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Creating Cultural Space: African American Undergraduates' Appreciation of Historically Black Greek-Lettered Organizations

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et al.: Creating Cultural Space: African American Undergraduates' Appreciation of Historically Black Greek-Lettered Organizations

CREATING CULTURAL SPACE: AFRICAN AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES' APPRECIATION OF HISTORICALLY BLACK GREEK -LETTERED ORGANIZATIONS

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Unaffiliated (nonmembers) and affiliated (members) African American undergraduates describe their shared and divergent views about historically Black Greek-lettered organizations' (BGLO) role in creating cultural space at a public flagship university in this mixed-method exploratory study. It was found that unaffiliated and affiliated students view BGLOs' social programming as a means of creating cultural space that meets the needs of students who seek to connect to Black culture and traditions. This exploratory study has implications for future research and practice on the intersection and interaction of African American undergraduate subcommunities with regards to impacting student success at public flagship institutions.

“Well, for me outside of groups, I think I am more social because of the Greeks being here.” – Pudgy

“Midwestern is mostly a White campus. It is good to see other people that share your color, share your similarities, and share your taste in music. Fraternities and sororities just let people get out and get together.” – Belinda

Pudgy and Belinda are two socially active African American seniors at Midwestern University whose preferences for seeking out Black culture-related experiences is essential to understanding the influence of Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) among African American undergraduates. Their reflections emphasize the role of BGLOs in helping many African American undergraduates achieve satisfactory out-of-classroom experiences. In this article, we interchangeably use the concepts of African Americans and Blacks to describe those Americans whose original ancestors came as chattel slaves to America. One crucial element of how BGLOs assist these experiences is by fostering cultural space for the African American undergraduate community. We define cultural space as BGLOs' formal (academic

programming, networking opportunities, career information, and weekend parties) and informal Black cultural structures that facilitate and serve as a nexus between unaffiliated and affiliated African American undergraduates in the overall majority White culture at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). The cultural space concept has several distinctive characteristics, including shared beliefs (DeSousa & King, 1992; Harper & Wolly, 2002; Patton, 2010; Renn & Arnold, 2003).

At Midwestern and other PWIs, White European students and African American students interact primarily in formal academic settings such as studios, classes, and labs; but these interactions are like two ships passing on the ocean when these students are outside the classroom (Brown, 1994; McClure, 2011;

Seaman, 2005). Overall, the formal social system of PWIs and the surrounding community's social scene appeals to traditional-aged White students. Furthermore, African Americans are a heterogeneous undergraduate population made up of different subcommunities that include student-athletes, academic achievers, socially-oriented students, vocationally-oriented students, and indifferent students (Britt-Fries, 2000; Brown, 1994; Guiffida, 2003; Harper, 2006a; Kuh, Hu, & Vesper, 2000). A further distinction arises between African American students who choose to participate actively in BGLOs (affiliated students) versus those who do not (unaffiliated students), with unaffiliated undergraduates making up most African American student populations. Above all, the common link between many of these unaffiliated subcommunities is a preference to participate in social activities that are anchored in Black culture, including musical genres (hip hop, rap, rhythm and blues, folk music, spirituals, jazz), art, literature, dance, oral traditions, and folk arts and crafts (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Patton, 2006; Ross, 2000).

Three unique characteristics of BGLOs are essential to this study: (1) their relatively small size compared to other student groups; (2) the lack of residential fraternity and sorority houses that provide structures for creating and supporting cultural space; and (3) BGLOs are responsible for organizing most of the social activities that appeal to African American undergraduates; however, BGLOs' weekend parties are the most visible artifact of their programming through the eyes and voices of unaffiliated students. BGLOs are typically small organizations that can range in size from four to 20 or more members in a chapter. Compared to traditional White Greek-lettered organizations (WGLOs), they typically do not have institutionally recognized fraternity and sorority houses (Black, Belknap, & Ginsburg, 2005; Whipple, Crichlow, & Click, 2008). WGLOs use their houses to host recruitment and new member activities, sponsor

alumni and undergraduate events, implement community service programs, emphasize academic programs, and entertain members and guests at weekend parties. BGLOs continue to exist and prosper by offering activities including membership intake programs, alumni and undergraduate events, academic and social programming, and community service programs utilizing both on-campus meeting spaces and suitable off-campus facilities.

