their perspective. Participant perspectives in this study also provided a deeper understanding of how contact with sorority members in higher education work environments combats challenges Black women face working in higher education.

Population

According to Alase (2017), the essence of conducting an IPA research study with homogenous participants is to get a better understanding of the overall perceptions among the participants' lived experience. With that in mind, this study participant selection criteria consisted of three components: (1) Each of the study participants self-identified as Black women, (2) they each held a professional staff position at a four-year higher education institution, and (3) all the participants were members of one of four Black Greek-letter sororities: Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, or Sigma Gamma Rho.

I invited 25 individuals that met the selection criteria to participate in the study. The number of individuals invited to participate provided the ability to secure 12 participants, which was the projected number of participants for this study. I sent each of the 25 individuals an invitation to join the study and chose participants who had careers in higher education for more than three years.

Study Sample

The participants for this study were Black women serving in various administrative roles in higher education institutions. Three participants with sorority memberships were chosen to participate from each of the four Black Greek-letter sororities. The smaller sample size provided the ability to go more in-depth when examining participants' lived experiences in relation to the sororities (Roberts, 2019). Ages of the study participants ranged from the early 30s to late 60s.

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Abilene Christian University (ACU), I used the Facebook professional social group, "Black Women in Higher Education" to identify study participants. Initial contact was made with participants through the messaging feature on the social media platform, with a request to engage in the study. Once

participants agreed to participate, I sent the consent form and the interview protocol for their review.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews

I collected data for this study using open-ended, semistructured interviews, as suggested for an IPA study (Smith et al., 2009). Study interviews were conducted electronically through a video-conferencing software and were recorded. The video aspect of the interviews was important as it gives researchers the best opportunity to understand that the innermost deliberation of the lived experiences of research participants study also includes nonverbal responses (Alase, 2017).

The interview with participants consisted of a 45–60-minute interview to find the influence they believed membership in a Black Greek-letter sorority had on their career advancement as Black women working in higher education. Participants were asked six open-ended interview questions and four demographic questions (Appendix D). I gave each participant the opportunity to review the interview protocol prior to the interview, and I asked participants the same questions during their interviews.

Expert Review

Interview protocol for this study was validated by an expert in the field of higher education leadership. The expert reviewer was a higher education institution administrator with an extensive career in higher education and was also member of one of the four Black Greek-letter sororities. The reviewer provided validation of the instrument by assessing the purpose of the study, research questions, and interview questions to ensure I would be given the appropriate

responses to answer the research questions. I code and interpreted interview responses to generate recurring themes and patterns.

Recording and Transcription

Alase (2017) explained that IPA research study should utilize different technological devices to collect necessary data. Researchers found that when attempting to write down everything the participant says during an interview can only capture the gist, missing important nuances (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

For this study, interviews were captured using Zoom, a video and audio-conferencing platform. Audio of the interviews were transcribed into verbatim textual data using a digital computer transcription service Temi to prepare for coding analysis. Temi transcriptionists sign non-disclosure agreements, and files and data were encrypted using TLS 1.2 protocol, bank-level security. Once transcription was complete, each transcript was uploaded to a password-protected account and then reviewed by me for accuracy in preparation for interpretation, coding, and identification of themes.

I immediately destroyed video data collected through the video and audio-conferencing platform by deletion of each file. Only audio data was maintained after interviews for transcription. The video files were separate from the participant audio data files and not required to complete the study. Therefore, the deletion of each video file prohibited any further access to the electronic data.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used as the method of analysis to review the data collected for this study. Following the IPA data collection procedures recommended by Smith et.al. (2009), the data analysis began with one-on-one semistructured

interviews. These interviews were audio recorded and then submitted to Temi transcription service. I reviewed each of the interview textual data and compared this to the original recording to ensure accuracy.

Once validity was confirmed for each transcribed interview, IPA analysis helped support the purpose of the study and allowed me to analyze the interview data in-depth. IPA provided the opportunity to engage in an interpretative relationship with the participant transcripts (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This engagement was vital because the first stage of analysis occurred through multiple readings of the transcripts. I was able to increase familiarity through this process and capture themes that emerged from participants' accounts.

The next stage of analysis was the production of a table of the themes. I ordered these themes coherently. During this process, each superordinate theme and an identifier was added to each instance to aid in the organization of the analysis and to facilitate finding the original source subsequently, as suggested by Smith and Osborn (2015).

Once I analyzed each interview transcript by the interpretative process, I constructed a final table of superordinate themes. Throughout the process, I worked to discern repeating patterns but also acknowledged new issues emerging in the participants' transcripts (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This information provided guidance as I determined future recommendations and implications for change for universities and Black Greek-letter sororities.

Moving into the final stages of the interpretive analysis, I progressed from creating final themes to the creation of a final statement outlining the meanings inherent in the participants' experiences. From each theme, narrative accounts were translated. I utilized excerpts from transcripts to support accounts as results, confirming that clarity was seen between participant responses and my interpretation of them (Smith, et.al., 2009).

Establishing Trustworthiness

Alase (2017) explained that an IPA research study should develop mechanisms that will allow for the research data and findings to be thoroughly authenticated so that the end results are not defective. These mechanisms help the reader understand why the study is trustworthy. Trustworthiness comes from the researcher using ethical research practice that is centered around a commitment to monitoring for any violations of ethics throughout data collection and analysis (Smith et.al., 2009).

In an effort to ensure quality, I used tools to authenticate and verify the phenomenological research data and findings. Trustworthiness was established by utilizing member checking. I completed member checking to verify the accuracy of data after collection and analysis (Naidu & Prose, 2018). Upon finalizing the transcripts and identifying final themes, I provided participants with a copy for their review and the opportunity to respond with any additional comments or suggested modifications.

The credibility of the data collected in this study is also supported due to my use of analytic memos. As interviews with participants transpired, I took notes and wrote comments and reflections on the perceptions being shared. Birks et al. (2008) identified that using memos allows the researcher to engage with their research to a greater degree than would otherwise be the case. This engagement allows for the establishment of an intense relationship with the data collected, thus enabling the researcher to feel a heightened sensitivity to the meanings contained therein (Birks et.al., 2008).

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this research, maintaining ethical standards was a chief priority. Ethical considerations were taken to certify that study participants were not harmed, and risk was

minimal. I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before the study began. I informed participants at each stage that their participation was voluntary, and that they could conclude the study or skip answering a question at any time without penalty.

I provided each participant a consent form that outlined that their specific institution of employment would not be informed their participation. Pseudonyms were utilized for each participant to ensure further confidentiality throughout the study. Each of the consent forms collected from the study participants were kept secure in a locked file cabinet drawer, of which only I had keys to unlock.

Participants were allowed the opportunity to review interview transcripts to ensure the integrity of the textual data collected during their interview and provide clarity or supplementary information. The Temi transcription service used to transcribe the participant recordings met security compliance guidelines. The company had built in security measures to ensure the confidentiality of each interview submitted with the data being encrypted at rest and in-transit using TLS 1.2 protocol, bank-level security. Only I had access to the transcription account used and the transcription site account was password protected.

Audio recordings of participant interviews were stored on my password-protected personal computer. After three years, all audio recordings collected during the interviews will be destroyed by deletion of each file prohibiting any further access to the electronic data. Hard copies and forms collected from participants will be held in a secured lock box for three years and shredded when the holding period for these documents has expired.

Any information collected during this study is only accessible by me. Electronic documentation is secured in a password-protected computer and any paper documents will be kept in a secured lock box.

Assumptions of the Study

It is assumed that each participant provided honest responses to questions asked during the interview process. It is also expected that all the data I collected was reported accurately without bias or prejudice regarding the perceptions of the study participants regarding the influence of Black Greek-letter sorority membership on their career advancement as Black women working in higher education.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to Black women who are members of the four Black Greek-letter sororities and currently employed in administrative positions at private and public higher education institutions. Perspectives from participants will only focus on their thoughts on the impact of their sorority membership on their career advancement in higher education institutions.

Summary

Qualitative phenomenology served as the best methodological approach to meet the purpose of this study successfully and answer the research questions this study aimed to address. I utilized open-ended, semistructured interviews to obtain data regarding the perceptions of Black women serving in higher education administrative roles have of the influence their membership in Black Greek-letter sororities had on their career advancement in higher education. By transcribing and reflecting on the interviews, I ensured the data presented was credible and trustworthy, allowing future researchers to understand how the findings contributed to better understanding the influence Black Greek-letter sororities have on Black women and their career advancement.

Chapter 4 reveals findings of the research based on the data collected. Excerpts and themes based on responses provided by study participants in the interviews expound upon the data.

Chapter 4: Results

For this qualitative study, I used IPA to explore the various lived experiences of 12 Black women that have a membership in one of four Black Greek-letter sororities and who currently work in administration roles in higher education. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore Black women's perceptions on the influence that membership in Black Greek-letter sororities have on their career advancement in higher education. Black women working as administrators in higher education were the participants. The intent was to extend the current literature on the career advancement of Black women in higher education and provide data about the impact of membership in Black Greek-letter sorority on career advancement in higher education to foreground further development in this area. For this to be achieved, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

Q1. How do Black women perceive that membership in Black Greek-letter sororities prepared them for career advancement in higher education? Based on my coding of participant interviews, the following themes emerged: (a) received wisdom, (b) increased accountability, and (c) preparation for management.

Q2. How do Black women perceive that membership in Black Greek-letter sororities influenced their professional success in higher education? Based on participant responses and my coding of these responses, the following themes emerged: (a) support system, (b) networking/professional connections, and (c) sisterhood/personal connections.

This chapter provides the findings of this IPA qualitative study. Included are the following subtopics: (a) sample and population description; (b) interview protocol; (c) data analysis/prevalent themes; and (d) summary and preview of next chapter.

Sample and Population Description

Twelve Black women administrators in higher education participated in this study. Each of these participants held membership in one of four Black Greek-letter sororities: Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, or Sigma Gamma Rho. The smaller sample size provided me with the ability to go more in-depth when examining the administrators' lived experiences and how their memberships in the Black Greek-letter sororities impacted their career advancement (Roberts, 2019). I initially invited 25 Black women with memberships in one of four Black-Greek letter sororities who currently work at four-year universities holding positions in administration to participate in the study.

Out of the twelve participants selected to participate in this study, all but four held assistant director, associate director, or director-level administration positions at their current university employer. Three participants were vice president or dean level, and one was an academic advisor. The participants represented universities from all over the United States. The participants ranged in ages from the early 30s to the late 60s. They all have been members of a Black Greek-letter sorority for 225 years collectively. Regarding gender, all 12 participants were female, and all identified as Black (Table 1).

