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## NPHC and MGC Sororities and Fraternities as Spaces of Activism within Predominantly White Institutions

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Garcia et al.: NPHC and MGC Sororities and Fraternities as Spaces of Activism wi  
**NPHC AND MGC SORORITIES AND FRATERNITIES AS SPACES OF  
ACTIVISM WITHIN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS**

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*This study explored how Students of Color within National Pan-Hellenic Council and Multicultural Greek Council sororities and fraternities engaged in activism and in what ways this involvement connected to their membership. Using a qualitative critical narrative approach, we examined the journeys of ten participants. Findings unpack ways participants engaged in activism and resistance aimed at educating individuals and increasing awareness of societal injustices, addressing inequities through service, and inciting disruption and cultivating institutional and societal level change.*

*We would intentionally wear our line jackets to show “Okay, an organization backs this up.” To my knowledge, we’re one of the few who like are allowed to go to rallies and stuff and wear our letters. - Marisol*

Student activism on college campuses has a well-documented history (see Rhoads, 2016) as do issues surrounding equitable and inclusive campus climates for diversity (Bourke, 2010; Hurtado et al., 2015; Hurtado et al., 1998). Although challenges around campus climates are not new, these dynamics are ever-changing as they are informed by context and time (Hurtado et al., 2012). Aspects of today’s sociopolitical climate stemming back to the 2016 election of Donald Trump, the implementation of the Executive Order on travel, and the increased visibility of the alt-right have carried over into colleges and universities, often creating hostile environments for Students of Color and other marginalized groups (Castrellón et al., 2017; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017; Sanchez, 2018). Students’ recognition of a lack of response from institutional leaders to address climate issues on campus can spur student activism (Linder & Myers, 2018). Indeed, scholarship has documented ways students from marginalized groups often engage in activism for change on campuses as well as to advocate for marginalized communities (DeAngelo

& Stebleton, 2016; Jones & Reddick, 2017; Kimball et al., 2016; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; Logan et al., 2017). Research has also shown how campus organizations can serve as centers of institutional change that support and empower Students of Color (Maldonado et al., 2005).

Culturally-based organizations, such as culturally-based sororities and fraternities (CBSFs) within the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) and those typically grouped on campuses within a multicultural Greek council (MGC), serve Students of Color in important ways such as affirming students’ racial identities (Guardia & Evans, 2008), providing a source of community (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2014; Luedke, 2018), and connecting students to resources that support their academic success and development (Atkinson et al., 2010; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Harper, 2007; Orta et al., 2019; Patton et al., 2011). CBSFs each have unique stories and connections to forms of activism (see Brown et al., 2012; Parks & Hughey, 2020; Torbenson & Parks, 2009), yet all share a common bond in that their formation and existence interrupts whiteness that permeates sorority and fraternity life. Further, Maldonado et al.’s (2005) work as well as other scholarship on student activism (Rhoads, 2016) points to the potential role

that student organizations, including culturally-based groups, can serve as spaces of activism for campus as well as broader communities. However, they also highlight the labor and potential negative ramifications students may experience as a result of their engagement in activism including psychological, emotional, and physical damage (Lantz et al., 2016; Linder, 2019; Rhoads, 2016). While scholarship has attended to ways NPHC and MGC sororities and fraternities serve to empower students and support their ethnic/racial identity development, further exploration is needed to unpack these organizations and their relationship with student members engaged in activism. The following questions guided this research:

1. In what ways do members of NPHC and MGC sororities and fraternities engage in activism?
2. How do these forms of activism connect to members' sorority and fraternity involvement?

### Literature Review

This literature review will first unpack some of the background and histories around college students and their engagement in activism. It will then discuss the role of culturally-based sororities and fraternities in the experiences of minoritized college students and their historical connections to lifting up minoritized communities.

#### College Student Activism

College student engagement in protests is not a new phenomenon; student protest has a long history, including the 1960s civil rights movements through the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (Cho, 2018; Hoffman, & Mitchell, 2016; Rhoads, 2016; Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). These movements have often been in response to racial inequities (Hoffman, & Mitchell, 2016; Rhoads, 2016; Wheatle & Commodore, 2019) as well as women's and LGBTQ+ student movements pushing

them to the foreground (Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; Rhoads, 2016).