Pudgy and Belinda's reflections about formal peer groups like BGLOs are consistent with how higher education scholars have described the critical role of formal (through structured student organizations) and informal (unstructured) peer groups in the lives of students (as cited in (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1999). Terenzini et al. define out-of-class experiences as structured and unstructured activities or conditions that are not directly part of an institution's formal course-related instructional processes. Attention is paid particularly to those out-of-class experiences that student affairs professionals have some control over through policy or programmatic intervention and, thereby, have the potential to contribute to their institution's academic mission (Terenzini et al., 1999).

Both WGLOs and BGLOs are formal peer groups that provide structured and unstructured activities for traditional undergraduates that broaden their educational experiences on campus (Whipple et al., 2008). However, most of the research about these groups' impact on out-of-classroom experiences focuses on traditional-aged White undergraduates (Terenzini et al., 1999). Seniors Pudgy and Belinda's appreciation of BGLOs in their out-of-classroom lives is shared by African American undergraduates at other PWIs, especially public flagship universities (Guiffida, 2003; Kimbrough, 2003; McClure, 2011). Among contemporary scholars, Ray (2013) and McClure (2011) did not expound the cultural space concept to describe BGLOs' critical role

among Black students at PWIs; however, they did identify that BGLOs are responsible for most of the social activities that appear in aggregate terms to most African American undergraduates at PWIs. This article seeks to contribute to the nascent literature about BGLOs' important role in creating cultural space that meets African American undergraduates' needs, especially those who seek to affiliate with Black culture and traditions at public flagship institutions. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides scholars and practitioners in higher education and student affairs an analytical framework that debunks current ahistorical views surrounding this issue. It illuminates that White racism is embedded in the fabric of PWIs' instructional culture and student cultures.

Analytical Framework

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an analytical framework that examines how institutions do not stand in isolation of White racism in American society (Schwandt, 2007). CRT examines how PWIs overtly and covertly privilege majority White citizens and marginalize members of underrepresented undergraduates. CRT emerged from legal scholars like Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado's research during the 1970s and 1980s (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997). CRT's essential components are:

- CRT includes all spheres of American society and its major institutions, such as government, judicial, law enforcement, and the K-16 (kindergarten through college) educational system (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009).
- CRT debunks ahistorical approaches.
- CRT declares that race always matters and rejects the color-blind nature of society (West, 1993).
- CRT embraces lived experiences (Bell, 1992).

As a consequence of their marginalization, African American undergraduates have created counter spaces to meet the needs for affiliation, support, and resources that the majority structures prevented them from obtaining (Case, 2017; Grier-Reed, 2010). BGLOs emerged to provide Black students with resources to help them achieve student success. BGLOs also provide networking opportunities to connect Black students on campus with larger Black communities (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Ray, 2013). BGLOs' weekend parties connect different sub-communities of African American undergraduates at PWIs (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). This article aims to use CRT as a means of better understanding how institutional racism, intertwined with other historical factors, has shaped the emergence of BGLOs, influenced their missions among Black students on campus, and fostered social justice for the larger African American community. By better understanding institutional racism, the critical role that BGLOs play in the lives of African American students will be made clearer.

Institutional Racism

Institutional racism describes how institutions within American society overtly or covertly prioritize the rights, needs, and interests of majority White citizens while dismissing or diminishing Black and other underrepresented citizen's rights. Dejure (by law) and defacto (by practice) segregation was normalized within American society by three Supreme Court decisions: *Dred Scott v. Sanford* in 1857, the *Civil Rights Cases* in 1883, and *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 (Dyson, 2020; Kendi, 2016). Black fraternities and sororities emerged at PWIs in the aftermath of the normalization of institutional racism in the American higher education system.

In 1906, seven Black male students founded Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. at Cornell University; in 1911, ten Black male students founded Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. at Indiana University. These two organizations

sought to create support systems and networks for their members to help navigate hostile and indifferent campus environments (Gillon, Beatty, & Salinas, 2019; Kimbrough, 2003; Parks, Ray, Jones, & Hughey, 2014; Ross, 2000). In 1922, Black women established Sigma Gamma Rho Inc. sorority at Butler University to support the pursuit of academic success among members and provide networking opportunities with alumni. Following the founding of their organizations at HBCUs, Black fraternities and sororities established chapters at PWIs, including Omega Psi Phi Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Inc., Iota Phi Theta Inc., Alpha Kappa Alpha Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Inc., and Zeta Phi Beta Inc. (Kimbrough, 2003; Parks et al., 2014; Ross, 2000).