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant Pseudonym	Black Greek-Letter Sorority	Ethnicity	Number of Sorority Membership Years
AKA 1	Alpha Kappa Alpha	Black	13
AKA 2	Alpha Kappa Alpha	Black	19
AKA 3	Alpha Kappa Alpha	Black	31
DELTA 1	Delta Sigma Theta	Black	23
DELTA 2	Delta Sigma Theta	Black	11
DELTA 3	Delta Sigma Theta	Black	4
ZETA 1	Zeta Phi Beta	Black	15
ZETA 2	Zeta Phi Beta	Black	25
ZETA 3	Zeta Phi Beta	Black	33
SGRHO 1	Sigma Gamma Rho	Black	11
SGRHO 2	Sigma Gamma Rho	Black	13
SGRHO 3	Sigma Gamma Rho	Black	27

Participant Descriptions

AKA 1 is an assistant director of student life at a four-year higher education institution. She had been in higher education for 18 years. She served as an assistant to the director and housing director before accepting her current role at a top private research university. AKA 1 is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha. She has been a member of the sorority for thirteen years.

AKA 1 has had an extensive career in higher education. While her career was predominately in university housing, she is now providing support to a diverse graduate student population as an assistant director of student life. She is responsible for assisting graduate students with various personal and academic issues impacting their student experience. AKA 1 will soon be completing her doctorate in higher education administration.

AKA 2 currently serves as an assistant vice chancellor for human resources at the university where she is employed. Before entering this role, AKA 2 worked as a compensation

manager whose primary role was developing, monitoring, and evaluating job classifications and salary levels. During her seven-year higher education career, she has been promoted to associate director and director of compensation before accepting her current assistant vice chancellor position at a private Christian university. Additionally, she is currently completing her doctorate in higher education administration.

AKA 2 is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha. She has been a member of the organization for 19 years. AKA 2 joined the organization during her time as an undergraduate. Her participation heavily influenced her membership in one of the sorority's high school outreach programs called "Alpha Kappa Alpha Debutantes." This allowed her to connect with the sororities' membership once she started college.

AKA 3 has worked as a higher education practitioner for over 25 years. She has held positions in alumni development throughout higher education, multicultural affairs, student housing, student conduct, and academic advising. In her current role, she serves as the assistant vice president for student affairs. Furthermore, she is the Title IX officer and senior diversity officer at the public university where she is employed. More than 10 years ago, she earned a doctorate in higher education administration.

AKA 3 holds membership in Alpha Kappa Alpha. She has been a member for 31 years. During her years of service to the organization, she has served in local, state, and national level sorority positions and attended many of the sorority's conferences. AKA 3 joined Alpha Kappa Alpha as an undergraduate member during her time as an undergraduate studying business administration.

DELTA 1 is an assistant vice president for student affairs in her university's multicultural division. At the time of her interview, she had been serving in this role for one month. Before

being promoted to her current position at the public university, she was an executive director for TRIO programs for four years. DELTA 1's career in higher education spans more than 16 years and includes academic and career education, teaching, and advising. She has held a Ph.D. in higher education administration and leadership for over five years.

As a member of Delta Sigma Theta, DELTA 1 has attended several of the organization's regional conferences, national conventions, and smaller sisterhood retreats. She is a legacy member of the organization, which had a significant influence on her decision to join the organization. DELTA 1 has been a Delta Sigma Theta member for 23 years and joined at the undergraduate level.

DELTA 2 currently serves as the women's resource center director at a private liberal arts college. As an administrator with 14 years of higher education experience, she has held roles in university student housing and student development. Additionally, her higher education experience has included equity and inclusion, interpersonal violence prevention, and coordinating a university's advocate program. DELTA 1 has a master's degree in higher education and says she is interested in advancing her education by pursuing a doctorate in higher education.

A member of Delta Sigma Theta, DELTA 2 joined the organization at the graduate level, a year after completing her undergraduate degree. She has been a member of the organization for 11 years. While DELTA 2 was interested in the organization during her undergraduate studies, she could not join due to missing the organization's intake processes because of deaths in her family and personal health issues. DELTA 2 has held leadership positions at the sorority's graduate chapter level and has attended sorority conferences and training.

DELTA 3 is in her 14th year as a higher education administrator, but first as a diversity, equity, and inclusion director at a four-year, independent, coeducational liberal arts college. Most of her higher education experience has been in student affairs roles, such as new student orientation, student programming, and student leadership and involvement. DELTA 3 completed her Ph.D. in leadership studies a few months before moving into her new director role. In this role, she is responsible for spearheading student advocacy, programming, and services to shape the campus' community development, understanding, and appreciation of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

DELTA 3 is a member of Delta Sigma Theta. She has been a member of the organization for four years, joining the graduate chapter. She participated in "Deltateens," a youth program sponsored by the sorority that provides educational, cultural, service, and social exposure for female high school seniors. She believed that "from a very young age, Delta was the only way" and sought out membership at the undergraduate level but was unable at that time for "many reasons."

ZETA 1 is the director of student affairs assessment and staff development. As a director at a public, historically Black research university, she currently oversees assessment for 18 functional units. She has worked in student affairs for eight years. Her higher education experience includes various positions in multiple areas, including judicial affairs, student organization management, multicultural affairs, and residence life. She also is the chief executive officer of her own higher education consulting firm. Additionally, ZETA 1 earned her doctorate in organizational leadership.

As a member of Zeta Phi Beta, ZETA 1 believed she "was a Zeta before she even knew what a Zeta was" and felt connected with the members during her undergraduate experience.

This is her 15th year of membership in the organization, and she has served in various sorority leadership positions. She is currently a state leadership and development coordinator for the sorority and has attended leadership training through the organization.

ZETA 2 has over 15 years of experience in higher education. As director of Greek life at a public land-grant research university, she advises and oversees all student Greek-letter councils and Greek student organizations. ZETA 2 also works with housing and directs Greek alumni relations. During her career, she has done work at a national level to help identify reforms to eliminate structural and systemic barriers to sorority membership.

ZETA 2's membership in Zeta Phi Beta started as an undergraduate college student while pursuing her baccalaureate degree. She has been a member of the organization for 25 years. As a first-generation college student, she said she was not familiar with any of the four historically Black Greek-letter sororities when she arrived on campus. However, she learned about them through a student she encountered in her university residence hall. Additionally, she participated in and became the president for a Zeta Phi Beta sorority auxiliary group at her university called "Ladies of Distinction." Her participation in this group "helped her become a member" of the organization.

ZETA 3 has extensive student affairs experience and earned her doctorate in higher education. Her experience in higher education spans over 25 years. Before her current role as dean of students at a public research university, she served as an associate dean for five years. While working as a higher education administrator, she has provided university leadership for student conduct, student engagement, and student care and well-being. Zeta 3 has experience in Greek life and has served as a motivational speaker locally and nationally for higher education organizations.

ZETA 3 has held membership in Zeta Phi Beta for 33 years. She believes “most of the people she spends time with on a personal level are Zetas.” Before attending college, she did not know about Zeta Phi Beta or Black Greek-letter sororities; however, she credits her college best friend for introducing her to the organization. ZETA 3 has earned two certifications from the Zeta Organizational Leadership program, a nationally structured, intense leadership training program through her organization that she described as the “pinnacle of leadership training” for the sorority.

SGRHO 1’s current role is as an academic advisor at an online for-profit university. She has worked in various higher education roles throughout her 19-year higher education career. As a result, she has served as a support coordinator, resident assistant, and program coordinator. She has also overseen the multicultural center at a university. SGRHO 1 has a Ph.D. in higher education administration. Furthermore, she owns a higher education consulting business.

Presently serving as a regional officer for the organization, SGRHO 1 is a Sigma Gamma Rho member. She has been a member of the sorority for 11 years. SGRHO 1 joined the organization at the graduate level after obtaining her bachelor’s degree in hotel restaurant management. She also has attended regional conferences hosted by the sorority.

SGRHO 2 currently works as the associate director of multicultural programs and engagement and the female institute director for the learning and development program at a public research university. Before her current position, she served as an assistant director for multicultural Greek life. Her higher education administration career was inspired during her stint in student affairs as a graduate assistant working with at-risk college students. She has worked as a higher education administrator for seven years and has earned a master’s degree in organizational communication.

Before she was a Sigma Gamma Rho member, SGRHO 2 learned about historically Black Greek-letter sororities from her middle school and high school teachers. She has been a member of the sorority for 13 years. SGRHO 2 serves in a regional leadership position for the sorority as an area coordinator.

SGRHO 3's interest in higher education was inspired by leadership opportunities she participated in during her undergraduate experience and a university administrator conversation. Her current role is as a senior director for volunteer engagement at a private research university. With experience in Greek life and student affairs, this higher education administrator has held both the assistant dean of students and director of fraternity and sorority life positions. She earned a doctorate in organizational leadership and communications six years ago and has a 20-year higher education administration career. Additionally, she also is a team member at a management consulting and training firm.

In her 27 years as a Sigma Gamma Rho member, SGRHO 3's journey with the sorority began in 1994. She has served the organization in various leadership roles, including a Sigma Gamma Rho graduate chapter basileus and a life member, an alumnae member with at least 10 financial sorority years with Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated. SGRHO 3 described her sorority chapter experience during her undergraduate career as a "powerful experience" and "very transformational."

Interview Protocol

All 12 participants contributed to a confidential, semistructured interview that contained 10 original questions. Each question related to one of the two research questions aimed to highlight the experiences and thoughts of Black women working as higher education administrators and who are members of historically Black Greek-letter sororities. I conducted

each interview one-on-one via video conferencing using Zoom. Once completed, the interviews were transcribed using the Temi Transcription Service. I reviewed each transcription against its recording. Once revisions were made, each participant had the opportunity to review their transcript and make any necessary revisions to ensure clarity of ideas or better grammatical coherence.

The research questions and the interview protocol are located in Appendix C and Appendix D.

Data Analysis and Prevalent Themes

I generated coding that identified recurring themes using the participants' responses. Participants provided their perceptions and accounts of their experiences regarding the questions asked throughout the interview process. While participants were forthcoming with a vast amount of rich responses, I did not incorporate or employ all responses in the findings to determine recurring themes. All 12 women willingly shared their own inimitable experiences connected to the study's overall purpose. The following topics presented represent recurring themes that emerged from the interview responses of study participants.

Sorority Selection Process

I asked participants to describe the process they used to select their specific sorority. Many of the women stated that family member affiliations to specific Black Greek-letter sororities were pivotal to their decision to join their perspective sororities. Teachers that shared their sorority membership affiliations in classrooms or during extracurricular activities also encouraged participants during their process of choosing a sorority to join. Others suggested their connection to the sorority was cultivated by their perceptions of the images that the sorority and

sorority members had on campus. Multiple women discussed these types of connections had a direct effect on their choices.

