

2017

# Intersectional Value? A Pilot Study Exploring Educational Outcomes for African American Women in Historically Black Sororities versus Non-Historically Black Sororities.

Donald Mitchell Jr.

*Bellarmino University*, [dmitchell2@bellarmine.edu](mailto:dmitchell2@bellarmine.edu)

John A. Gipson

*Purdue University*, [gipsonj@purdue.edu](mailto:gipsonj@purdue.edu)

Jakia Marie

*University of Louisville*, [jakia.marie@louisville.edu](mailto:jakia.marie@louisville.edu)

Tiffany Steele

*The Ohio State University*, [steele.868@osu.edu](mailto:steele.868@osu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.bellarmino.edu/education\\_fac\\_pub](https://scholarworks.bellarmino.edu/education_fac_pub)

 Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Mitchell, D., Jr., Gipson, J., Marie, J., & Steele, T. (2017). Intersectional value? A pilot study exploring educational outcomes for African American women in historically Black sororities versus non-historically Black sororities. *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors*, 12(2), 44-58.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Annsley Frazier Thornton School of Education at ScholarWorks@Bellarmino. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@Bellarmino. For more information, please contact [jstemmer@bellarmine.edu](mailto:jstemmer@bellarmine.edu), [kpeers@bellarmine.edu](mailto:kpeers@bellarmine.edu).

**INTERSECTIONAL VALUE?  
A PILOT STUDY EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR  
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN HISTORICALLY BLACK SORORITIES  
VERSUS NON-HISTORICALLY BLACK SORORITIES**

**DONALD MITCHELL, JR., BELLARMINE UNIVERSITY, JOHN GIPSON, PURDUE UNIVERSITY  
JAKIA MARIE, UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE, AND TIFFANY STEELE, THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**

*The purpose of this pilot study was to initially explore if there is value added in terms of educational outcomes for Black women involved in historically Black sororities by comparing them to Black women involved in non-historically Black sororities, given the racial-gender support historically Black sororities offer. Main findings suggest Black women involved in historically Black sororities were more socially involved than Black women involved in non-historically Black sororities. The article closes with implications for practice and future research.*

The positive relationship between student engagement and fraternity and sorority involvement among African American college students is well documented (e.g., see Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011). This is especially true for African American<sup>1</sup> college students who join Black Greek-lettered Organizations (BGLOs), or historically Black college fraternities and sororities, regardless of their attendance across institutional type (see Kimbrough, 1995; Ross, 2001 for an overview of these organizations). Given that researchers have concluded that student organizations, those designed for racially minoritized<sup>2</sup> students, assist students in ways that include racial identity development (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010) and leadership development (Dugan, Kodama, & Gebhardt, 2012), the engagement outcomes associated with BGLOs involvement are not surprising.

Research on BGLOs and African American college student involvement continues to develop. However, despite that African American women represent approximately 60% of the total enrollment of African American students in institutions of higher education (Allen,

Jayakumar, Griffin, Korn, & Hurtado, 2005), studies explicitly focusing on gender have disproportionately focused on men (e.g., Jones, 2004; McClure, 2006). The limited attention African American women have received in BGLOs involvement and, more broadly, in studies exploring gender among African American students, might be explained by Kaba's (2008) thesis that African American women are the new *model minority*. Kaba defined model minority as "groups that were one time marginalized, educationally, economically and socially, but eventually rose up despite their many obstacles to become prosperous, admired and even emulated" (p. 310). We boldly refute Kaba's claim.

Generally, the model minority narrative ignores diversity amongst racially minoritized populations. Further, building upon Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) articulation of *intersectionality*—highlighting the ways multiple marginalized identities oppress Black women because of interlocking and systemic forms of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, classism)—assigning the model minority label to African American women is dangerous. The model minority

---

<sup>1</sup>African American and Black are used interchangeably throughout the article.

<sup>2</sup>Similar to other scholars (e.g., Harper, 2012; Harper & Griffin, 2011), we use the term minoritized acknowledging that racial categories are social constructions in the United States and certain groups are minoritized in the context of racial power and privilege afforded to White people.

misnomer is particularly troubling as African American women are “theoretically erased” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139) when interventions and supports focus on single-axis identities (e.g., solely race, solely gender) rather than the intersection of their multiple marginalized identities. Acknowledging and recognizing the unique experiences of African American college women is important, and they need educational support, as much as any student, as they matriculate through college. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore historically Black sororities as one form of support for African American women in college.