Methodical Underpinnings

Since 2012, studies related to BGLOs have largely used quantitative and qualitative designs and methods. (Strayhorn & McCall, 2012) used survey methods to learn about the cultural competency of BGLO advisors, and Rogers, Rogers, and Anderson (2012) used quantitative methodology to learn about the link between pledging, hazing, and organizational community within BGLOs. Other authors who have used qualitative methodology to develop their studies include Ross (2000), Kimbrough (2003), Mckenzie (2005), McClure (2006), Ray (2013), and Greyerbiehl & Mitchell (2014). Few authors have used mixed methods to learn about an organization's impact on its members and the interactions between members and nonmembers (McClure, 2011; Parks et al., 2014). Missing from this collection of literature are mixed design studies that allow broader generalizations and opportunities for students to describe their experiences in their own words. Creswell and Plano Clark's (2007) explanatory model for developing a mixed design study influenced the approach and design of this study. The characteristics of their model include establishing the warrant for a mixed design study, establishing whether quantitative or

qualitative methods would be a priority in the study or would assume equal weight, establishing the phases of data collection, analyzing the data as a one-phase or two-phase study, and writing up the report as a one-phase or two-phase study. The literature review results indicate that a mixed-method study design is suitable to learn about unaffiliated and affiliated students' views regarding the cultural spaces that BGLOs create and how they appeal to African American undergraduates at Midwestern University.

Institutional Context

Midwestern is a major public flagship university with 28,000 undergraduates and a median SAT score of 1110. 17.3% of the undergraduates receive Pell Grants. African Americans make up 5.9% of the undergraduate population (approximately 1,600 students). Six-year graduation rates show Whites at 73% and African Americans at 49.7% ("The Education Trust releases 2006 Education Watch State Summaires," 2006). The undergraduate African American community has several subcommunities, including the Black Student Union (BSU), BGLOs, gospel choirs, minority business organizations, and groups of student-athletes.

BGLOs chapter sizes may vary based on the institution's location, the amount of African American students that attend the institution, and the institution's history regarding the matriculation and graduation of Black students. There are approximately 50 to 60 students in the seven NPHC affiliated organizations at Midwestern; however, the campus-wide programming role of fraternities and sororities results in an inverse impact on the African American population.

Midwestern is an institution with a varied history involving African American students. On the one hand, Midwestern has played a pioneering role in welcoming African American students to the campus's academic and athletic teams (M. Johnson, personal communication,

October 15, 1987; C. Proctor, personal communications, September 10, 2000). On the other hand, Midwestern has also fostered Black students' exclusion from the institution's formal social system (M. Smith, personal communication, October 15, 1987; C. Proctor, personal communication, September 10, 2000). Consequently, Black students have established their own unique formal social system to create and support their cultural space on campus.

Research Design and Methodology

A mixed-methods approach allows for the investigation of cultural space within the historical context of Midwestern's policy and practices towards African American students. Torres (2006) argued that using a mixed-method design necessitates that the researchers provide information about their process as well as methodological issues. Blending methods also allows for a more thorough examination of unaffiliated and affiliated undergraduates' views concerning the impact that cultural space has on their social experiences. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods is an effective means of establishing and confirming a study's reliability and validity. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach enables unaffiliated and affiliated undergraduates to provide qualitative descriptions of their views on BGLO's role in creating cultural space in their own words. By contrast, a quantitative analysis would only permit a quantitative description via questionnaire measurements. This study prioritizes qualitative methods over quantitative methods.

Quantitative Analysis

Procedure. Email invitations were sent to 1,144 African American students asking them to complete the Insider's Perception Questionnaire (IPQ) through Midwestern University's research office. The IPQ is a 30-item pilot quantitative questionnaire developed from grounded theory data based on the first author's earlier

studies of African American undergraduates at Midwestern. The IPQ included questions related to BGLOs' social programming, especially weekend parties, the needs that the parties helped students achieve, and unaffiliated and affiliated students' views of BGLO experiences trying to host social programming in university facilities. Students indicated their response to each question on a five-point Likert scale (where a low score indicated dissatisfaction and a higher score indicated satisfaction). Participants were provided a token for participation in the study and the opportunity to win assorted prizes; 257 (22%) of students completed the IPQ questionnaire.