Family/Teacher Connections

AKA 1

I went to a predominantly White institution, but I have a cousin through marriage who went to North Carolina Central. She was always talking about those students. One summer, I had an opportunity to hang out with her on campus for the summer. She introduced me to one of her girlfriends. Her girlfriend had on this cute shirt, and it had a little ivy leaf on it. I did not know anything about the sorority, but I thought the shirt was cute.

I remember returning to college that fall for the first time. That was my first year at school, and I saw someone else with a similar shirt. I wanted to know how I could get one of those. Honestly, that is just really what stood out to me.

AKA 2

I was an Alpha Kappa Alpha debutante in high school because I had many high school teachers who were Alpha Kappa Alpha members. Many of my mother's friends were active in the graduate chapter near where I was going to school. Because of this, it was one of those things that just naturally happened because I had made many connections with Alpha Kappa Alpha members and made friends as a debutante, so I felt a natural connection with that group of individuals.

AKA 3

I met a faculty member, and she was a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, and her husband was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. My interactions with them are

what drew me to Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. I babysat for their kids and admired that faculty member, and saw she was a very respected community member. That was my connection. That is how I came to want to be a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. It was the two of them and them being role models.

DELTA 1

I am a legacy. My mother has been a member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority for 56 years. Being a member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority runs in our family too. My mother's sister was a Delta and both of her sister's daughters, my cousins, are also members of Delta Sigma Theta sorority. It was in the family.

DELTA 2

The members of Delta Sigma Theta sorority in my life were all aunties. They cared about me. They would say, "Come do this project with me" or "Let me, let me nominate you for this award." While I did not know them as members of Delta Sigma Theta sorority at the time, I knew about them and who they were.

When I got ready to go to college, there was one member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority that left an impression. She was in the adult choir at my church. She was also the one who wrote my letter of recommendation to join the Delta Sigma Theta sorority. I grew up with her, and I was talking to her one day about college. She was the one that told me, she did not doubt that I was going to be successful in college.

SGRHO 2

I also mainly learned about Greek life from my teachers. My step coach was one of my middle school teachers, and she is a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. Then,

my high school AP history teacher was a member of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority.

They did not talk about their organizations a whole lot, but they were influential.

My mother's best friend is a member of Zeta Phi Beta sorority. I knew about that sorority just from hearing her talk about being on the yard at her university and other things about joining a sorority.

Image of Sorority and Sorority Members

AKA 1

On my college campus, I had the opportunity to attend a "Meet the Greeks" event. This meeting allowed me to go around to the sorority's table and learn more about the organizations on my campus, both divine nine and the multicultural organizations. Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority stood out for me. I loved their valuing of education.

The founders of the sorority were educators. At that time in my life, I wanted to be a high school teacher. I liked what the organization stood for because I could see myself being a teacher, so it resonated with me.

Then, I learned the magnitude of the organization. Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority was founded first, and the fact they were a historically Black sorority resonated with me even more. I began to learn more about the organization and the history and the great work they had been doing, and the people on campus. I then learned about the celebrities that were a part of this organization and the love that communities give towards Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. Those are just a few of the things that drew me in, and here I am over ten years later.

DELTA 1

My friends were all members of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. My childhood friend became a member of Zeta Phi Beta when she went to school. You think I would join a sorority with my friends, but I started to look around campus. I saw who was doing the work and who was carrying themselves the way I wanted to carry myself, as a woman of distinction. Then, I changed my mind. I said, “Nope, I am definitely going to pledge Delta Sigma Theta sorority.” That was my process. I saw that Delta Sigma Theta Sorority members were about their academics, were working and volunteering in the community, and doing service in the neighborhoods near the university. I felt like they stuck true to the virtues and values of the sorority.

ZETA 1

The current Black Greek-letter organizations on campus would do a step expo and then read about their history. That was my first exposure to Greek life. When I was touring the campus, my tour guide was a Phi Beta Sigma fraternity member, but all that makes sense a little later.

I am at the step expo, and everybody is stepping and reading history, but only one organization did not have to use a piece of paper to read their history. Those were the members of Zeta Phi Beta sorority.

In November of that fall semester, I had a near-death drowning experience at school. I was probably about 30 seconds from losing my entire life. I did not know how to swim and got into the deep end. I saw the white light. I remember vividly saying, “God, if it is my time, I am ready to go.”

Later that next year, I knew they were going to start the sorority membership process. I knew that when I joined something, I want to be able to leave a legacy. I

wanted something that was me and that I did not have to fit or change who I am to be a part of. That was Zeta Phi Beta Sorority for me.

I knew I made the right decision when we had our first pledge meeting. The members of both Phi Beta Sigma fraternity and Zeta Phi Beta sorority came into the room. I was the only person in my pledge line. In the room, I see the member of Phi Beta Sigma that provided my incoming college tour. He was the person who sold me on the university and a person I admired. It all started to come together for me then. I saw that I would also have a brother/sister bond by joining this sorority since their constitutions bind the organizations. Not only do I get sisters, but I also get brothers.

That same night, I was supposed to pay my membership fees. I had my check ready and handed it to my pledge class dean. I remember one of the older members inquiring about why I wanted to be a member of Zeta Phi Beta sorority. I told him about my story, the near-death drowning. He took my check and ripped it up in front of my face. I got nervous because I thought that meant they did not want me to be a member anymore; however, they all said that I was a part of their family now. One of them explained that I should instead use the money to take care of my medical bills and they would cover my pledge membership fees. I cannot remember if I cried right then and there, but I cried at some point because that is when I knew I made the right decision.

As much as being a member of Zeta Phi Beta sorority gives me a headache some days, I am always reminded of that story because that act of kindness from the members is where my foundation came from and is how I chose to be a member.

My best friend from college excitedly approached me and said, “I need you to go to this tea with me. I cannot go by myself”. It turned out to be an interest meeting for Zeta Phi Beta sorority.

When I got there, many of the women I recognized in the room were women who had been kind to me when I was a freshman. There were a resident assistant and different student leaders. Even girls helped us get into parties for free, and girls that made sure we had food when we did not have money. I did know before then that they belonged to this specific sorority. This was not on my radar.

I filled out the membership application, got invited to an interview. After the interview was completed, I felt like they were not even going to pick me. Then, I got my letter in the mail. I said, “Oh my God,” and I was excited.

While it was not something I was looking for, seeking, or had ever considered in life, the things that they were doing, the things that they talked about, and the way I had encountered them on campus, I felt like I could definitely see myself as a member of this sorority.

SGRHO 1

It is all about soul searching and doing your research. Identifying each one of the organizations and finding out what they stand for. Researching their sorority image and what types of activities they do on campus and in the community. This is super important. So, I am a researcher, and that is what I did in getting to know the organization before I became a member.

SGRHO 2

Before coming to college, I had not heard of Sigma Gamma Rho sorority, to be one hundred percent honest with you. I was exposed to other Greek letter organizations, so I knew about Greek life in some capacities. When I got to my institution, Sigma Gamma Rho sorority was inactive, and there was no presence.

I did not see members of Sigma Gamma Rho sorority until the spring of 2007. That year the chapter was reactivated, and I knew a few of those members from meeting them during my first year of school. They were just exceptionally kind. Those members invited me to many events, and they approached me as a first year to join. I told them no at that time but asked if they would allow me to do more research.

The thing I love so much is even though I said no, at that time, the members of the sorority still invited me to events. They invited me to programs and were so friendly. Even though I had turned them down, that sentiment meant a lot to me and spoke volumes to me.

After seeing the sorority members on campus and all the fantastic work they were doing, the awards they were winning, and with whom they were doing great collaborations, I became so impressed with the sorority. I began to think this sorority is a fit for me. What pulled me in was the genuineness of the members and the tenacity of the organization.

SGRHO 3

I am a first-generation American and first-generation college student; therefore, I cannot tell you that I understood legacy or what people meant when they spoke about Black Greek-letter organizations.

I was in a summer program before I started college, and three of the women in the program had joined Sigma Gamma Rho sorority in the spring of 1994. I remember being at an event, and I just always admired them. I thought they were classy, beautiful, and smart.

At the event, I saw them wearing Sigma Gamma Rho paraphernalia. I inquired about what it meant. The members explained it was a sorority they had just joined. That event I was attending was their first big event, so they were so excited.

The next summer, I ran into one of the members in the university cafeteria. We had a conversation, and I stated, “You never told me about this group you joined.” She told me about it and then asked me, “Have you ever thought about being Greek and joining a sorority?” Out of nowhere, I said, “Yes, your group.” That is how it started.

After that, they asked me to meet some of the members since they knew I was interested. The more and more members I met, the more interested I got. I found them all to be really involved, really in the know about things, and I respected how they carried themselves on campus.

Benefits Gained From Sorority Membership

Participants believed their memberships in their specific sororities provided benefits. Many of the participants experienced increased networking opportunities and gained professional connections resulting from their sorority membership. Others found sisterhood and personal connections to be a significant benefit of membership. Participants also noted these benefits could reach beyond their sorority. Their affiliation with a Black Greek-letter sorority also garnered support and connections from other Black Greek-letter sorority and members.

Networking/Professional Connection

AKA 2

No matter where I am in a physical location, I could reach out to someone, whether through another Soror that I have met through school or other places. It is a connector. Whether it be at work or in the community, it is one thing where you do not have to do things alone. You can reach out to somebody say, “Hey, I have a soror who lives in Fort Worth; reach out to her.” And when you reach out, be like, “Hey, this soror already gave me your number and said to say hi.” It is always a very positive interaction. The connection has really had an impact on me as an older adult. I am happy to be able to connect with those individuals and network.

AKA 3

Though I live in Kansas, I still can connect with my sorors across the United States. Being a member of the Midwest region and traveling, making those connections personally or professionally has worked for me. While I have worked at predominantly White institutions, knowing I can connect with another NPHC [National Pan-Hellenic Council] member keeps me closely connected.

For example, on my campus here, a faculty member is a Delta Sigma Theta sorority member. We are the only two members of NPHC organizations on our campus. I often say that members of other NPHC organizations and especially sororities members are my NPHC sorors because we have a connection. The way our organizations are founded, what we rely upon, how we connect. We are members of the two oldest organizations for NPHC, and we have a connection now. Do we joke with each other?

Yes. Did I buy her a mask that has an elephant and Delta Sigma Theta sorority on it? Yes. We have those connections.

It has been the opportunity to connect with members of my sorority and have that connection, personal and professional, on another level with the other NPHC groups. I find that is a fulfilling opportunity. It is a great way to connect and support each other. I do not necessarily see that within NPC and IFC organizations that they connect across as a council. However, we could network not only within the sorority but also through the NPHC council.