Moreover, students with minoritized identities are often among those fighting for their rights in the face of oppression, aggression, or outright violence against them (Hope et al., 2016; Jones & Reddick, 2017; Kimball et al., 2016; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). They take on these causes for myriad reasons, including undergoing or witnessing trauma and seeking assistance the institution fails to provide (Cho, 2018; Jones & Reddick, 2017; Linder & Myers, 2018; Vaccaro & Mena 2011). Harmful events can be utilized as a catalyst for challenging inequities in the name of social justice, allowing for students to strip themselves of stigmas and feel empowered once again (Jones & Reddick, 2017; Kimball et al., 2016). Students' involvement in activism can take various forms ranging from "Existence as Resistance" to the degree that "Activism Consumes Life" (Logan et al., 2017, p. 259). Historically, college students have been a driving force in institutional change (Heidenreich, 2006; Logan et al., 2017; Rhoads, 2016; Wheatle & Commodore, 2019).

#### NPHC and MGC Sororities and Fraternities

Our use of the term culturally-based sororities and fraternities refers to sorority and fraternity life (SFL) organizations that are race and/or ethnicity based. We recognize the terms "race" and ethnicity" are constantly being critiqued and evolving (Edwards et al., 2001) though both are acknowledged as social constructs that are used to continue exploitation and oppression of minoritized people. For clarity, we relied on the American Sociological Association's delineation of the terms whereas "race" refers to phenotypical differences and ethnicity references shared culture which includes language, traditions, and beliefs among other factors (American Sociological Association, 2021). Culturally-based sororities and fraternities include historically Black sororities and

fraternities within the NPHC and sororities and fraternities typically grouped on campuses within MGC including Historically Native American Fraternities and Sororities (HNAFS), Asian Pacific Islander Desi American, Latinx/a/o, and Multicultural based groups.

CBSFs are not a monolith, each have unique histories, founding purposes, and connections to activism (see Brown et al., 2012; Parks & Hughey, 2020; Torbenson & Parks, 2009). Yet CBSFs also share a common tie in that they were founded in response to systemic and campus-based forms of racial/ethnic discrimination (Garcia & Shirley, 2020; Gillon et al., 2019). Thus NPHC and MGC sororities and fraternities inherently have long histories of resisting systemic oppression within college campuses and larger societal contexts, which in and of itself may be considered a form of activism.

Findings from participants' experiences within these organizations show that membership deepens individuals' racial and/or ethnic identity development and commitment to their communities (Guardia & Evans, 2008; Still & Faris, 2019). Additionally, CBSFs allow for individuals to gain responsibilities and leadership experience that may be instrumental in serving their communities (Arellano, 2020; Atkinson et al, 2010). These organizations offer minoritized college students space to not only survive but thrive in postsecondary education (Garcia, 2020; Harper, 2007; Orta et al., 2019; Patton et al., 2011) even when their campus communities do not recognize or prioritize their needs (Garcia, 2019b).

CBSFs implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, facilitate student's recognition of systemic inequities, thus they may inform students' desire to participate in activism against injustices (Garcia, 2019a). However, little research has explored the connection between these organizations and student activism. Some scholars have charted the historical roots of these organizations and their commitments to fight inequities

such as Heidenreich's (2006) overview of Latinx Greek letter organizations or Parks and Hughey's (2020) work on NPHC organizations and their "long and rich history of service, advocacy, resistance, and racial uplift" (p. 1). Harris and Mitchell (2008) extended the discussion of racial uplift from a critical perspective noting it has long been contested for its elitist connotations. Regardless, the authors assert that social action has been foundational to NPHC organizations (Harris & Mitchell, 2012). Although these seminal pieces of literature serve to demystify the role of activism in relation to larger organizations, additional empirical research is needed to understand the contemporary role of NPHC and MGC sororities and fraternities as spaces of activism and resistance from the voices and perspectives of the members engaging in this work.

### Conceptual Framework

A number of scholars have attempted to understand and define what student activism is, and what it is not (Cabrera, et al., 2017; Jacoby, 2017; Logan, et al., 2017). For instance, in their work on "new student activism," Jacoby (2017) adopted the 2016 Wikipedia definition: "Activism consists of efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental change, or stasis with the desire to make improvements in society and to correct social injustice" (as cited in Jacoby, 2017). Similar to Morgan and Davis (2019), we saw value in keeping our definition of activism as broad and encompassing as possible and used select tenets drawn from Cabrera et al.'s (2017) work to do so.