Participants. 257 African American students completed the IPQ. Only 26 (10%) affiliated students completed the questionnaire, while 231 (89%) non-affiliated students completed the questionnaire. This imbalance between affiliated and non-affiliated students precludes direct comparisons via typical parametric statistical tests. Matched samples were created to allow an appropriate direct comparison between unaffiliated and affiliated questionnaire responses. Affiliated and non-affiliated students were matched on gender, race, class standing, and GPA.

Quantitative Results. A series of paired sample t-tests were assessed according to two categories: the role of BGLOs as the most influential student organization among African American students and the level of satisfaction with social experience on campus. The quantitative analysis results are shown in Table 1 (see next page).

Affiliated and unaffiliated students had shared views on the role of BGLOs at Midwestern. Both groups had a positive perception of BGLOs in their role to support Black cultural experiences; however, the affiliated students rated the role of BGLOs in supporting Black culture significantly higher than unaffiliated students. Both groups also had positive reactions when considering BGLOs as the most influential student organization, the role weekend parties

Table 1*Paired Sample t-Test Results, Means, and Standard Deviations on IPQ Items for Unaffiliated and Affiliated Students*

Category 1 - BLGOs exhibit significant influence among Black students				
	Questionnaire Item	Unaffiliated	Affiliated	p-value
Q3.1	BLGOs play an important role supporting Black cultural experiences	3.73 (.83)	4.31 (.68)	.008 *
Q3.3	BLGOs are the most influential student organization	3.46 (1.14)	4.00 (.85)	.065
Q3.4	BLGO weekend parties enhance social adjust and comfort	2.69 (1.23)	3.38 (1.13)	.068
Category 2 - BLGOs foster, create, and enhance cultural space through social experiences on campus				
	Questionnaire Item	Unaffiliated	Affiliated	p-value
Q3.7	"Warm" climate exists on campus.	3.46 (.81)	2.96 (.87)	.035 *
Q3.8	BLGO weekend parties foster "warm" climate on campus.	3.46 (.86)	3.68 (.95)	.409
Q3.9	BLGO weekend parties encourage new students who appreciate Black cultural experiences.	3.73 (.72)	3.88 (.91)	.476
Q3.10	BLGOs are a strong link in undergraduate African American community	3.69 (.97)	3.88 (.71)	.446

Based upon a series of paired-sample t-tests; * statistically significant differences between the matched unaffiliated and affiliated groups at the $p < .05$ or less.

played in facilitating a warm campus climate, the encouragement of new students to appreciate Black cultural experiences, and linking students to each other in the African American student community.

Although there were no statistical differences between unaffiliated and affiliated students' responses on the items mentioned earlier, there was a trend for the affiliated students to rate BGLOs' influence on student organizations and BGLOs' role in organizing weekend parties higher than unaffiliated students. In contrast, unaffiliated students had a significantly more positive view of the "warm" campus climate at Midwestern than the affiliated students.

The results of the quantitative analysis have significant implications. Approximately 26 of the 60 (43%) affiliated students polled completed the IPQ. These students represent a significant

portion of the overall affiliated student population. While this sample was smaller than desirable, the matched pairs approach allowed for direct comparison between unaffiliated and affiliated students while controlling for essential student characteristics. Overall, the quantitative results demonstrate that there are both shared and different perspectives regarding the role of BGLOs in creating cultural space.

Qualitative Analysis

After completing the questionnaire, students were given the option to participate in focus groups and individual interviews to expand their responses. Two graduate students facilitated focus group interviews that lasted 90 minutes and were recorded and transcribed. Two affiliated and two unaffiliated focus groups, each composed of six to eight students, were

held between March and May 2006. The facilitators' objectives were to share IPQ results with students in the focus groups and to learn about participants' views and feelings about the survey results. Students were also invited to participate in individual interviews based on their interest in the study. Two affiliated and two unaffiliated students were selected for individual interviews. The individual interviews sought to include students from different backgrounds, including class rank and gender, to emphasize the importance of representation. One of the focus group facilitators conducted interviews and utilized a semi-structured format that lasted 45 to 60 minutes. Based on IPQ results and focus group interviews, focus questions were utilized to gain a deeper perspective into the students' self-described social experiences. Several key steps were taken to ensure that the results from the focus groups and individual interviews reflected the participating students' true beliefs.