DELTA 1

It is nice when you go on a job interview and whether the person is a Delta or not, but they are a member of one of the Black Greek organizations. It is nice to have that connection. I do not think that you get the job over someone else due to it, but it is nice to ask some more pointed questions because your values are similar, your mission, and your work. You can say, "What is the real deal for Black people in this neighborhood and this community? How are we treated on this campus? How our students, and what are their experiences? What is your experience?"

And then there is, "What church do you attend and where do you get your hair done? Is there a chapter here? Can I get involved? If not, what are the other ways I can get involved in the Black community?" That has been a benefit everywhere that I have been. I have been able to get acclimated into the better communities as a result.

DELTA 3

My current supervisor is a member of Zeta Phi Beta sorority. We were able, even in the interview process, to connect on certain parts of that. There is just something about the culture that aligns very well.

I have learned many things professionally as a member doing the work of Delta Sigma Theta sorority. I have been able to apply in lots of different areas in my professional career. I have several mentors who are Delta Sigma Theta sorority members and have even really been able to pay that forward because my current intern is also a Delta Sigma Theta sorority member. Having that level of community and sisterhood has a way to build those bonds has benefited, even in the professional realm.

ZETA 1

It is an instant connection of community and networking anywhere I go. In terms of my career, you have little groups that cater to Black Greek-letter organizations or Zeta Phi Beta sorority members in different higher education pockets. That is another network and depending on the levels that people are at in their careers, you could have job opportunities and research opportunities.

ZETA 2

I can go anywhere in the world with my Zeta Phi Beta sorority letters on, and I will be recognized. Furthermore, it does not matter which Black Greek letter it is just because I am Greek, I will be recognized by another Greek.

Even in the job market, just having those letters on my resume, regardless of whether you are in a Black sorority or fraternity, just being Greek, you will be recognized. Who would have ever thought that being a part of a sorority would open doors from a career standpoint?

Sisterhood/Personal Connection

AKA 2

The primary benefit is knowing that you always have somebody somewhere you can connect with, especially now during this whole COVID-19 pandemic. You can reach out and have someone check on you. If no one else does, you have your sisters from school or work.

DELTA 1

Of course, lifelong sisterhood. I keep in regular contact with about four of my line sisters. We have a group me and everything.

DELTA 2

One cheesy benefit is sisterhood. I am an only child, and my mom is the oldest of six; she has five brothers. I wanted something that would give me that same bond. What I found was that it gave that to me with my 24-line sisters. It is an alumni chapter; we do not cross a whole bunch of people. There are just 25 of us.

I go through imposter syndrome regularly. However, when I enter that group chat and tell my line sisters that I want to do something and or experience struggle, I will get a barrage of affirmations, encouragement, and private messages. They say, "You got this."

We are all grown. I am the youngest on my line. I was 22 when I became number 22, and my oldest line sister just turned 68. However, it does not matter. Our age does not change a thing, and that is invaluable to me. You will not find 24 other women who support me and the way I support them.

DELTA 3

I have moved across the country. It has been wonderful to be able to move and automatically have a community to get connected. Being a member also gives you that sense of community even with other women who are in other divine nine organizations. Even though you are not my soror, I can still have that sense of connectivity.

ZETA 1

Anywhere I go in this world, I am connected to either a member of Zeta Phi Beta sorority or a Phi Beta Sigma fraternity member. Because of social media, you can put on your page, "Hey, I am headed to Texas." Then someone will reply, "Hey, soror, I am in Texas. Be sure to direct message me and let me know when you get here." That is real, and I do it, and we meet up. It is an instant connection of community and networking anywhere I go.

ZETA 3

I am an only child. It was a good fit with the people that are in my sorority. I did not realize that my relationship and involvement as a Zeta Phi Beta sorority member would move way beyond my collegiate experience. I would say most of the people I spend time with on a personal level are Zeta Phi Beta sorority members.

SGRHO 1

We talk about sisterhood all the time, but it goes a little bit deeper than that for me. I am the youngest of three, and I had two older brothers who were 12 and 13 years older. In the process of just living this life and existence, I have lost both, so sisterhood was huge for me. I never had sisters, so this was an opportunity for me to be in a world where I can understand what it is like being around women and sisters. Also, being able to share that connection and that bond I never had.

This sorority has brought me sisters and truly taught me what it is like to have sisters. Sometimes we like each other, and sometimes we do not and are in fights. However, I know I can depend on them, and I know that they have identified their love and support for me because whenever I go through anything, they are one hundred percent there. Being a member of my sorority meant having true sisters, which I have gotten out of it.

SGRHO 2

I will start with sisterhood. I know that it sounds pretty cliché, but I am an only child, so I wanted sisters. I wanted that experience. To me, sisterhood was something I was looking for, and I found people who have poured into me and have allowed me to pour into them. My sorority sisters have seen me at my best and my worst, my absolute worst. They have held my hand and been in my corner. My sorority sisters have supported me on anything that I have decided to do.

SGRHO 3

The person I have become today, I must attribute it to my sorors. Being in our sorority chapter was hard. They were very high performing, high achieving, so new members joining wanted to come in and be the best they can be. Every Sunday, we had a chapter meeting, and people got called out if they did not have things up to par. Our chapter had very high standards, and they had won chapter of the year, so they would tell us that we had to win again. Our chapter was also regionally recognized.

I came into a very high performing chapter, but I wanted to do that. They helped develop me. I think about the person I am today. There was a time I could not have even done an informational or public speaking because I would be too nervous about doing it.

It is crazy how today my life has completely changed, but I know it was all those experiences that shaped me.

My sorority sisters showed me the true meaning of sisterhood. I think about being around women that cared about each other—having interventions with one another. You know how things go. We had a soror infatuated with her ex-boyfriend, and we had to tell her not to do that.

We had a member that was not going to class, and we had to say, “What are you doing?” Before you knew about mental health, they were the foundation for my understanding of what it is to care about a person in totality, that what I experienced with them.

I learned to love myself too. I had issues with my weight. I had issues with what I looked like, and I surrounded myself with people that I thought were so fly but never made me feel bad for where I was. I just wanted to be better around them. And so slowly but surely, I was able to do that.

I appreciated that they called you out if your outfit was not right or your hair was not right. But in a good, healthy way, I do not think we see this as often anymore on college campuses.

Training Experienced as a Result of Sorority Membership

All the women agreed that training had been incorporated into their sorority membership experience. Most of the women shared the type of training they received as a Black Greek- letter sorority in preparation for management. This training came in many forms, including sorority officer positions on local, national, and international levels, retreats, workshops, and leadership development training. The management preparation allowed participants to adapt to the demands

of their roles in higher education more easily. It also provided skills and a platform to practice these skills to make them successful in the workplace.

Preparation for Management

AKA 1

Within the sorority, leadership development is an ongoing thing. Not only within the chapter but also in the region. If you are interested in holding positions within the organization, there is always training that goes along with it.

The chapters have their retreats to talk about roles, responsibilities, and operations. Then, you have your regional conferences to learn more about what is happening on a regional level. Then you have what we call the Boule, which is all members coming together. You cannot only connect with other women from around the world, but you can learn more about the organization and how to run your chapter in terms of financial procedures. We can take advantage of the workshops that provide us with skills that we can use internally and externally.

AKA 2

Membership in the sorority allows you to prepare for meetings and to lead a group of people. It taught me some supervisory skills. It also really taught me how to interact with other people when you are in a leadership position. It helped me with professional attire.

In my HR role, you may not have to have white stockings on, as you do for some Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority event, but there is a way to dress professionally. Being in leadership or just being in a sorority gave me much insight into dressing professionally because we must have a specific dress code for every event or meeting. Having that was

very important. It sounds minor, but I think many people need that from what I see in HR right now.

My membership also taught me how powerful women in leadership are. It gave me such insight into the powerful professional, experienced women. In the sorority, you have so many who are around that it cannot help but rub off on you and influence or touch you somehow. Seeing those people around me all the time was critical and very influential for me.

AKA 3

It goes back to being an undergrad. We went to regional conferences and undergrad experience, now called Roundup. We have cluster meetings too, where you can get together in a smaller situation. We were also able to observe the leadership styles of our graduate advisors.

The nice thing is that I am a member of the graduate chapter that had oversight for my undergraduate experience. It gives me goosebumps to think about that and to say that out loud.

I observed some things that were helpful for me to learn as a leader. I work with individuals, work with my fellow sorority sisters, and interact with folks in the community. Because not only am I representing my family, I am representing Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority.

Our sorority gives leadership opportunities. Our Supreme Basileus, our international president, said, "Always nurture your ivy." As an undergrad, I did not realize what nurturing your ivy meant until years later. It is one of the things I explained to other NPHC and IFC organizations that our membership, learning, and leadership

training goes beyond the undergraduate experience. You learn foundational things as an undergraduate. You get to put them into play at work, in the long-term. You do that as an undergrad, but you are still gaining information and helping each other. Everything you learn as an undergraduate, you can carry to your career.

DELTA 1

We had a Greek retreat, and it was all the fraternities and sororities of the divine nine. It was a full day of exercises and seminars. It was great. I remember those things were more centered on student leadership, developing your identity, and discussing what legacy you want to leave on campus. We discussed what work we wanted to do individually but also as an organization. That was good.

There has been even more of that going forward. In the last 22 years, I have had training from regional conferences to national conventions to smaller sisterhood retreats.

DELTA 2

I have facilitated retreats and different leadership opportunities, and I think that is how they prepared me for leadership by believing in me.

Delta Sigma Theta sorority is full of women who are leading companies, nonprofits, schools, and businesses. We are not missing any leaders. My initiating chapter saw a person who wants to lead and is willing to learn things that she needs to do.

I have always taken pride in something that I am always willing to learn in my job and personal life. Delta Sigma Theta sorority gave me the tools to learn. Even if they could not pay for the whole thing, they will get you some dollars to cover training fees. They will pass a hat around the chapter meeting to raise funds.

I have never been the chapter president, but I have gone to plenty of stuff with the chapter president because she let me know if someone else did not want to go to training and then would invite me. And I say, “I will drive. Let us go.”

It is the combination of them believing in me and investing in me, then creating a space for me to do that. The most significant piece of my leadership came from the sorority.

DELTA 3

There are particular pieces that Delta Sigma Theta prides itself in as far as training members. There is leadership training that we do on an annual basis every sorority year. I have also gone through training for membership intake. That adds another whole level of training and development, including risk management, financial budgeting, and event planning. I have also served in leadership positions in my chapter. I was the chapter secretary, and because we were a small chapter, I also served as the technology chair. I designed their website, and they still use it today. I even designed their logo. Because of that skill set, I also ended up being a journalist. That happens a lot in small chapters. Everybody wears many hats. I did the flyers, and even when it came to doing ads, we did all of that.