Cabrera et al. (2017) constructed a series of tenets that refine what activism entails that we considered; however, we determined that some of these—including a requirement for an element of risk—would greatly limit students' sensemaking about what they deemed as engagement with activism. After much consideration we chose

to center the following tenets in this work: “Premise 1: Student activism involves an intentional, sustained connection to a larger collective” (Cabrera et al., 2017, p. 404); “Premise 2: Student activism involves developing and exercising power” (Cabrera et al., 2017, p. 405); “Premise 6: Student activism must be guided by a utopian vision or a vision of what social progress looks like” (Cabrera et al., 2017, p. 407); “Premise 8: Even though student activism seeks to change the political landscape, it is not the same as political governance (or campaigning)” (Cabrera et al., 2017, p. 408).

## Methodology

### Epistemology and Study Design

Our decision to pursue this research study was guided by our critical epistemology, and specifically through two key tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT; Harris, 1993; Hiraldo, 2010). First, we recognize the permanent role of race and racism in our society (Hiraldo, 2010) and chose to focus our research on the experiences of People of Color to shed light on this reality. Counterstorytelling was another crucial component of this work as we centered voices of members of Students of Color within NPHC and MGC sororities and fraternities. These individuals are often silenced as People of Color within society and treated as secondary to historically white sororities and fraternities within historically white institutions (Garcia, 2019b; Ray & Rosow, 2012).

Given our epistemological framing, we used a critical qualitative narrative inquiry approach (Barone, 1992). This methodological approach was useful for this study as it explicitly recognizes researchers and participants make meaning of participants’ lived experiences through storytelling. Furthermore, our research questions, interviews, and analysis were all framed with a critical perspective calling attention to ways power, privilege, and oppression manifest within participant experiences.

### Positionality

Because we were intentional in centering a critical perspective, it was also important that we, the members of our research team, engaged in reflexivity regarding our positionalities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The team was comprised of graduate students and was led by Crystal Garcia, a faculty researcher that has engaged in extensive research focused on minoritized college students and CBSFs. Crystal Garcia is a Latina and white woman that is a member of a historically white sorority, serves as the faculty advisor for a Latinx/a-based sorority, and conducts much of her research in the realm of culturally-based sororities and fraternities. William Walker is a cisgender Black man who was a member of a historically White fraternity. His understanding of culturally-based sororities and fraternities stems from his Bachelor’s in African American Studies and experience in research centered around social justice and equity throughout his master’s graduate assistantship. Ciera Dorsey is a Black heterosexual cisgender woman. She is a member of a Divine Nine organization (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc.). She was raised in a household and community where Black culture, history and facts were an integral in her learning and daily living. One of those pieces of history being NPHC Organizations. When she saw advocacy, it was constantly demonstrated through individuals in NPHC organizations. She wanted to be a part of history and an organization that met the needs of the community around it. Zachary Werninck is a white cisgender man and member of an Interfraternity Council organization, and is currently completing his master’s degree in higher education. During his undergrad he served in an executive role for a Greek honors organization that collaborated with the NPHC, MGC, Panhellenic Council, and Interfraternity Council (IFC). Currently he serves on the Board of Trustees for his chapter where he has the opportunity to engage with executive members of the chapter in educating them on the

importance of NPHC and MGC sororities and fraternities within the Greek community. Jessie Johns is a white woman and is a member of a historically white sorority. As an undergraduate she served on the Panhellenic Council, where she worked closely with officers from the MGC and NPHC and served as a graduate intern for the MGC and NPHC Councils.

We all have different connections to involvement in activism, SFL, and NPHC and MGC sororities and fraternities more specifically. We entered this research space with intentionality and were conscientious of the fact that all but one of our members was not a member of NPHC and MGC sororities or fraternities. We remained cognizant of our positionalities, consistently engaging in conversations as a team to debrief areas we were unfamiliar with or lacked knowledge of.

### **Participant Selection and Data Collection**

We used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) to recruit participants that could shed light on our research questions. Aligning with our decision to maintain a broad definition of activism, we were intentional in our decision not to “screen” potential participants to select those that were engaged in activities that we identified as forms of activism. Therefore participant criteria simply required that individuals 1) were current undergraduate students or completed their undergraduate experience within the last year at a four-year, predominantly white institution 2) identified as People of Color 3) were members of culturally-based sororities or fraternities and 4) engaged in forms of activism (as identified by the potential participants).