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is the inquirer's efforts to show audiences that the case data indicates that a good study was completed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, they suggest that establishing credibility (validity) and reliability helps inquirers demonstrate that they developed a trustworthy study. Merriam (2009) outlines six strategies for demonstrating credibility and transferability: (1) triangulate the findings; (2) use member checks; (3) implement a peer review/examination process; (4) establish an audit trail; (5) contextualize the study for possible transference; and (6) establish maximum variation.

The inquiry team applied these different strategies to establish the trustworthiness of the study. Maximum variation in the sample was achieved by including unaffiliated and affiliated students from different backgrounds in individual and focus group interviews. Triangulation was achieved by utilizing two graduate student inquirers to conduct the focus group and individual interviews with unaffiliated and affiliated students. Data was gathered

from multiple sources, including the IPQ questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. Results were individually analyzed, and each reviewer wrote reflective memos about their findings. These results were then independently analyzed to identify the emergent themes from the participating students, and the results were combined from individual themes into uniform categories. This process involved developing a detailed description of the study with six categories of the audit trail data, including interview transcripts, observation notes, data reduction and synthesis products, different memos, materials related to the intentions and dispositions, and instrument development (Halpren, 1983 as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Themes in the transcripts were discovered by using the "open coding technique," which consisted of investigators identifying potential themes by pulling real examples from the narratives (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2006). Codes and tables were then developed from the themes. Codes were also organized into notebooks with examples from data sources (focus group and individual interviews). Several meetings were held to develop consensus around the data's themes and categories.

The inquiry team also accomplished member checks by sharing tentative interpretations about the findings with unaffiliated and affiliated students at general BSU membership meetings and general National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) membership meetings. Peer examination occurred by asking a colleague from another university to review the article's findings.

Qualitative Results

Undergraduate narratives from both the focus groups and individual interviews showed that unaffiliated and affiliated students shared a common view that BGLOs are the most influential formal peer groups within the overall Black undergraduate community at Midwestern, because they help to create cultural space.

BGLOs' influence flows from their pivotal role in creating cultural space by organizing most of the Black culture-related social life events that appeal to many of the 1,600 African American undergraduates. Not only do BGLOs often "run the yard" on campus but they also provide opportunities for students to share information, organize formal/informal programming, foster transitions, form relationships, and develop Black cultural awareness.

Running the Yard. "Running the yard" is a campus culture-based Black colloquialism that describes a particular Greek-lettered organization as the most influential fraternity or sorority among undergraduate African Americans. Affiliated students' influence flows on campus from factors such as sharing information with students about important matters through informal and formal channels, persuading students through campus-wide academic and support programming, and sponsoring "phat" (highly entertaining) weekend parties. Throughout our interviews, we repeatedly found evidence that BGLOs "ran the yard" regarding their influence on both unaffiliated and affiliated students.

Sharing of Information. Unaffiliated and affiliated students shared that the strengths of BGLOs stemmed from their capacity to collect and share information that unaffiliated students believed was important. Sharon and Dino, two unaffiliated female students, pinpointed why BGLOs are influential with other African American students. Sharon observed the following:

My freshman year, that's how I found out about everything on campus, whether that was a party, maybe the BSU was doing something, or maybe they (BGLOs) needed help with something [programming] this week. You would hear about it from the Greek organizations. Therefore, I think they have a lot of power to get out information to the Black community.

Dino agreed with Sharon's observation:

I volunteer for an organization on the

campus, and they may not get it all on one day, and they may not remember anything. However, if a Greek organization says we are having a party on Saturday, everyone will know, everyone will come. We perceive Greeks as our media here, our way to connect with everyone.

Sharon and Dino had similar observations about BGLOs' major role in disseminating information about academic support, especially social programming for Black undergraduates on campus.

Programming. Student organizations' programming (structured educational experiences) allows them to implement their organization's general mission throughout the greater campus community. BGLOs uniformly embrace the value of service to the community during and after college. Weekend parties are typically one of the key components of BGLO programming that seeks to connect the Black undergraduate community. Marie, an unaffiliated student, voiced her appreciation of BGLOs' campus-wide programming during a focus group session:

Outside parties, they have different events going on throughout the week. Each fraternity or sorority has their week so during that week; people go where they learn about something that they want you to learn about. Usually, some kind of message about Black culture or women or men all depends on what helps because these are smaller social settings. You learn more about their organization, but you learn about some other beneficial things that will help you out.

BGLOs' weekend parties attract African American students from a cross-section of the campus, students from other colleges and universities in the region, and community youth from the local high schools. Undergraduates identified several positive outcomes from attending BGLOs' weekend parties, such as fostering student transition from high school to college, cultivating new peer relationships, and

fostering Black cultural awareness.