With a long history of developing cultures that resist oppression, refuting stereotypical societal expectations, and celebrating and maintaining aspects of their own culture (Phillips, 2005), historically Black sororities have supported members in a number of ways. Phillips (2005) noted, “by creating communities and intentionally developing sisterhood, African American sorority women have been able to affirm and encourage one another while overcoming personal difficulties” (p. 350). Still, despite the in-depth support these organizations provide for members, limited research has focused on the racial-gender structures of these groups.

Black women involved in historically Black sororities highlight the support, or intersectional support, African American women receive from involvement in these organizations. Historically Black sororities provide mentorship, relationships, and other supports that other groups cannot provide African American women, what Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) called intersectional social capital. Using an *intersectional social capital* theoretical framework, this article explores if there is evidence that there is truly an added value for Black women involved in historically Black sororities by comparing them to Black women involved in non-historically Black sororities.

### *African American Women in College*

Although Black women are making significant strides in the realm of academia, the cost of this success, socially and emotionally, is rarely recognized in research (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; Patton, Haynes, & Croom, 2017). Chavous and Cogburn (2007) noted that African American women in college are primarily used as a success measure as they are compared to African American men at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels. With focus on the successes of Black women within education, a false perception is created about the experiences of Black women in college. This invisibility in academia is detrimental for Black women on college campuses—specifically predominantly White campuses—since African American women often graduate at lower rates than their White, Latina, and Asian American women collegiate peers (Bartman, 2015). Scholars have increasingly begun exploring and documenting African American women’s unique collegiate experiences to combat this invisibility.

Schwartz, Bower, Rice, and Washington (2003) found that a low sense of belonging was a common experience for the Black women in their study as the women were often excluded from organizations that were populated by mostly White students. Further, building upon Collins’ articulation of *outsider within* status (as cited in Howard-Hamilton, 2003), Howard-Hamilton noted that Black women in college were often invited into places that dominant groups had occupied, but were invisible and had no voice to contribute to the space. These issues created a need for Black women to develop coping strategies while in college in order to persist to graduation. As noted by Robinson-Wood (2009), “coping varies depending on a person’s belief systems and resources” (p. 78); however, researchers have documented that Black women in college use similar tactics to cope with everyday stressors. These coping

strategies include family support, spirituality, mentorship, and peer support.

Some Black women persist through challenges of invisibility and isolation and remain enrolled at higher education to attain degrees because of familial expectations and support (Porter & Dean, 2015). For example, Kennedy (2014) found Black female<sup>3</sup> college students noted family playing a significant role in their decision to enroll into college, and family as important to their overall college experience. In addition, aside from encouragement in attending college, Alexander and Bodenhorn (2015) found that Black female college students viewed family as a support system for their personal and emotional adjustments during their college careers. Still, familial relationships are not consistently positive. For example, Gilford and Reynolds (2011) found that family relationships could have negative effects on Black female college students when these students are the main providers of their families while transitioning into a new collegiate environment. Black women also turn inward to cope, leaning on their spirituality, as highlighted in Patton and McClure's (2009) study. Black women also turn to on-campus support to cope, and this support is often in the form of mentorship and peer support.

As noted by Borum and Walker (2012), there is a positive relationship between Black students' satisfaction with their institutions and faculty mentorship. For African American women specifically, mentoring is beneficial in their development and advancement, particularly when African American women are serving as mentors and displaying role-modeling behaviors for other African American women in college (Crawford & Smith, 2005). Despite these documented positive gains, the lack of racial-gender mentorship opportunities available for Black women on college campuses is noteworthy as African American women who are faculty and staff account for a small percentage of the population of professionals on college campuses

(Bartman, 2015; Croom & Patton, 2012). Given the lack of access to campus support in the form of African American women in faculty and staff roles, Black women in college may resort to other on-campus networks such as peer support. Black students rely on support from others and the chance to bond with fellow students to cope with stress, particularly at predominantly White institutions; and Black women in college often find similar support from other Black women in college (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, 2013; Payne & Suddler, 2014). African American women's involvement in BGLOs or historically Black sororities is one form of peer support that warrants further attention given their racial-gender structures.

### *African American Women Involved in Greek-Lettered Organizations*

Generally, the educational and engagement outcomes associated with African Americans involved in Greek-lettered organizations are positive. Patton et al. (2011) found that African Americans involved in fraternities and sororities reported higher levels of faculty-student interactions and involvement in active or collaborative assignments at significant levels. When examining BGLOs in particular, scholars have found similar educational benefits. Kimbrough (1995) and Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) both found that African American students involved in historically Black fraternities and sororities held more student leadership roles and believed their leadership skills were developed as a result of their fraternity or sorority involvement. In regards to academic outcomes, Harper (2007), Mitchell (2012), and Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) all found positive outcomes associated with BGLOs. Harper (2007) found that BGLO members were more engaged in classroom discussions because of their affiliation, Mitchell (2012) found that BGLO membership contributed positively to persistence towards a degree, and Sutton and Kimbrough (2001)

---

<sup>3</sup>Female and women are used interchangeably given an author's use of the term in their work.

found BGLO members held higher grade point averages (GPAs) when compared to African American students not involved in BGLOs. When focusing specifically on African American women involved in historically Black sororities, the racial-gender support these organizations provide is pronounced (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Mitchell, 2014).