To enter the study, participants first completed a demographic form that included questions about their identities, educational experiences, and organizational involvement. Participants then engaged in their first interview, which focused on understanding the individual’s institutional context, the nature of the participants’ organizational involvement, and engagement in activism. As discussed within our conceptual framework section, we wanted to keep our assumptions about what activism meant to the participants as broad as possible. This was reflected in our interview questions, examples of which included, “In what ways, if any, have your identities played a role in your involvement in activism?” and “In what ways, if any, has your sorority/fraternity involvement played a role in your activism experiences?” After conducting the first interview, participants completed journal reflections with prompts around their campus climate, engagement in activism, and the labor involved in activism. Participants’ journal responses were used in analysis and also to construct questions for the second interview, which further examined ways the participant engaged in activism and the role of their sorority or fraternity in this activism.

Thirty one individuals reached out with interest and were sent the study information. Ten participants followed through with completing their demographic form and first interview. Of those, four individuals could not complete the reflective journal or second interview due to time constraints in their schedules. We still felt we acquired rich data within their first interview and decided to include these participants’ stories within data analysis. See Table 1 for participant demographic information.

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Information (Reported on Demographic form)*

Pseudonym <sup>1</sup>	Pronouns	Race/Ethnicity	Organization Type
Alexandra	She/Her	African-American	NPHC sorority <sup>2</sup>
Bagel	She/Her	Black	Latinx/a Based Sorority
Daniel	He/Him	Hispanic	Latinx/o Based Fraternity
Brooklyn	She/Her	Asian / Chinese	Asian American Based Sorority
Taylor	She/Her	African American	NPHC sorority
Al Kim	He/Him	Latinx	Latinx/o Based Fraternity
Celeste	They/them	Chinese	Asian American Based Sorority
Bruce	He/Him	African American	NPHC Fraternity
Marisol	She/Her	Mexican	Latinx/a Based Sorority
Voodoo	He/Him	African	NPHC fraternity

1 Pseudonyms were selected by the participants.

2 All NPHC members were part of different organizations

### Analytical Approach

Data analysis began as the researchers reviewed interview recordings and constructed preliminary jottings (Saldaña, 2016) on concepts that stood out to the researchers with particular attention to ways individuals made sense of their role as an activist and the activism they engaged in. Week by week we listened to interview recordings, took notes, and then met as a team to discuss notable patterns that were present in participants' reflections. We then identified a list of overarching patterns that extended across participants that pertained to the research questions and used this list to create narrative analysis documents that we completed for each participant. Our analysis accounted for our theoretical framework and epistemological approach, particularly that the permanence of racism contributed to the existence of culturally-based sororities and fraternities as well as the much of the activism participants engaged in.

As a team we were each assigned one participant for whom to serve as the primary researcher and one for whom to serve as the secondary researcher. In the first week we

each reviewed the participants' transcripts we were assigned as primary researcher and organized sections of the transcripts into the narrative analysis document while identifying additional pieces that did not fall into these themes. The next week, we reviewed the analysis document in relation to the transcripts for the participant we were designated as secondary researcher. We added to the document where necessary and indicated areas we disagreed or were uncertain. During the third week we reconciled our analysis documents as primary and secondary researcher. After completing the first round of participants, we met together as a larger team and discussed patterns that were prominent across participants' experiences. We completed a second round of participant analysis following the same process. We used the narrative analysis documents to complete thematic analysis and came together as a team to further refine the themes (Saldaña, 2016).

### Findings

In our analysis of ways participants de-

scribed their involvement in activism and how they connected these experiences to their sorority/fraternity involvement, we identified three overarching themes. First, participants engaged in activism through formal and informal opportunities to engage community members in education to identify inequities. Second, participants often described their involvement in community service efforts targeted towards addressing inequities. Finally, participants engaged in activism to incite disruption and cultivate institutional and societal level change.

### **Activism as Education to Raise Awareness**

Participants' reflections on their engagement in activism often took the form of education both in and outside of their respective organizations. These educational activism efforts often raised awareness of systemic injustices through informal conversations as well as formal modes such as educational forums, panels, and other events. Several participants described ways they engaged in these practices through informal conversations. For instance Brooklyn, a member of an Asian American based sorority, reflected on ways she interrupted power dynamics by correcting herself and educating others on why particular terms can be harmful: "it's important to understand that language has history behind it and we should understand what it means to people and how it can hurt people." Voodoo was an international student from Africa and an NPHC fraternity member who shared:

I go out of my way to educate people more about the African continent and African cultures and things like that... When I first got here, people were thinking everywhere in Africa is impoverished, you live in huts, we don't have money, and I had to let them know that...We're not all broke, and we're not all poor.