Transition and Developing Relationships. Undergraduate comments recognized that sororities and fraternities' weekend parties help diverse African American students have satisfactory transitions from high school to college. Chip, a fraternity member, expressed the following in an individual interview:

Welcome Week was a time that we were supposed to come down here. When I had classes, I went through a whole week of going through classes and such without seeing anybody that looked like me. Furthermore, when the party came, my sister, a senior here, told me to come out to the party. After I went to a party, I was like, "Wow, there are others here like me." It lets you know the population of African Americans that are here on campus. It is a small ratio, but it is large, as you want it to be. You kind of branch out and meet people from other events.

BGLOs' weekend parties provide a framework to foster students' development of friendships with other students with whom they share a cultural affinity. Joyce, an unaffiliated student, shared that BGLOs' weekend parties help students establish new peer relationships with students from their cultural background during a focus group session:

I think that they [weekend parties] play a big part of the interaction between students and the campus. Like he said, they get new people to get outside of the dorms. Since it is mostly a White campus, it is good to see other people who share your color, share your similarities, and taste in music.

Stanley, another unaffiliated student, partially agreed with Joyce about the role BGLOs' weekend parties play by helping students develop new peer relationships with other students from their cultural background. Stanley specifically reflected on the role weekend parties played in developing a comfort zone and social skills to interact with students who share their cultural

backgrounds. He stated:

Well, for me, outside of Strivers [a first-generation admission program], I think I am more social due to the Greeks being there. You get to meet more people. You like to get involved in these dances.

Affiliated and unaffiliated students share a common view that weekend parties help freshmen and transfer students establish new peer relationships with students from their African American background on campus.

Black Cultural Awareness. African American undergraduates are a heterogeneous, as opposed to a homogenous, population at Midwestern. Students' socioeconomic class (SEC) and sociocultural background affect their expectations and needs from BGLOs' weekend parties. BGLOs' weekend parties help diverse students immerse themselves in Black culture. Terri, a sorority member, asserted:

For me, my transition, I did not go to any parties. It was all about studying. That's why before I did not know anything about Greek life. My parents were from a western African country. I did not know about it [Greek lettered organizations], and I saw people wearing this stuff [Greek paraphernalia]. I started research on the Web to find out more about it. I would have liked to see more Black people because I did not go to many parties my first year. However, my second year, I did go to many parties. I started learning about the sorority and stuff like that. I like the fact that I could see other Blacks there.

Terri's experience growing up in the United States and having immigrant parents from a West African country gave her a unique perspective on how initially attending BGLO's activities and later joining a sorority impacted her Black cultural awareness. Portia and Terri come from different sociocultural home community backgrounds; nevertheless, they share a common identity preoccupation with learning about Black issues. Portia, an affiliated student, acknowledged:

I went to a predominantly White high school. Going to parties helped me to meet Black people. I was already excited to see Black people, period. However, I could see them in other settings. Later, we could see if we had some other connections like academic or fellowship, or whatever.

Portia implied attending a predominately White high school left her feeling as though something was missing in her cultural identity. She was eager to meet and interact with different African American students. Students from majority African American communities sometimes have different experiences coming to majority White university such as Midwestern. Dianne, an unaffiliated student from a predominately Black community background, stated the following:

I came from an all-Black school (laughs), and when I came here. I cried when I came here and saw a predominately White school. I did not have a problem talking to White people. Well, I am lying again I did have a problem talking to White people. Well, some of the White people here never talk to Black people. I would pick them to talk to, and they would look at me like what...etc.

In these three narratives, Terri, Portia, and Dianne reflected on how attending BGLOs' academic and social programming affected their Black cultural awareness. The three students came from immigrant, predominately White, and predominately Black backgrounds, respectively, to a majority White campus at Midwestern. The common thread among these students' narratives is their identification of themselves as African American. However, difference between these narratives is that their perceptions about the disparate impact of their geographical and sociocultural (rural, urban, and suburban) backgrounds on their identity developmental pattern. Overall, the qualitative data shows that BGLOs influence most African American students through their status and Black sociocultural programming; however, within-

group differences among unaffiliated students exist relating to how fraternities and sororities meet the needs of students 21 and over.