In my current chapter, I am on the technology committee as well. Not only do we have to learn what we are doing, but we also must provide training for other sorors, even if it is a technology tip. The sorority gives you the skills you need and sets you up to help teach those skills to others.

ZETA 2

I learned you do not sign anything with a pencil. You make sure you always have that nice, good blue ink to sign everything with because that is a legal document. I learned things like that.

I learned about the importance of process and procedures. How to make sure you know all the rules and all the policies that go with it because you want to make sure you always put your best foot forward.

If you must go into a meeting or when you are going to meet with your advisor, you cannot just half do it because you want to be prepared. If somebody comes behind you and says something, you want to make sure you can speak to that. I learned all that stuff.

When I was doing my membership intake process, my big sister did an outstanding job ensuring I learned all those business pieces of the sorority. Our organizations are business-oriented; we are not just social and about having a good time. We are a business, and we continue to say that until this day. That is why we are incorporated because we are a business.

ZETA 3

In Zeta Phi Beta sorority land, the pinnacle of leadership training is to be ZOL-certified [Zeta Organizational Leadership program]. Moreover, I am double certified since 2011. I do need to go back and get my advanced classes because apparently, I need to get some more upper levels of certifications, but we have a leadership program. All our conferences are called leadership conferences because they have various kinds of leadership elements. If you go to a Zeta Phi Beta sorority organizational leadership training, that means you are preparing to be a leader beyond just in your chapter.

SGRHO 3

I thank Sigma Gamma Rho sorority for my career. I thank it for teaching me to value myself, to be a part of something larger, and that I always represent all of us. I think about that every day, and I have been a member for 25 years. I still ask myself questions like, “Should I be wearing that? Or should I do this? Should I say that?” And that is a good thing. That is leadership. It is self-awareness when you think about authentic leadership. My sorority taught me that when it came to the hard conversations, they are because people who care about you will help you become a better person.

Influence of Membership in Sorority on Career Advancement

The participants shared that their membership in a Black Greek-letter sorority influenced their career advancement, and networking was a theme mentioned multiple times. They expressed that having a built-in network provided access to more opportunities. Some women even experienced elevated reputations when people became aware of their sorority affiliations. Other participants found that having a support system made up of their sorority sisters helped their career advancement.

Networking

AKA 2

It is that networking ability. To know a sorority member who works somewhere, or their mom works somewhere, or et cetera, just having that network of people to call on.

AKA 3

I could see networking being a component. I have made many connections, and who knows, my membership in the sorority may have been what got me elected as regional director of our region for a national higher education organization. If someone sees in my

bio that I am an Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority member, I might have gotten their vote just for that. So, now I get to be in that leadership role for the region, serving on the board.

DELTA 2

One of the biggest takeaways for me is that we are always looking for new opportunities for ourselves. We are always looking at the opportunities around us and try to help the sorority members we relate to.

ZETA 1

When you start going to conferences, it is easy to connect with someone you have common interests with. For me, it was members of Delta Sigma Theta sorority and members of Phi Beta Sigma fraternity. Those conversations turned into, “Hey, I am working at such and such, can you come to speak? Alternatively, we have job openings.” From there, it has just spiraled out. I know it was because I have Greek affiliation that I have gotten to some of these spaces.

ZETA 2

I do not know at what point my favorite sorority sister and I interacted, but it was on like popcorn after that. She is probably the most remarkable individual I have ever known. She is full of energy and life. She kind of dragged me into some things. Through her influence, she ended up on a national board, but she first invited me to be a part of a community program and some other stuff and different projects that she had.

She nominated me for the national programming chair. Then, she encouraged me to apply for the vice president’s position. She still has plans on other things that she thinks that I need to be doing. Amid that, she also got me involved with all the initiatives as the NPHC coordinator for a program.

Because I was open to the process of thinking about being a Zeta, I ended up being a part of all these different leadership boards. I got invited to be on a national board of directors for the honor society, a multimillion-dollar organization, and a managing board.

All these things happened because way back in 1987, I went to an interest meeting. When you flash forward, I ended up getting a job at my current institution, which led to some other opportunities, which led to me going to conferences, which led to me being put in all these different positions. So, absolutely everything happened because I think I went to that interest meeting.

SGRHO 3

I remember people helping me out. I value that it is a network.

Support System

AKA 2

It has helped at my current institution because I know I have people in my corner. I am in a space where few women of color, so having those sorority sisters on campus has been beneficial. I know I have a group of individuals rooting for me and who will speak up for me and say, "Yes, I know her, and she is a good person. She is a talented person; she is a smart person." That network of people has been significant, especially as I have navigated my current university.

AKA 3

I see the impact of sorority membership is more of a support system. While the contact I have had within the sorority may have been minimal because of the state and the region I am currently in, I believe it has still impacted me.

DELTA 2

I was in graduate school and told a soror that I was having a tough time finding a job in Atlanta. I could not figure out why they did not want to hire me. My soror explained that most of my higher education experience was when I was an undergraduate. She told me, “You need some new post-grad school higher education experience.” I responded, “I cannot get experience if people do not hire me to get experience.” She told me to graduate, and then we could talk about it and see what she can do. After I graduated, she did help. She created a position for me at her university.

From that short internship, she was able to help me get residence life experience, fundraising experience, and first-generation experience. She did help and made sure that I had a foundation that we could build on.

SGRHO 1

Even when society and the academy did not accept me, my sorors stepped in and loved me and encouraged me. I just started my own consulting business for higher education. I am so super excited, and that happened because of the encouragement from my sorority sisters. My sisters have stood behind me and supported me every day.

I have had opportunities to move or advance in higher education, but I have a 17-year-old and is in school, so I do not want to move him. Because of this, I have not taken opportunities offered to me by sorority members until he finishes; but there are offers everywhere. They say, “I got you, you just come here, and I am ready.” The support is tremendous.

SGRHO 2

Sorority women surround me. My director is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, and she has believed in me from the very beginning. Even getting the job and then really going to bat for me for my promotion because my promotion, honestly, is a made-up job. There was only a director, associate director, assistant directors, and administrative staff in my department. My role as associate director is a new role. I have been in this position for about a year now, but it was created by my director and the senior vice president, especially for me.

My director went to bat for me. There was not any room for growth technically. She went to the vice president and explained that I had been at this institution for five years and asked what we can do to keep me. I must thank her for that.

Influence Sorority Mentorship Experience on Career Advancement in Higher Education

The sorority mentorship experience influenced a considerable amount of the participants. The received wisdom was a multidimensional aspect of their sorority experience. The wisdom described could be from an elder sorority member providing advice and guidance to newer members. The wisdom could also be received peer to peer.

Participants likewise described their own current experiences serving as mentors. Many of them noted their decision to mentor other sorority members directly influenced the mentorship they received due to sorority membership. This type of relationship was described as typical, and participants were appreciative of these connections.

Mentorship can also transcend sorority membership affiliations. Some participants explained that members of other Black Greek-letter sororities had provided them wisdom and guidance because they were members of one of the four Black Greek-letter sororities. This also influenced the career advancement of participants.

Received Wisdom

AKA 1

The power of mentorship is indescribable. It is a two-way street. I love to meet with sorority members who have more experience. I want them to pour into me, tell me the scoop, and keep it real. I want them to let me know what is going on.

I like having the mentorship experience with other women. It something powerful when we get together, and we talk about our experiences. Something that they have experienced, whether it relates to serving in a particular role or being in a chapter, I have learned some things from it.

In my current position, I have a soror who is a mentor and a dear friend. She has stuck with me. She has been in the sorority for about twenty years. I am learning how to lead more effectively in my role as a vice president and take those same skills to connect with people to do what I need them to do. I am learning tips and tricks on how to move people from point A to point B and trying to get them to see and join along in my vision. She has helped me within the sorority indefinitely and provided me with some strategies that I have used over the past couple of years. Now that I have her as a mentor, I asked myself, "Where was I before? Why did I not know this?"

An example that comes to mind is her advice on my performance reviews. She taught me that you always want to keep track of all the things you are doing throughout the year. For example, if they ask you to spearhead all those committees, they asked you to serve. She taught me the importance of keeping track of those kinds of things more strategically and learning how to ask for references or feedback to use that information to

your advantage when you are doing your evaluation. That was just one of the areas she has provided guidance.

In higher education, there are many politics, and she is helping me work on my face and keep my attitude in check so that I can play the politics. There are politics in the workplace. You must be open to mentorship. I am open to mentorship because it has influenced me as a sorority member and helped propel me professionally.

AKA 2

I think it is important that the older sorors reach out and mentor younger sorors. I had those individuals to reach out to when I was in a place where I did not know how to navigate or work within a space or had difficulty. I was always able to reach out to a soror and ask a question or ask, "How do I do this? Or what do I need to do next? Alternatively, when you had this issue, what did you do?" Mentoring is a valuable resource.

AKA 3

Two years ago, I had the opportunity to serve as the conference assistant to the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority international president while she was in my conference. She was amazing to observe, and I got to ask her questions. I was able to benefit from some conversations with her about the things she was working on. I loved having the opportunity to learn from her. Because of the relationship we created, I know that I can do that if I want her to coach me. I can ask her for that.

DELTA 2

The mentorship has been good. It has allowed me to learn the nuances of being a high achieving Black woman in higher education. I have had the opportunity to learn from

multiple women of Delta Sigma Theta sorority, including some of our national presidents.

DELTA 3

I hear my students say, “Oh, I wish I had gone to HBCU.” Sometimes NPHC, specifically divine nine Greek organizations, provides that sense of culture, often not at a PWI institution. I feel like my membership and mentorship in this organization have helped me try and fill that gap to serve my students better. Having mentors in Delta Sigma Theta sorority provides that sense of knowledge of the organization behind the scenes.

ZETA 2

Multiple NPHC sisters were influential by navigating the political side of things and teaching me from a career standpoint. They taught me when it is appropriate to speak on certain issues and when is not a good time speaking on certain issues. They taught me what is inappropriate, how to dress, how to show up every day, and that the way you are presenting yourself is crucial.

That was very helpful in my early years. Especially sorority members who helped me get to the level where I am by coaching me about my resume, telling me to get a specific type of experience to set me up for another position.

SGRHO 1

I have been groomed and mentored by some strong and powerful women who saw it in me when I did not even see it in myself. My mentor has been a member of Sigma Gamma Rho sorority for 24 years now. She took every opportunity she could to learn from everybody. Then, she took all of that, and she gave it to me. You would not believe the

knowledge that I have gained and the opportunities I have had afforded me because of that grooming and mentoring from my sorority members.