Mitchell (2014) explored the importance of gender for BGLO members and found that African American men involved in historically Black fraternities overlooked gender while the African American women involved in historically Black sororities found value in the gendered structure of the organizations, highlighting how historically Black sororities were created just for them. In Floyd's 2009 study, she highlighted similar findings as the African American women in her study called historically Black sororities "a place of [their] own" (p. 120) where they connected with like-minded women. Later, Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) explored the ways in which the racial-gender structures, or intersectional nature, of historically Black sororities provided African American women with unique support. They found that historically Black sororities provided the women what they coined *intersectional social capital* given that the organizations provided "access to a space where others have a shared common experience" and "an actual space where the participants felt secure sharing their opinions and being themselves because they shared the common experience of navigating a predominately White institution as Black women" (p. 291).

### Research Questions

The purpose of this pilot study was to quantitatively explore if there is value added in terms of positive academic and social educational outcomes for Black women involved in historically Black sororities by comparing them to Black women involved in non-historically Black sororities, given the intersectional support

Black sororities offer African American women as documented by Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014). Two main research questions guided this study:

1. Are there differences between involvement in historically Black sororities versus non-historically Black sororities and academic outcomes (i.e., GPA, hours per week studying alone, hours per week studying with friends, number of faculty interactions, retention/persistence) for African American women?
2. Are there differences in the amount of time spent participating in various educational practices (i.e., student organization involvement) and type of sorority affiliation for African American women?

### Theoretical Framework

This study is framed by Greyerbiehl and Mitchell's (2014) articulation of *intersectional social capital*. The framework builds upon (a) Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) articulation of intersectionality and (b) social capital theory. As alluded to earlier, intersectionality highlights the intersection of multiple marginalized identities (e.g., race, gender, class) and the ways in which systems of oppression intersect and reinforce each other (e.g., racism, sexism, classism) to further marginalize those who have multiple marginalized identities (e.g., low-income Black women) (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Given that historically Black sororities were founded to serve Black women, in particular, one can assume they provide African American women a place where members have similar lived experiences. Social capital theory highlights the resources embedded within social networks and can be defined as an "investment in social relations with expected return" (Lin, 1999, p. 30). As African American women decide to join historically Black sororities, one can assume they expect some sort of return. Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) wrote, "historically Black sororities

can be considered ‘intersectional support groups’ because they provide African American women a unique space on predominantly White campuses—space where the overlapping of race and gender are acknowledged” (p. 284), and outcomes associated with this intersectional social capital is explored in this study.

## Method

### *Instrument*

This study utilized a survey instrument designed by the researchers to investigate characteristics of undergraduate African American college students (see Appendix A for a sample of the questions utilized for this study). To develop the instrument, an extensive review of literature relating to the experiences of African American college students and related survey instruments (e.g., National Survey of Student Engagement, Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys) was conducted. Content validity of the survey was established through an extensive literature review and through consulting senior-level student affairs administrators and faculty members on relatedness of questions to experiences available within higher education. After consultation and revision, the instrument was piloted with a sample of 16 students to determine the test-retest reliability of the questions. The researchers found that all but one question scored greater than .60 (ranging from .76 to .985), which is generally acceptable when using categorical data in the social sciences (Landis & Koch, 1977); the remaining item received a score of .562.

### *Sample*

A purposive sample of undergraduate students who self-identified within each participating institution’s record system as African American were invited to participate in the larger study, leading to 728 total participants. Seven four-year public institutions across the United States participated in the larger study; as defined by the

Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, four master’s colleges and universities as well as three doctoral-granting universities agreed to participate. An invitation to participate was sent to students by various institutions, and a reminder was sent one week later. The invitation informed students of the anonymous nature of the survey, how to contact the researchers, that GPAs were not disclosed to the researchers, and that participation was voluntary and could be ceased at any time.