Age-Based Within-Group Differences

Two unaffiliated students Mickey, a male student, and Yvonne, a female student, described how some African Americans over 21 have lukewarm feelings about attending BGLOs' weekend parties. Mickey stated:

You know I am not that busy. I would say that I think you can relate to me because we are probably similar age, that we did have the opportunity to really engage in the off-campus activities. But when we turned the legal age, we ended up having to transfer to a more aggressive scene. I enjoy the bars, and then I go up to Capital City on occasion to do other things.

Yvonne added the following:

Plus you can dance and listen to all kinds of music with your friends who are over 21, just stuff like that where it is just a whole different atmosphere to me like going to a Black Greek organization party it seems like all you see is people lining and you know some people are dancing, but then they are a group, but it is not like you dance with a girl and a guy it is more group dancing. There it is dancing with a girl and a guy and also like when I did go to the parties at like the after-parties where more so than the parties. I do not know if they still have them, I am sure they do, but I remember the after parties where I think because they also sold alcohol I think they did.

In these narratives, Mickey and Yvonne's comments imply that students 21 and over can pick and choose when they want to attend BGLO's weekend party, as opposed to younger students who do not yet have legal access to bars and other locations. There are additional within-group differences between unaffiliated and affiliated students concerning the alleged elitist attitudes that affiliated students display towards

unaffiliated students. Thus, there is some tension that exists between unaffiliated and affiliated student subgroups.

Elitist Attitudes

Some unaffiliated students believe that fraternity and sorority members maintain elitist attitudes about themselves and view nonmembers with disdain. Beverly and Derrick, two unaffiliated students at Midwestern, described these attitudes during their interviews. Beverly said:

You know we are like the little people to them; we are not on that level or so that hierarchy that also causes tension between the African American community and our Greek organizations. If you don't take us seriously or care about what we want, why would we respect you, or why would we look up to you.

Derrick added:

Like I said in a way it is like us vs. them type of thing since they only hang around themselves. You have some organizations that actually try to like uh, uh group play like in the rec room but then you have some Greeks that you are just like, okay, they only sit together they only hang out together they only talk together. If you walk up to them, it's like hi and then bye and then they get back to talking to their group or something like that. So, if you were going to want to be a part of that group, they might group you with the stereotypical non-Greeks or something like them.

During their respective interviews, affiliated students did not respond directly to these accusations concerning such attitudes. However, one student attempted to explain the social disparity between unaffiliated and affiliated students. During his interview, Roger, a fraternity member, shared this statement:

We do have a strong influence. It is kind of... when you become a member everyone knows your name and you are kind of put

on a pedestal for lack of a better word, and people start expecting things from you, and change what they think that you are like... We are given a power, and I always tell people that the difference between a man and a boy or a woman and a girl is the acceptance of responsibility that you are given.

Discussion

Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings that contribute to the nascent literature relative to how BGLOs create and maintain cultural space for African American undergraduates. The mixed-methods design employed in this study allowed for the identification of several themes through quantitative analysis, and these themes were further explored using qualitative methods. Also, the qualitative data provided rich contextual narratives from the students directly regarding how BGLOs impacted their efforts to create cultural space at Midwestern.

This study found several themes throughout the shared outlooks of both unaffiliated and affiliated students, including:

- BGLOs exhibit significant influence in the Black undergraduate community.
- BGLOs' weekend parties serve multiple functions for the campus (i.e., introduction to campus, social life, and identity development).
- Undergraduates under 21 are more likely to regularly attend BGLOs' weekend parties.
- Undergraduates over 21 have more options, such as attending downtown bars and BGLOs' weekend parties.

Shared Perspectives

The results from this mixed-method study support the research question that BGLOs are considered by both unaffiliated and affiliated students to be the most influential formal peer

group among African American undergraduates. BGLOs' academic and weekend social programming play an important role in the daily lives of diverse African American undergraduates at Midwestern. This conclusion also supports contemporary scholars Ray (2013) and McClure (2011) and earlier scholar Kimbrough (2003) that BGLOs are the most influential of the Black formal subcommunities due to their pivotal role in organizing Black social programming that meets the needs of most African American undergraduates at PWIs. The quantitative results suggest that BGLOs are influential in the day-to-day lives of Black students on campus. In contrast, the qualitative results provide a framework and description of why BGLOs are influential among undergraduates.