Being a Black woman is a fight every day. You must have others around you who pour into you and who feed into you. Those women who are your wise counsel and who are there to uplift you and to tell you, “God has got you.” I have that from my sorority sisters, and that is tremendous. They continue to uplift me all the time.

SGRHO 2

I have had several mentors that are sorority women in my organization and outside of my organization. There are many women I can think of. It started before my career. Even before going into grad school, one of my mentors, a member of Delta Sigma Theta and one of my first bosses, really gave me the information on how to do an assistantship and what that even was. She was the one that told me I could get my degree for free and that I should look for opportunities so I would not need to pay for anything.

Experiences Working in Higher Education as a Black Woman

When asked to describe their experiences as Black women working in higher education, each participant articulated many negative experiences. Double standards, psychological stressors, and fabricated ambassadorships were described as common occurrences in the workplace. Almost all participants shared feelings of isolation and seclusion as their experience as Black women working in higher education.

Feelings of Isolation and Seclusion

AKA 1

It is hard being a Black woman in higher education. We cannot show up as our authentic selves, whether it be my hair, attire, clothes, or ability to express myself verbally. I feel

that I have worked hard throughout the years, and even now, I am still not getting what I deserve.

We cannot make the same mistakes as Black people, especially Black women. I have had colleagues who are not the same race as me mess up and had the opportunity to come back again. Black women do not have that same luxury, and it bothers me. I do not want to always go to work and feel heavy, but I am constantly watched over my shoulder.

AKA 2

When I started at my job, I walked in, and no one looked like me. There also had not ever been anyone who looked like me in the space. As the first Black female in the department, it was difficult. I dealt with macroaggressions, but as a Black woman, I expected it.

DELTA 2

I am the only Black director. I am also the only director who has ever shown any interest or capacity to help students who are not White. That means I am constantly on more committees than my colleagues. I constantly have my brain picked way more than other people.

DELTA 3

It is daunting. There are times where you do not necessarily see yourself in the leadership and administration. How can you position yourself so that you are not only sitting at the table but also your voice is heard? And that you are not an afterthought being added to the conversation when they need help to clean up an issue. If you bring me in from the start and then maybe you will not flub it in the first place. That is what it is like to be me as a Black woman in higher education.

ZETA 1

The first institution I worked at was a small, private, predominantly White institution with about 1500 residential students. Out of about 300 faculty and staff, only two of us were Black. I was one of them in a very racist space.

It was my first job out of my master's program. I got there in July, and then I started looking for jobs in September. The only reason I stayed the full year was because of the Black students. However, the reason why I left was because of the Black students as well. I stayed because I knew they needed to see more people who looked like them and supported them. However, I left because they came to me and said, "We love you. We are glad you are here, but they do not allow you to do your best work here. We would rather lose you to an institution that is going to give you what you are worth, so you can be all that you can be rather than to keep you here and watch you not reach your highest potential with students."

ZETA 2

It is very hard being a Black woman in higher education. You must be incredibly careful with how you show up every day. When that happens, it is hard to be yourself. For the most part, I will say I can be myself, but I still must tiptoe in certain areas because of my position.

ZETA 3

I have had more than my fair share of horrible experiences. I have had people blatantly attack me and malign my character.

I had a young lady whom I worked with in my office at the time. We were at an event, and when we were meeting people, she introduced me as her nemesis. We both

worked in a division together, but I had only limited interactions with her, so I was unsure what she was talking about or why she would say that to her colleague.

I have had many times where I had to bite my tongue and hold my peace. I had somebody I was working with tell people, "I do not think she is a good person." However, they can never provide a reason or tell anybody why I am not a good person.

I have had people who have tried to attack me. I had a mean-spirited boss. I think he had an issue with women of color. He cursed me out during lunch at a conference. When I reported it, I was told, "Oh, he is a good man. Maybe he was having a bad day." When his behavior continued to escalate, and I took it to human resources at my university. I was told I needed to adjust myself to his training, to him, and his management style.

SGRHO 2

It can be hard changing your mindset. I feel that it has become my job to be a voice for the voiceless. Especially at a White institution, the voice you are trying to project is not the majority's voice. Other people cannot quite understand what that even looks like or means. It is not easy, but I am grateful for the colleagues I have that are very supportive and encouraging. However, it can feel a little lonely sometimes because you feel like only a couple of us care.

Influence of Membership on Professional Success in Higher Education

Participants were asked to describe the influence membership in their sorority had on their professional success in higher education. Many participants shared examples of the increased accountability they had experienced due to being members of their specific sororities. This feeling of increased accountability manifested itself in many ways, according to

participants. Some of these behaviors included pursuing advanced educational degrees, doing work in their community, and motivating some participants to present themselves in the best light.

Participants also suggest the increased accountability magnifies their visibility and need to protect the reputation of the organization. They are motivated to be prepared for meetings, dress professionally and be confident. These are all behaviors cultivated by the sorority and have also increased their professional success in their higher education careers.

Increased Accountability

AKA 1

Being in Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, I have been exposed to many different women of many different backgrounds. I am talking about judges, attorneys, police officers, college presidents. It is like a sea of Black girl magic. It forces me to level up.

When I roll up to our sorority meeting each month, I need to have my committee notes together and I have to be sharp and cute. It forces you to level up because these are women who are leaders in the boardroom. Because of this, my membership has had a significant influence on me.

Whenever I step out, whether it is with the sorority or with my job, I always try to put my best foot forward and have my stuff together. Whether it is my speech, my notes, or my PowerPoint, I always want to be packed, polished, and prepared. Because not only am I representing myself, I am representing my family, and I am representing my organization to a certain extent.

My membership has had a significant impact and influence on my profession. I have made sure to surround myself with folks within the organization who are out here

doing their things, and I admire them. It forces me to level up. That level of success within the organization just automatically spills over, and it forces me to make sure that I always present myself in the best light possible.

AKA 2

I think all the things I learned from being in my sorority and all the things I was asked to do in the chapter make me prepared for the next level. It undoubtedly prepares you for leadership. It does.

I think it gave me sort of a leg up, so to speak, as a young Black woman coming in because I had already had to be reprimanded for stuff, so I know what was ok in the workplace and what was not. I had experienced sorors looking out for me, and that is one thing you can always look for in the sorority is someone looking out for you and helping you through problematic spaces. I have met so many different people through my sorority that have helped me navigate some difficult spaces. My membership in Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority had an impact on me professionally and in many ways.

AKA 3

Watching sorority members prepare for their next opportunities has helped me to start thinking about what I should be doing and preparing for in my future. Having our sorority sister, Vice-President Kamala Harris, getting ready to go to the White House, reminds us of how we should hold ourselves, manage ourselves, and respond and interact. It is an excellent reminder of what I am doing now. I am reminded by watching other sorors of the saying, “with great power comes great responsibility, and with some power comes to some responsibility.” That is a key component, so I try to observe our international leadership much more closely.

DELTA 2

Delta Sigma Theta sorority has an international reputation of having hardworking women. I want people always to know that Delta women are going to do amazing work. Because of that reputation, I feel like I am continually trying to be high achieving. I know that I am a great asset to any space where I am.

DELTA 3

Being in my sorority is not just about wearing letters. It is not just a member. It is about living a good life and knowing that I know that I am doing it right. My four-year-old daughter wants to be a Delta Sigma Theta girl when she grows up. Not only is she seeing me break barriers and change my community, but now I have students who come to me expressing interest in wanting to be a Delta just because they have seen how I navigated my life and career. I have been able to present myself positively in the professional realm.

SGRHO 2

My professional success in higher education goes back to the leadership development I received from the very beginning when I became a sorority member. I had continual training being a member. In addition to the training, they also help me know that there is more out there and more important things than yourself. That has always played a role in my professionalism because I always must remember representing someone else. It is not just me anymore.

SGRHO 3

Getting a doctorate was something Sigma Gamma Rho sorority did for me. Seeing so many members have their degrees inspired me, and I knew it was something I wanted to achieve.

I have just seen excellence around me in my sorority and have wanted to be a part of it. I also liked that it is excellent in different ways. For example, we forget that not everybody starts as a flawless, remarkable speaker and presenter. We have to show people grace, and my sorority did that for me. They allowed me to develop on my own with some constructive criticism along the way, but because they were so nurturing and supportive, it helped. It helped guide me and made me want to be better.

Summary and Preview of Next Chapter

Chapter 4 reviewed the themes and correlating responses that provided findings for this study. Through these findings, I hoped to understand better how Black women perceive that membership in Black Greek-letter sororities prepared them for career advancement and influenced their professional success in higher education. Based on the prevalent themes discovered through coding, I found that Black women working as higher education administrators and members of Black Greek-letter sororities have similar experiences and perceptions. The participants discussed the sorority selection process, the benefits gained from leadership, and the training received as a member of their sorority. They also expressed the benefits gained from membership, the influence of sorority membership, and how mentorship influenced their career advancement and the experiences of working as a Black woman in higher education.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Black women leaders' challenges at institutions of higher education have led to difficulty in recruiting and retaining women who could fill the gap at institutions lacking this specific type of diversity in leadership (Holder et al., 2015). To combat the challenges faced by Black women in higher education, many women turn to their affiliations in Black Greek-letter sororities to fill in gaps (Jennings, 2017).

The purpose of this IPA study was to explore Black women's perceptions on the influence that membership in Black Greek-letter sororities has had on their career advancement in higher education. For research purposes, the Black Greek-letter sororities included in this study are Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, and Sigma Gamma Rho. All study participants were members of one of the four sororities identified as historical Black sororities.

This final chapter provides closing interpretations of significant findings and recommendations for future research. Based on sources provided in the literature review and overall theoretical framework, connections in the literature to the findings of this study will be discussed. Subtopics for this chapter are study overview, summary of findings, interpretation of study participant responses, conclusion, implications for change, and recommendations for future research.

Study Overview

This qualitative study used IPA methodology to explore the perceptions of Black women working as administrators in higher education and holding memberships in one of the four Black Greek-letter sororities. Using IPA granted insight into how participants' interpretations of their experiences connected with the research topics.

Study Procedures

This study's data were derived from interviews conducted with 12 Black women who hold memberships in one of four Black Greek-letter sororities and work in administrator roles at higher education institutions. The interviews followed a semistructured protocol. Each participant individually shared how, through their membership in sororities, they perceived the impact that membership had on their career advancement in higher education. I recorded their interview responses and then had them transcribed using the transcription service Temi. I then reviewed the transcription of each participant interview to ensure the validity of the study. I took detailed notes and engaged fully with each study participant, seeking to understand better their lived experiences they conveyed through their responses. Finally, I coded the responses to identify reoccurring themes that provided answers to the two overarching research questions.