The sample for the present study consists of 75 undergraduate African American students who identified as women and indicated involvement within a sorority across five of the seven institutions included in the study; two regional campuses did not offer sorority life so results from five institutions were applicable to the current study. Of the sample, 13 (17.3%) students identified as first-year, nine (12.0%) sophomore status, 21 (28.0%) as juniors, and 30 (40.0%) as seniors. In addition, 32 (42.7%) students were between the ages of 18 and 20, 26 (34.7%) were between the ages of 21 and 23, 9 (12.0%) were between the ages of 24 and 26, 2 (2.7%) were between the ages of 27 and 29, and 6 (8.0%) were age 30 or above.

### *Data Analysis*

Due to the categorical nature of the data and a small sample size, Mann-Whitney U tests were utilized to determine if the population distributions were equal for students involved in a historically Black sorority and peers involved in a non-historically Black sorority. A Mann-Whitney U test is the nonparametric alternative to an independent samples t-test (Moore, McCabe, & Craig, 2012). This method of data analysis is best for Likert-type scales since the data typically will not follow a normal distribution and this method is also beneficial for small sample sizes since the central limit theorem will not apply. Thus, failing to use a nonparametric test may produce biased parameter estimates and statistical conclusions may not be valid. SPSS Statistics 23 (IBM

Corporation, 2015) was utilized to analyze the data and the alpha level was set at .05.

## Results

### Academic Involvement

The data suggest there was no statistical difference ( $z = -.66, p = .51$ ) among the academic performance of students in this study, as 44.4% of women in historically Black sororities possessed a GPA greater than 3.00 compared to 48.0% of students in non-historically Black sororities. Furthermore, though 35.2% of women in non-historically Black sororities and 47.6% of

individuals in a historically Black organization identified a faculty or staff mentor, the difference was not significantly different ( $z = -.99, p = .324$ ). Lastly, results also indicated no statistical difference in the number of hours studying alone ( $z = -.36, p = .72$ ) or with friends ( $z = -.42, p = .67$ ) per week for women in historically Black sororities and non-historically Black sororities.

### Social Involvement

A Mann-Whitney test indicated that there was a significant difference ( $z = -2.46, p = .01$ ) in the involvement rates of African American women in cultural student organizations. Table 1 indicates

**Table 1**

*Involvement in Cultural Student Organizations*

| Hours/Week | Non-historically Black Sororities | Historically Black Sororities |
|------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 0          | 24 (48.0%)                        | 6 (30.0%)                     |
| 1 to 5     | 23 (46.0%)                        | 6 (30.0%)                     |
| 6 to 10    | 2 (4.0%)                          | 5 (25.0%)                     |
| 11 to 15   | 1 (2.0%)                          | 2 (10.0%)                     |
| 16 to 20   | 0 (0.0%)                          | 1 (5.0%)                      |
| 20+        | 0 (0.0%)                          | 0 (0.0%)                      |

*Note.* 70 students answered this question.

that African American women who were members of a historically Black sorority spent more time per week involved within cultural organizations as compared to African American women involved within a non-historically Black sorority.

Furthermore, there was a statistical difference

( $z = -3.65, p < .001$ ) in the number of hours involved per week in sororities. Specifically, African American women in historically Black sororities spent more time involved within Greek organizations per week compared to African American women involved in a non-historically Black sorority (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Involvement in Sororities*

| Hours/Week | Non-historically Black Sororities | Historically Black Sororities |
|------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 0          | 24 (48.0%)                        | 2 (9.5%)                      |
| 1 to 5     | 16 (32.0%)                        | 7 (33.3%)                     |
| 6 to 10    | 9 (18.0%)                         | 8 (38.1%)                     |
| 11 to 15   | 0 (0.0%)                          | 4 (19.0%)                     |
| 16 to 20   | 0 (0.0%)                          | 0 (0.0%)                      |
| 20+        | 1 (2.0%)                          | 0 (0.0%)                      |

*Note.* 71 students answered this question.

Although there was no difference in the rate at which women seriously considered leaving an institution, there was a statistical difference ( $z = -2.33, p = .04$ ) in the reasons women remained enrolled after seriously considering leaving. After examining further, African American women in historically Black sororities were more likely to decide to return as a result of family support compared to African American women in a non-

historically Black sorority (see Table 3).