Furthermore, this study's qualitative approach allowed students to use their own voices to describe two sources of BGLOs' influential role among undergraduates: (1) BGLOs play a dominant role in organizing social programming (especially weekend parties) that creates cultural space for African American students who seek out-of-classroom activities anchored in Black culture and traditions; and (2) BGLOs shape conversations within the informal communication networks among Black students.

Creating Cultural Space. BGLOs' social programming (especially weekend parties) provides a structure that fosters the intersection of diverse African American undergraduates around artifacts of Black culture and tradition. More so than juniors and seniors, the needs of freshmen and sophomores were met through the fraternities and sororities' social programming. Since many freshmen and sophomores are under 21 years of age, they did not have legal access to socialize in the popular downtown bars that are a unique feature of their college town. Juniors and seniors were often over 21 years of age and had more choices regarding their weekend social lives; these choices included socializing in the downtown bars and attending BGLOs' weekend parties. Unaffiliated and affiliated students both

agreed on the multiple outcomes that came from attending BGLOs' weekend parties.

Outcomes. BGLOs' pivotal role in organizing cultural affinity programming is consistent with the views of higher education scholars like Harper (2006), Patton (2006), Tierney (as cited in Torres, 2006), McClure (2011) and Ray (2013) regarding how cultural affinity programming impacts some undergraduates' (especially those from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds) capacities to develop connections on campus.

Using CRT as an analytical framework reveals that BGLOs have helped to create cultural spaces at PWIs since before WWI. The ability of BGLOs to distribute information along informal communication networks has allowed them to galvanize students around their social programming. However, unaffiliated and affiliated students have divergent views about whether fraternity and sorority members display elitist attitudes towards nonmembers. Furthermore, there is a disparity between students who are under 21 and those that are 21 and over since the former are more likely to attend weekend parties.

Implications for Future Research and Theory

Brown (1994), Harper et al. (2009), and Strayhorn (2012) identified that the higher education literature about African American undergraduates is characterized by a focus on matriculation to PWIs, and that less attention has been paid to retention, academic achievement, and graduation experiences at PWIs. As a result, there is a lack of focus in higher education literature about meeting African American undergraduates' needs.

This study employed a mixed-method approach to learn about unaffiliated and affiliated African American students' views regarding their social experiences at Midwestern University. The study provided insight into unaffiliated and

affiliated students' shared and divergent views about how fraternities and sororities' academic and social programming creates and sustains cultural space that impacts African American undergraduates' out-of-classroom experiences at a public flagship university.

As with all research studies, this exploratory study has limitations that should be highlighted. Because this study focused only on a single site, this may limit the results' generalizability to better understand unaffiliated and affiliated African American undergraduates' experiences at other public flagship universities. The matched pairs approach employed in the quantitative analysis may also contribute to questions about how representative the sample was of the African American population at Midwestern. And yet, the matched group comparison provided significant controls for extraneous variables above typical randomized group comparisons. Moreover, the paired sample methodology, along with the depth of the focus group and individual interviews, provided some significant insights into the role of BGLOs in the African American student experience at PWIs.

Future research should seek to identify how the interaction between institutional culture and student subcultures impacts the multiple subcommunities among undergraduates at public flagships institutions. This understanding should contribute insights into how the multiple subcommunities' interactions impact the academic expectations, social climate, and graduation patterns within the overall African American subpopulation. Future mixed-method studies should occur at several public flagship universities to test the exploratory approach employed in this study. The results of future studies should provide greater insight into unaffiliated and affiliated undergraduates' shared and divergent views regarding the importance of Black cultural space in their retention and graduation from public flagship universities.

Implications for Practice

This study has several implications for Greek Affairs staff and NPHC advisors. CRT provides Greek Affairs staff with a means of examining the structural advantages of WGLOs and the structural disadvantages of BGLOs. Furthermore, it provides a lens for Greek Affairs staff to view institutional constraints on NPHC chapters and enables the development of comprehensive social programming that appeals to Black students. Greek Affairs staff should use focus groups and individual interviews to learn about how the leaders of NPHC chapters may feel constrained in their efforts to create cultural spaces on campus. Focus groups and individual interviews could also be used to learn more about why unaffiliated students view Divine Nine organizations as the most influential of the formal Black subcommunities on campus. Greek Affairs staff members and NPHC chapter advisors should partner with BGLOs to identify and eliminate elitist views and practices which undermine their pivotal roles among Black undergraduates at PWIs. Such partnerships could also be used to provide more support to NPHC chapters in their efforts to create cultural spaces that appeal to Black undergraduates.

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