Participants

Each study participant served in an administrative role at a four-year higher education institution in the United States. All interviewed had higher education careers that span between seven and twenty-five years. Each participant was a member of one of the four Black Greek-letter sororities, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority. Three participants were selected from each of the four sororities for a total of twelve study participants.

Research Questions and Corresponding Themes

The following research questions guided this study. The corresponding reoccurring themes that addressed each question are also included.

Q1. How do Black women perceive that membership in Black Greek-letter sororities prepared them for career advancement in higher education? Based on coding founded on

participant interviews, the following themes emerged: (a) received wisdom, (b) increased accountability, and (c) preparation for management.

Q2. How do Black women perceive that membership in Black Greek-letter sororities influenced their professional success in higher education? Based on participant responses, the following themes emerged: (a) support system, (b) networking/professional connections, and (c) sisterhood/personal connections.

Summary of Findings

Black Feminist Thought

Despite various reoccurring themes presented, the connection between Black women's experiences as a heterogeneous collectivity, which is the third distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought, emerged as the overarching concept. The connection in experiences among Black women manifests in a group knowledge or standpoint (Collins, 2000). Based on the findings, all participants believed that their membership in a Black Greek-letter sorority influenced their career advancement. This collective belief among the participants is a practice of Black feminist thought. This body of knowledge and perspective focuses on the empowerment surrounding the rights Black women should possess to interpret their realities and define how they experience things. Responding to the impact Black Greek-letter sororities have had on the career advancement of Black women in higher education, participants defined their experience as members in Black Greek-letter sororities as positive because it provided them each with relevant tools, support, and wisdom to successfully navigate career advancement in higher education.

Participants also discussed the importance of the relationships they formed through membership in Black Greek-letter sororities. According to Collins (2000), Black women's efforts to construct individual and collective voices have occurred in safe spaces and involve

Black women's relationships with one another. Through both professional and personal connections that participants experienced with other Black women through membership in their respective sororities, participants came to rely on the nurturing and support that these groups provide. Myers (1980) found many Black women affirm one another through sisterhood and friendship. Participants shared that this affirmation and support played an immense role in not only their experience as a member of a Black Greek-letter sorority but was emphasized through its influence on their career advancement in higher education.

This final chapter explains Black women's perspectives serving in higher education administrator roles about the impact their membership in their Black Greek-letter had on their career advancement in higher education. The findings from this research provide support to universities concerning ways to support Black women working at higher education institutions. Using the data as a guide, university leaders could use the study to identify possible support areas for Black women working on their campus. Furthermore, by reviewing the study, Black Greek-letter sororities can identify ways to incorporate training for members focused on intentional mentorship of other sorority members.

Interpretation of Study Participant Responses

Black women participants holding memberships in a Black Greek-letter sorority and currently serving in administrator roles at universities shared their viewpoints on the influence sorority membership had on career advancement in higher education. Based on their responses, reoccurring themes emerged, providing answers to the two research questions for this study. Themes discussed throughout this section are the following: (a) networking/professional connections, (b) sisterhood/personal connections, (c) preparation for management, (d) support system, (e) received wisdom, and (f) increased accountability.

Networking/Professional Connections

Several participants discussed how membership in their sorority helped to provide networking opportunities and professional connections. From the ability to easily connect with a sorority member in their departments at work or to connect with members worldwide through professional conferences and social media, each of the participants shared examples of how they have connected with other women simply because of their sorority affiliations. West (2019) emphasizes that mentoring relationships, expanding professional networks, and professional development activities play a pivotal role in Black women's career development.

Although networking and professional connections are a vital part of the Black Greek-letter sorority membership experience, participants could not say definitively that they were chosen for jobs precisely due to their sorority affiliation. They did describe that the networking and professional connections led to conversations with sorority members that provided insight into job roles, departments, or universities that might have made their interview processes at each level go more smoothly.

Professional contacts made by Black Greek-letter sororities often transition into mentor relationships, which Gardner, Jr. et al. (2014) listed as critical to Black women's success in higher education. Participant responses confirmed this finding by providing examples of connections they created with sorority members that transformed into mentor relationships. One participant shared that she had many mentors who are members of her sorority. Other participants expressed that not only have they been professionally mentored by members of their sororities, but they also mentor other younger sorority members, as it is expected behavior of Black Greek-letter sororities members. Additionally, some participants experienced cross-sorority mentorship.

Sisterhood/Personal Connections

Greyerbielh and Mitchell (2014) discussed how Black sororities are valuable in generating social capital for their members, serving as an intersectional support system, and providing a sense of community and belonging. Many participants discussed how their membership in their sorority and connection with its members positively impacted their personal lives. When the participants described how they experienced acceptance, love, and support from other sorority members, that positivity trickled down into the other aspects of their lives. Their collegiate experiences were enriched as they connected deeply with other women in their sororities. They also described experiencing increased motivation, confidence, and self-awareness.

Participants described sisterhood as being a profound personal connection that they experienced with sorority members, especially those members that were initiated into their specific chapter at the same time as the participant. Participants described this sisterhood as a deeper bond that many intentionally sought out when they lacked this type of connection in their families due to loss or lack of biological sisters. One participant explained that her sorority sisters had seen her at her worst and her best. SGRHO 2 stated, “My sorors have seen me at my absolute worst. They have held my hand, been in my corner, and really supported anything I have done or decide to do.” She went on to say they poured into her and that has been a benefit. To her and other participants, the sisterhood provided by their organizations is an invaluable benefit of membership in their Black Greek-letter sorority.

Preparation for Management

According to participants, leadership development and preparation for management is an ongoing entity within their sororities. When members join one of the four Black Greek-letter

sororities as an undergraduate student at a university, that leads to the commencement of training that builds a foundation for successful management of groups, departments, or organizations in their careers. Participants agreed that sororities use leadership development as an essential and guiding principle of the organizations. Participants describe that this development occurs in a multitude of ways. These ways include but are not exclusive to being taught supervisory skills, financial budgeting, risk management, and event planning. In addition, membership gave them the opportunity to interact with and influence people, learn how to dress and act appropriately in the workplace, and learn how to interpret and create processes and procedures. All these areas influence members' leadership skills (Routon & Walker, 2016). They also strengthen the sorority members' ability to lead and manage confidently.

Preparation for management in Black Greek-letter sorority also came in the form of representation. Participants believed they had experienced increased career advancement in higher education because their sorority membership allowed them to see other successful Black higher education administrators who were also members of their organizations. Having more Black women in leadership roles in higher education positively affects other Black women (Holder et. al., 2015). Furthermore, some even had access to these members to ask for mentorship or guidance. After seeing other women in their sororities have management success in their career fields, participants describe feeling an internalized belief that they could also be successful in their higher education management careers.

Participants believed their sororities provided experiences and training that enhanced their ability to succeed in management at their higher education institution. The training included regional and national conferences. Many of the sessions at the conferences, according to participants, are geared towards preparing members for leadership, developing their identity

personally and as a leader, and discussing what legacy they want to leave on campus and in their community. These conferences also provide exercises and seminars “composed of leadership modules, to provide members with an enhanced skill set that will propel them to be successful as they matriculate from college, motivate employees, and make positive changes throughout our communities” (Wright, 2015, p. 2). These behaviors are vital for career success and advancement.

The Black Greek-letter sororities provide management enhancement opportunities that include officer, executive positions, and committee appointments at the local, regional, and national levels. These are safe training spaces for Black Greek-letter sororities members to navigate leadership while receiving positive feedback and constructive criticism that will not come with the negative impact that failure could mean if done in the workplace. One participant expressed that her leadership role in her sorority gave her the skills she needed and set her up in ways so she could help teach those skills to others. The sororities make it a point to facilitating an environment where members assist each other in personal and professional success (Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, 2019).

Support System

Several participants expressed the need for support systems as they navigated their careers. It is difficult for Black women to grow their careers alone (Smith et al., 2019). Smith et al. (2019) found that Black women need commitment and support to advance. According to the participant interviewed, being a member of their specific sorority filled the gap and met this need. One participant shared that having sorority members that worked at her job helped because she knew she had people in her corner. Those same sorority members at her job answered questions she had, rooted for her, and vouched for her talent when necessary. These types of

relationships have been invaluable for participants as they navigated their university careers.

A number of participants experienced feelings of isolation and seclusion, double standards, psychological stressors, and fabricated ambassadorships. However, the support systems created through their sorority memberships helped them navigate these challenges. Black women involved in Black Greek-letter sororities are provided with pronounced racial-gender support (Mitchell et. al., 2017). Mitchell et. al. (2017) found that support received from members of Black Greek-letter sororities attributed to persistence in higher education environments for Black women.

Career advancement is a product of the support that many of the participants received from their sororities. This support is not bound to the workplace. It presents itself in sorority members' personal lives as well. Participants shared that the sense of community and belonging they experienced when moving to new higher education workplaces and into new living communities led to an expedited sense of support and belonging. This sense of support and belonging helped assuage the isolation felt by many Black women in higher education and, in turn, assisted in their ability to thrive and experience enhanced career advancement.

The research found historical legacies, prejudice, and racism persisting across predominantly White institutions as barriers for Black women striving to move to leadership positions in higher education (Gasman et al., 2015). The support systems provided by sorority members also help combat many challenges Black women face during their careers in higher education institutions. Through their sorority member support systems, a participant expressed that during these challenges, they received encouragement, support for advancement, and experience opportunities they required to have all the knowledge and skills needed to apply for advanced positions.

Received Wisdom

All participants expressed that received wisdom is a significant aspect of the sorority experience. The advice and guidance members receive from sorority chapter peers and elder members of the organization they made acquaintances with at their workplace or through networking was pivotal to their careers. Received wisdom provides members with actual knowledge of how to navigate a myriad of Black women's experiences in higher education.

Each participant discussed types of received wisdom they had accepted from other sorority members. From advice about performance reviews to navigating interoffice politics, this wisdom often provides valuable guidance in complicated or confusing spaces. Participants even described receiving feedback on leadership strategies, crafting visions for organizations, and insight about upcoming opportunities.

All participants discussed sorority members going the extra mile to provide knowledge and information. According to the responses, participants looked forward to their advice from trusted members of their organizations. The received knowledge did not end with the participants. All the women used the knowledge they acquired from other sorority members and utilized it as a foundation for the mentorship relationship they have created with other sorority members. This kind of support is critical, especially in the early stages of Black women's careers in higher education.

Smith et al. (2019) discussed the importance of sponsors, who "protect, prepare, and push" Black women, as critical facilitators in Black women's success in their career development. The received wisdom passed from sorority sister to sorority sister is an effort formed to protect, prepare, and push each other toward successful career development. This also

connects to creating social capital, which involves ties among group members reflected by the frequency with which they share specific information types (Linuesa-Langreo et al., 2018).