### Limitations

Prior to discussing the findings, we would like to acknowledge some limits of this study. First, given this is a pilot study consisting of 75 African American women across five U.S. institutions, the study is not generalizable to the entire population of African American women

**Table 3**  
*Summary of Mann-Whitney U Analyses*

| Variable                                 | Z      | p-value |
|--|--------|---------|
| <b>Academic Outcomes</b>                 |        |         |
| Hours studying alone                     | -.364  | .716    |
| Hours studying with friends              | -.424  | .671    |
| Cumulative GPA                           | -.658  | .511    |
| Considered leaving the institution       | -1.754 | .079    |
| Remained enrolled due to family support* | -2.333 | .044    |
| Internships                              | -1.919 | .055    |
| Undergraduate Research                   | -1.939 | .053    |
| Faculty/Staff Mentor                     | -.986  | .324    |
| <b>Social Involvement</b>                |        |         |
| Hours within cultural organizations      | -2.455 | .014    |
| Hours within non-cultural organizations  | -.493  | .622    |
| Hours involved within sorority           | -3.646 | < .001  |

*Note.* \*exact 2-sided significance

involved in sororities across the United States. In particular, the lack of generalizability was most notable in our sample in regards to the various age differences of the students who participated in our study. Although 77% of the sample consisted of women 18–23, the other 23% of data came from women aged 24 and older. The differences in age could also present differences in experiences and expectations of membership within both historically and non-historically Black sorority life. Second, because the data were collected using categorical variables, Mann-Whitney U tests were used to compare distributions of the two samples (i.e., African American women in historically Black sororities versus those in non-

historically Black sororities), and more rigorous statistical analyses may produce more robust findings. Third, historically Black sororities are comparatively smaller in membership in terms of recruitment and chapter size to their non-historically Black counterparts. Therefore, measures such as involvement may be skewed amongst sororities based on the number of active members in a chapter at the time this study was conducted. Fourth, as noted by McClure (2006), fraternities and sororities are voluntary associations and students must be interested in joining, selected for membership, and must be able to afford membership to receive the benefits gained from these organizations. Fifth,



BGLOs are not without controversy and often deal with issues surrounding pledging and hazing (Parks & Brown, 2005). Pledging and hazing were not explored within this study, but this limitation should not be overlooked as pledging and hazing influence students' experiences in BGLOs. Finally, historically, sororities have primarily recruited, and have been exclusively for, cisgender women; therefore, we did not address outcomes associated with transgender African American women attempting to join sororities.

## Discussion

The findings of this pilot study both support and expand upon the literature on African American women involved in sororities by comparing those in historically Black sororities to those involved in non-historically Black sororities, emphasizing the racial-gender or intersectional structure of historically Black sororities, and exploring whether these organizations provide African American women with what Greyerbiehl and Mitchell (2014) called *intersectional social capital*. In Greyerbiehl and Mitchell's (2014) qualitative study, they concluded that Black women involved in historically Black sororities found unique support that was not provided in other organizations, and the results of this pilot study provides quantitative data in support of those findings.

The first research question explored differences between involvement in historically Black sororities versus non-historically Black sororities and academic outcomes (i.e., GPA, hours per week studying alone, hours per week studying with friends, number of faculty interactions, and retention/persistence) for African American women. We found that survey participants involved in historically Black sororities were more likely to remain at an institution due to family support. As indicated in the literature, family support is an important coping mechanism for African American women

in college (e.g., Kennedy, 2014; Porter & Dean, 2015), and we found that those involved in historically Black sororities were less likely to leave an institution because of family support. Though this finding is interesting, it simply highlights more questions about how membership in historically Black sororities and family support were related for the participants.

Although African American women involved in historically Black sororities were more likely to remain at an institution due to family support, and this was the only significant finding related to academic outcomes, three other variables warrant attention: seriously considering leaving, involvement in internships, and involvement in undergraduate research. These variables were marginally significant and women involved in historically Black sororities were less likely to consider leaving and were more involved in internships and undergraduate research. With a larger sample size, we anticipate these findings would have reached significance. In Mitchell's (2012) study, he found similar findings and attributed persistence to support provided by members and professional opportunities to faculty, staff, and alumni members who were affiliated with BGLOs. Finally, we would like to highlight the non-significant GPA finding. Previous research has indicated students involved in BGLOs may suffer academically (e.g., see Chambers & Walpole, 2017; Guiffreda, 2004; Harper, 2000; Mitchell, 2012); however, this was not the case for the students included within this sample and refutes those claims.

In the second research question, we explored the differences in the amount of time spent participating in various educational practices (i.e., student organization involvement) and type of sorority affiliation for African American women. Reaffirming previous studies (Guiffreda, 2004; Mitchell, 2012), African American women involved in historically Black sororities were more involved than those in non-historically Black sororities in two ways: they were more involved in cultural student organizations and

within their sororities. These findings also reaffirm the importance of groups created specifically for racially minoritized students in terms of providing cultural and racial identity support (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). Further, the type of support found within historically Black sororities goes deeper than other organizations because members have a sense of belonging as a result of their intersecting identities and life experiences being recognized, celebrated, and uplifted (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014).