Voodoo's hope was that educating others would combat stereotypes individuals possessed regarding African people. Voodoo

likewise embraced formal opportunities to increase people's awareness of people from Africa by participating on panel discussions and delivering presentations about Africa.

Participants also often discussed their experiences hosting initiatives alongside their sororities and fraternities. One example was a multicultural dance night and an event Daniel engaged in with his Latinx/o based fraternity that featured "cultural food... educational pamphlets and a speaker." Al Kim, also a member of a Latinx/o based fraternity, has been an active part of an initiative on his campus that focuses on the queer community within Greek life because as he described, "as a university or as organizations, we have to accept that for fraternities, we were based off a lot of hyper masculine environments and concepts. The same goes with feminization with sororities." Through this event, Al Kim and the other speakers:

talk about our experiences to the new generation of Greeks...It's not necessarily about teaching them what to say and what to do...it's more to talk about what it's like so [they can] know how to or get better ideas. [on] how situations should be handled or how they shouldn't have been handled.

Al Kim recognized that even though his fraternity was created to affirm racial and ethnic identities for People of Color, it could still be problematic—like all sororities and fraternities—in terms of gender and sexuality.

In addition to initiatives that participants were a part of with their sororities and fraternities, they were also involved through other outlets on campus. For example, Alexandra, a NPHC sorority member, discussed her involvement in workshops and conferences for student organizations. These initiatives were intended to, "educat[e] other students who are not Black or other students who do not identify as a Student of Color as to what it means to be Black. What does Black Lives Matter really mean?" These conversations targeted an array of social justice issues within U.S. society:



...We talked about Donald Trump, we talked about white supremacy, we talked about rape, child molestation, all that. Just anything that, any issue that came up, we had a porch talk. We talked about what it means to be Black versus what it means to be African in America...We've had conversations about that and try to grow and understand each other as people.

Alexandra understood this work in relation to activism as, "teaching people how to be allies, how to be more articulate of what to do rather than just doing something." Notably Alexandra explained that some of her activism work had to be separate from her NPHC sorority "because of our national guidelines, regulations and rules, we can only do so much as far as activism is concerned."

Celeste similarly led educational workshops for the campus community addressing social justice topics: "I teach some workshops on microaggression, and stereotypes, and all those kinds of things." Celeste and their Asian American based sorority also helped to raise awareness around domestic abuse, sexual assault, and human trafficking through partnerships with various organizations that had upcoming events: "So, we tend to do a lot more during domestic violence awareness month and then also sexual assault awareness month...We also do the Take Back the Night...We also partnered a lot with the Title IX [office]."

### **Activism as Service to Address Societal Injustices**

All participants recognized various ways they engaged in service efforts to address societal injustices and shared ways their sororities and fraternities directly connected them to these opportunities. Bagel for one discussed a long list of initiatives that she engaged in through her Latinx/a based sorority:

We do a lot of empowering women events. We try to have speakers from the, like the Women's Center on cam-

pus...I mean, our motto is culture is pride, pride is success. We're big on culture... We'll make cards for women's centers or domestic violence shelters.

Bagel continued to explain that the principles established by her sorority are what holds her accountable to continue to engage in this work:

The community service, wanting to serve the community, wanting to do better for the world. I feel like it holds me accountable. These are our principles, I have to uphold them...not that I have to, but I need to do stuff that upholds with these principles, and doing activism and helping other people upholds these principles.

Like Bagel, Alexandra spoke about ways she engaged in work alongside her NPHC sorority to serve disenfranchised communities, which worked against misconceptions about sorority involvement:

I'm stepping off of this university campus, and I'm doing things for the community...these organizations are supposed to build up the lives of not just Black people but of all people. So I have always tried to have a voice or tried to always show face because it's like, don't just think because I am in my sorority that I'm not aware or that I don't care about other people as well.

As evident in Alexandra's reflection, her engagement in activism was not only in resistance to systemic inequities that served to harm people but also against preconceived notions of what membership in a sorority entailed.