Increased Accountability

Increased accountability was an influence frequently suggested by participants as a product of membership in a Black Greek-letter sorority. This advanced level of accountability was attributed to the magnified visibility they experienced due to their membership in the organization. Participants explained that throughout their sorority membership, they had always been groomed to present themselves in a positive light, because they are direct representatives of the organizations. While their successes reflect positively on their organizations and other members, likewise, failures or negative perceptions from those outside the organization could also negatively impact them personally and other sorority members.

The reputation of sororities is essential. Participants described sorority and sorority members' image as a factor that heavily impacted their sorority selection processes. For some participants, historical reputations took precedence over the image of the chapter, and this affected their choice to join their specific sorority's undergraduate or graduate chapter. The rich legacies of these organizations require the level of increased accountability participants described to continue to attract new members and, as Johnson (2019) described, uphold the strong ideals of education, integrity, public service, and activism.

Conclusion

All participants expressed that they had experienced significant challenges as Black women in higher education administration roles. Most participants' significant experiences were feelings of isolation and seclusion, double standards, psychological stressors, and fabricated ambassadorships. However, while they had experienced these common occurrences throughout

their careers, having the support of their sorority sisters and the opportunity to establish genuine relationships with sorority mentors enhanced their professional and personal well-being.

Without the relationships established with members of their sorority, many participants expressed that while they may have reached their current roles in higher education, the experience would have been increasingly difficult. Many shared levels of success stemmed from training, development, and opportunities provided to them due to sorority membership or, at times, due to the visibility their sorority membership provides. Participants also believed that watching other sorority members excel in higher education and other career fields set the tone for their career advancement. Black Greek-letter sororities have been built around a culture of high-achieving women. This advancement sets the tone for new generations of women who join and aspire to uphold this cultural norm.

Although participants were members of different sororities, they agreed that sorority membership had a profound impact on their career advancement in higher education. Participants perceived that membership in their Black Greek-letter sorority prepared them for career advancement and influenced their professional success in higher education. From fellow sorority sisters encouraging strategies on pursuing higher-level administration roles in higher education and successfully navigating workplace challenges, relationships created and maintained through sorority membership provide significant advantages for Black women working in higher education.

Implications for Change

As a result of the literature, theoretical framework, and study findings, the following implications should be considered.

1. Higher education institutions should encourage connection between Black Greek-letter sorority members through university-sponsored, focused connection support groups. The employee resource groups can include members from all the four Black Greek-letter sororities. Employee resource groups provide additional opportunities to create relationships, and a more engaging and fulfilling work experience (Welbourne & McLaughlin, 2013). Ongoing employee resource group connection meetings should be encouraged. New employees identifying as Black women who are members of Black Greek-letter sororities should be provided information about joining and participating in this support group.
2. Black Greek-letter sorority undergraduate and alumni chapters should incorporate training for members focused on intentional mentorship of other sorority members. While the organizations often focus on tools members will need to be successful in the workplace, mentorship was a crucial part of membership's influence on participants' career advancement. By including more in-depth training that provides specific strategies for successful mentorship and how to create formal mentorship programs, members can experience more purposeful mentorship connections in addition to the organic mentor relationships that are created between members. These formal mentoring programs should focus on a specific period of time and feature matching, goal-setting, and structured activities (Ehrich et al., 2004).
3. Higher education institutions should provide formal mentorship experiences to retain and recruit Black women serving in leadership positions. This mentorship experience should focus on ensuring Black women have access to received wisdom similar to the focus areas Black Greek-letter sorority members receive from other sorority

members. These areas include but are not limited to advice about performance reviews, navigating interoffice politics, feedback on leadership strategies, guidance crafting visions for organizations, and insight about upcoming opportunities.

Mentoring has been cited as a critical professional development strategy for Black women who aspire to administrative leadership positions in higher education (Gardner, Jr. et. al., 2014).

Recommendations for Future Research

Below are considerations for future research that provides a good starting point for discussion and further research on the influence of membership in Black Greek-letter sororities on the career advancement of Black women.

1. It is recommended that future studies focus on Black women in other career fields outside of higher education. Their view on the impact and influence that sorority membership has on their career advancement should be examined.
2. Future researchers are also encouraged to do a comparative study on the impact of sorority membership on the career advancement of Black women serving as higher education administrators to those who do not have a career in higher education. Researchers can utilize this comparison to identify whether only Black women serving in administrative roles in higher education institutions have experienced positive benefits from sorority membership on their career advancement or if Black women also experience these positive benefits in other professions not associated with higher education.

3. It is also recommended that future studies focus on the influence of mentorship relationships created between women that are not members of the same Black-Greek-letter sorority but are both members of one of the four Black Greek-letter sororities.
4. It is recommended that this study be replicated to include sororities and fraternities that are not Black Greek-letter organizations to ascertain if their responses would be similar to the results found in this study.
5. In conclusion, it is recommended that future researchers should examine the leadership development strategies and processes used by Black Greek-letter sororities to develop members professionally and personally. The information could provide specific ways to address Black women's needs as they navigate challenges experienced in the workplace.

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Appendix A: Abilene Christian University IRB Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



October 13, 2020

Erin Wilson
Department of Educational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Erin,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Exploring Membership in Black Greek-Letter Sororities and the Influence on Career Advancement for Black Women in Higher Education",

was approved by expedited review (Category 6 & 7) on 10/13/2020 (IRB # 20-142). Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix B: Participant Solicitation Email

20-142

Approval Date: 10/13/2020

Participant Solicitation Materials

Dear [*Participant*],

My name is Erin Wilson and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Doctor of Education program at Abilene Christian University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about exploring membership in Black Greek-Letter sororities and the influence on career advancement for Black women in higher education. You're eligible to be in this study because you hold an administrative or professional position at [*2-or-4year higher education institution*] and are a member of [*Black Greek-Letter sorority*]. I obtained your contact information through the Association of Black Women in Higher Education, Inc. group on LinkedIn.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will participate in one 60-minute interview that will take place using Zoom, a video and audio-conferencing platform. I would like to audio/video record your interview and then I'll use the information to extend the current literature on the career advancement of Black women in higher education and contribute to developing innovative strategies that aid in the retention of this group.

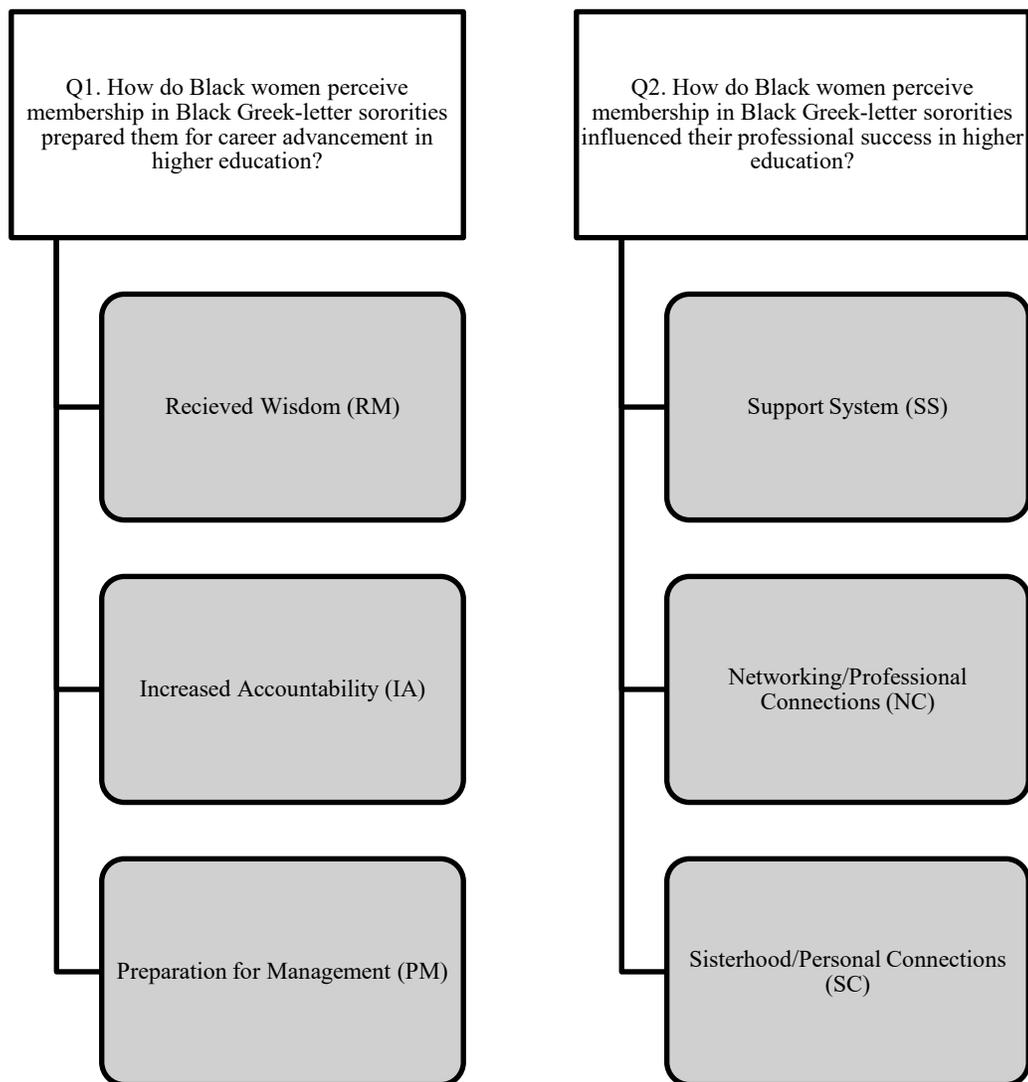
Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at xxxxxxxxxx or call [xxxxxxxxxx](tel:xxxxxxxxxx).

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Erin Wilson, MS

Appendix C: Research Questions, Corresponding Themes, and Codes



Appendix D: Interview Protocol

20-142

Approval Date: 10/13/2020

Interview Protocol

1. What is your current job title?
2. In which Black Greek-lettered sorority are you currently a member?
3. How long have you been member of this Black Greek-letter Sorority?
4. Describe the process you used to select your chosen sorority.
5. What specific benefits have you gained from membership in a Black Greek-letter sorority?
6. Describe the leadership training you have experienced as a member of your specific Black Greek letter sorority.
7. Explain the influence membership in your sorority has had on your career advancement in higher education?
8. Explain the influence sorority mentorship experience had on your career advancement in higher education?
9. Discuss your experiences as a Black woman working in higher education?
10. Describe the influence membership in a sorority has had on your professional success in higher education.