### ***Implications for Practice***

It is well documented that BGLOs provide a sense of belonging that is difficult to find in other organizations for African American college students. No matter the reasons students gain interest in joining BGLOs, it is clear that these organizations—particularly historically Black sororities—provide a space for African American women in college that is not found anywhere else on campus. As a result, institutions of higher education must become more intentional in working with these organizations and providing equitable opportunities for them across college campuses. BGLOs must be promoted during campus life events and within promotional materials as students, particularly African American women, need to be aware of all of the options available to them on campus. Historically Black sororities must also be intentional in highlighting their efforts by being involved in campus programming and initiatives that relate to women, Greek-lettered organizations, and African Americans. In addition, given that some predominantly White institutions have low numbers of African American women and historically Black sororities require sophomore status, historically Black sororities should find creative ways to partner with predominantly White institutions to ensure African American women have access to membership. Black women hold, at minimum, two fundamental marginalized identities. Uplifting them on

campus and supporting them will provide a better campus climate and a better sense of belonging on campus, and historically Black sororities appear to be one way to provide this support through membership. Beyond membership, historically Black sororities can also serve as a model for other organizations developed to support African American women.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

Based on the initial findings of this pilot study, we suggest several avenues of future research that might be explored using various forms of methodological approaches (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods). For example, although this study explored what African American women gained from being a member of a historically Black sorority, more research can be conducted on the reasons African American women decide to join historically Black sororities versus non-historically Black sororities. It would also be interesting to see why African American women do not consider membership in historically Black sororities or do not join when interested given the documented benefits of these groups. In relation to our findings about the importance of family support in conjunction with membership in a historically Black sorority, we would be interested in other factors that might have influenced this finding (e.g., family income and first-generation college status). An additional component that could be explored in terms of family involvement and sorority membership is legacy status and the ways in which legacy status influences the amount of support women receive during the membership intake process.

To address one of the limitations of our study, future research could explore the difference in membership experiences of women in sororities based on age. A difference such as age could influence women's various motives to join sororities, their expectations of membership, or their level of involvement within their organization. In relation to involvement within

a sorority, future research could explore the difference of involvement between historically Black and non-historically Black sororities based on factors such as chapter size, recruitment practices, and sorority guidelines and requirements; these components of sororities may influence who is allowed to be involved and to what extent they are involved with their organization. Finally, research conducted on the experiences of African American women in non-historically Black sororities would be useful.

In conclusion, we would like to acknowledge that the aim of this study was not to promote historically Black sororities over non-historically Black sororities for African American women. Rather, its purpose was to further explore educational outcomes that may be associated with the intersectional support historically Black sororities provide. Based on existing literature and our pilot findings, historically Black sororities are unique organizations that provide needed and wanted support for African American women in college, support that is often not offered anywhere else on college campuses. African American women are not the new model minority (Kaba, 2008). This article highlights that African American women are students who need the support of policy makers, administrators, faculty, staff, peers, family, and friends, and they should not be “theoretically erased” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139) when designing support mechanisms for college students.

## Appendix A

### *Sample Questions*

1. Outside of the classroom, how many hours per week do you spend studying or completing coursework alone?

- a. 0
- b. 1 to 5
- c. 6 to 10
- d. 11 to 15
- e. 16 to 20
- f. 20 or more

2. Outside of the classroom, how many hours per week do you spend studying or completing coursework with friends?

- a. 0
- b. 1 to 5
- c. 6 to 10
- d. 11 to 15
- e. 16 to 20
- f. 20 or more

3. How many hours per week do you spend involved within cultural student organizations?

- a. 0
- b. 1 to 5
- c. 6 to 10
- d. 11 to 15
- e. 16 to 20
- f. 20 or more

4. How many hours per week do you spend within non-cultural student organizations?

- a. 0
- b. 1 to 5
- c. 6 to 10
- d. 11 to 15
- e. 16 to 20
- f. 20 or more

5. How many hours per week are you typically involved with your fraternity/sorority?

- a. 0
- b. 1 to 5
- c. 6 to 10
- d. 11 to 15
- e. 16 to 20
- f. 20 or more

6. Have you every participated in any of the following?
  - a. Internships (Yes/No)
  - b. Undergraduate Research (Yes/No)
  
7. Have you ever seriously considered leaving your college/university?
  - a. No
  - b. Yes
  
8. Why did you decide to remain at your institution? (Select all that apply)
  - a. Peer support
  - b. Family support
  - c. Faculty/staff support
  - d. Financial aid
  - e. Strive to succeed
  - f. Student organization involvement
  - g. I didn't know what other options were available
  - h. Other (open-ended)
  
9. Do you have a faculty or staff mentor?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
10. What is your gender?
  - a. Man
  - b. Woman
  - c. Transgender
  - d. Other
  
11. What is your class standing?
  - a. First-year
  - b. Second-year
  - c. Junior
  - d. Senior
  
12. What is your current age?
  - a. 18 to 20
  - b. 21 to 23
  - c. 24 to 26
  - d. 27 to 29
  - e. 30 or above

## References

- Alexander, Q. R., & Bodenhorn, N. (2015). My rock: Black women attending graduate school at a Southern predominantly White university. *Journal of College Counseling, 18*(1), 259–274.
- Allen, W., Jayakumar, U. M., Griffin, K., Korn, W., & Hurtado, S. (2005). Black undergraduates from Bakke to Grutter: Freshman status, trends and prospects, 1971–2004. Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute, University of California.
- Bartman, C. C. (2015). African American women in higher education: Issues and supporting strategies. *College Student Affairs Leadership, 2*(2). Retrieved from <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/csai/vol2/iss2/5/>
- Borum, V., & Walker, E. (2012). What makes the difference? Black women undergraduate and graduate experiences in mathematics. *Journal of Negro Education, 81*(4), 366–378.
- Chambers, C., & Walpole, M. (2017). Academic achievement among Black sororities: Myth or reality? *College Student Affairs Journal, 35*(2), 131–139.
- Chavous, T., & Cogburn, C. D. (2007). Superinvisible women: Black girls and women in education. *Black Women, Gender, and Families, 1*(2), 24–51.
- Crawford, K., & Smith, D. (2005). The we and the us: Mentoring African American women. *Journal of Black Studies, 36*(1), 52–67.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 139*, 139–167.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241–1299.
- Croom, N. N., & Patton, L. D. (2012). The miner's canary: A critical race perspective on the representation of Black women full professors. *Negro Educational Review, 62&63*(1–4), 13–39.
- Dugan, J. P., Kodama, C. M., & Gebhardt, M. C. (2012). Race and leadership development among college students: The additive value of collective racial esteem. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 5*(3), 174–189.
- Floyd, R. D. (2009). *Yes we can: The impact membership in Black Greek sororities has on the experience and persistence of Black women students at predominantly White 4-year institutions* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Indiana State University, Terre Haute.
- Gilford, T. T., & Reynolds, A. (2011). “My mother’s keeper”: The effects of parentification on Black female college students. *Journal of Black Psychology, 37*(1), 55–77.
- Greyerbiehl, L., & Mitchell, D. (2014). An intersectional social capital analysis of the influence of historically Black sororities on African American women’s college experiences at a predominantly White institution. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 7*(4), 282–294.
- Guiffrida, D. A. (2004). How involvement in African American student organizations supports and hinders academic achievement. *NACADA Journal, 24*(1&2), 88–98.
- Harper, S. R. (2000, Fall). The academic standings report: Helping NPHC chapters make the grade. *Association of Fraternity Advisors Perspectives, 14*–17.
- Harper, S. R. (2007). The effects of sorority and fraternity membership on class participation and African American student engagement in predominantly White classroom environments. *College Student Affairs Journal, 27*(1), 94–115.
- Harper, S. R. (2012). Race without racism: How higher education researchers minimize racist institutional norms. *Review of Higher Education, 36*(1), 9–29.

- Harper, S. R., & Griffin, K. (2011). Opportunity beyond affirmative action: How low-income and working-class Black male achievers access highly selective, high-cost colleges and universities. *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy*, 17, 43–60.
- Harper, S. R., & Quayle, S. J. (2007). Student organizations as venues for Black identity expression and development among African American male student leaders. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(2), 127–144.
- Hirshfield, L. E., & Joseph, T. D. (2012). “We need a woman, we need a black woman”: Gender, race, and identity taxation in the academy. *Gender and Education*, 24(2), 213–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2011.606208>
- Howard-Hamilton, M. F. (2003). Theoretical frameworks for African American women. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2003(104), 19–27.
- IBM Corporation. (2015). *SPSS 23.0*. Chicago, IL: Author.
- Jones, R. (2004). *Black haze: Violence, sacrifice, and manhood in Black Greek-letter fraternities*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Kaba, A. J. (2008). Race, gender and progress: Are Black American women the new model minority? *Journal of African American Studies*, 12(4), 309–335.
- Kennedy, S. (2014). Earning autonomy while maintaining family ties: Black women’s reflections on the transition into college. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*, 7(2), 133–152.
- Kimbrough, W. M. (1995). Self-assessment, participation, and value of leadership skills, activities, and experiences for Black students relative to their membership in historically Black fraternities and sororities. *Journal of Negro Education*, 64(1), 63–74.
- Kimbrough, W. M., & Hutcheson, P. A. (1998). The impact of membership in Black Greek lettered organization on Black students’ involvement in collegiate activities and their development of leadership skills. *Journal of Negro Education*, 67(2), 96–105.
- Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The measurement of observer agreement for categorical data. *Biometrics*, 33(1), 159–174.
- Lewis, J. A., Mendenhall, R., Harwood, S. A., & Hunt, M. B. (2013). Coping with gendered racial microaggressions among Black women college students. *Journal of African American Studies*, 17(1), 51–73.
- Lin, N. (1999). Building a network theory of social capital. *Connections*, 22(1), 28–51.
- McClure, S. M. (2006). Voluntary association membership: Black Greek men on a predominantly White campus. *Journal of Higher Education*, 77(6), 1037–1057.
- Mitchell, D., Jr. (2012). *Are they truly divine? A grounded theory of the influences of Black Greek-lettered organizations on the persistence of African Americans at predominantly White institutions* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Available at ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (UMI No. 3498533).
- Mitchell, D., Jr. (2014). Does gender matter in Black Greek-lettered organizations? *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors*, 9(1), 20–32.
- Moore, D. S., McCabe, G. P., & Craig, B. A. (2012). *Introduction to the practice of statistics* (7th ed.). New York, NY: W. H. Freeman and Company.
- Parks, G. S., & Brown, T. L. (2005). “In the Fell Clutch of Circumstance”: Pledging and the Black Greek experience. In T. L. Brown, G. S. Parks, & C. M. Phillips (Eds.), *African American fraternities and sororities: The legacy and the vision* (pp. 437–464). Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.
- Patton, L. D., Bridges, B. K., & Flowers, L. A. (2011). Effects of Greek affiliation on African American students’ engagement: Differences by college racial composition. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 29(2), 113–123.

- Patton, L. D., Haynes, C., & Croom, N. N. (2017). Introduction: Centering the diverse experiences of Black women undergraduates. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*, 10(2), 141–143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2017.1331627>
- Patton, L. D., & McClure, M. (2009). Strength in the spirit: African American college women and spiritual coping mechanisms. *Journal of Negro Education*, 78(1), 42–54.
- Payne, Y. A., & Suddler, C. (2014). Cope, conform, or resist? Functions of a Black American identity at a predominantly White university. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 47(3), 385–403.
- Phillips, C. M. (2005). Sisterly bonds. In T. L. Brown, G. Parks, & C. M. Phillips (Eds.), *African American fraternities and sororities: The legacy and the vision* (pp. 341–359). Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.
- Porter, C. J., & Dean, L. A. (2015). Making meaning: Identity development of Black undergraduate women. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*, 8(2), 125–139.
- Renn, K. A., & Ozaki, C. C. (2010). Psychosocial and leadership identities among leaders of identity-based campus organizations. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 3(1), 14–26.
- Robinson-Wood, T. L. (2009). Love, school, and money: Stress and cultural coping among ethnically diverse Black college women: A mixed-method analysis. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 33(2), 77–86.
- Ross, C. L., Jr. (2001). *The Divine Nine: The history of African American fraternities and sororities*. New York, NY: Kensington.
- Schwartz, R. A., Bower, B. L., Rice, D. C., & Washington, C. M. (2003). “Ain’t I a woman, too?”: Tracing the experiences of African American women in graduate school. *Journal of Negro Education*, 72(3), 252–268.
- Sutton, E., & Kimbrough, W. M. (2001). Trends in Black student involvement. *NASPA Journal*, 39(1), 30–40.

### Author Biographies

**Donald Mitchell, Jr, Ph.D.**, is professor of education in the Higher Education Leadership Department in the Annsley Frazier Thornton School of Education at Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY. He is a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

**John Gipson** is a PhD candidate studying educational psychology at Purdue University in West Lafayette, IN.

**JaKia Marie** is a PhD student studying Pan-African studies at University of Louisville in Kentucky. She is a member of Sigma Lambda Gamma National Sorority, Inc.

**Tiffany Steele** is a PhD student studying higher education student affairs at The Ohio State University in Columbus, OH.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Donald Mitchell, Jr., Annsley Frazier Thornton School of Education, Bellarmine University, 2001 Newburg Road, Louisville, KY 40205. Email: [dmitchell2@bellarmine.edu](mailto:dmitchell2@bellarmine.edu)