In addition to engaging in service outside of campus, there were also important ways participants brought attention to inequities within the bounds of the campus community through their sororities and fraternities and alongside other campus organizations. Daniel discussed how he and his fraternity were intentional in working together with other campus organizations for minoritized populations: "I always try

to make sure anything we do that's visible on campus, we try to collaborate with other organizations that represent these minority demographics, whether they'd be LG-BTQ+, Hispanics, African-Americans, etc." Taylor, an NPHC sorority member, shared that she is "the presiding president of two prominent health organizations on campus and we do a lot of work with minority students in particular and in the greater campus community as well." Celeste started an organization on campus "in regards to the increasing amount of sex trafficking and human trafficking that's going on a lot in [our city] but, in general in the country. I'm trying to raise awareness of that." In addition to raising awareness, which aligns with the educational piece of Celeste's activism, Celeste wanted to ensure survivors had access to support. When asked what types of organizations they connected with, Celeste shared: "So, there are obviously women shelters that [focus on] either domestic abuse or human trafficking just for them to go to. Helping them find resources and things like that."

### Activism as Disruption

The final form of activism participants engaged in were those aimed at disruption and the desire to incite institutional and societal level change; these efforts largely took place on campus. For example, Al Kim described how his fraternity tabled and got signatures to bring attention to the refugee crisis. Marisol, a Latinx/a based sorority member, recalled a prominent activism experience she engaged in during the 2016 presidential campaign when a Republican party student organization constructed a "Trump wall" on campus:

The administration allowed them to on the basis of freedom of speech... That really pissed off a lot of organizations and culturally-based fraternities and sororities. A lot of them were out there counter protesting to take that down and to the administration as well like, "Why are you allowing hate

speech on campus and claim it to be free speech?"

This event was a major moment for Marisol and helped her to recognize that she could choose to engage in activism to change her institutional culture. This was the first time Marisol ever engaged in a protest; she and the others stayed in counter-protest for the two hours the group reserved to do their Trump wall demonstration. It was frustrating for her to have to engage in this labor and likewise it was further infuriating when campus administration did not respond, "they didn't say anything. They didn't address the situation." The students were made aware that the same group was going to construct the wall again on campus so she and the other students decided to take preemptive action by doing a sit-in in the administration office on campus: "they were out there for like four days.... Yeah, during the sit-in. People would come and go like they had shifts, we're going to sit here until like the administration doesn't let them do it. Then that worked."

Being a part of this protest and sit-in incited a lot of emotion for Marisol: "I think it was some other feeling of just being angry that we even have to do this. Then also feeling like, 'All right, we have to do something or it's going to happen again.'" Marisol participated in as many rallies around issues she thought were important throughout her college career including several on sexual assault on campus—particularly focusing these efforts on residential fraternities, DACA, and Missing indigenous Women. The latter was particularly important as Marisol recognized, "we have some sorority sisters who are Yakama, that's one of the tribes near our area. Then our campus is on tribal land. So acknowledging stuff like that was important."

Similar to Marisol, other participants also participated in efforts to address campus inequities. Al Kim participated in activism for mental health coverage:

I was really active with supporting the movement to get expanded health,

mental health coverage here because when I first came in, I normalized it pretty fast but I knew it wasn't right. To get a counselor, unless you blatantly outright say, "I'm thinking about suicide," you cannot see a counselor or a mental health specialist guaranteed. The wait time was up to five weeks sometimes, and that is like ... Again, in my experience, you can be in a very bad place mentally without necessarily fully believing a statement, "I have the desire to end my life." You should still see someone very soon, like immediately.

Al Kim recognized that mental health was an important issue facing college students and the institution had a responsibility to address students' needs.

Like Al Kim, Bruce engaged in efforts to hold his institution accountable to minoritized students. At the time, he was the president of his NPHC fraternity and after the university defunded the multicultural center he and other students decided to send a message to administration regarding their thoughts:

The options were a march, a sit-in, or a letter. Like I said, mind you, this is the first time I've actively done anything like this so for me in my head, my first thought was, "Ok. A march? That's a lot. A sit-in? That's definitely a lot. We can write a letter.

Bruce was "extremely scared" about the ramifications knowing that his name was visible to administrators on campus; however, as his first time engaging in activism, he and the other students thought "this was the best way possible" to advocate for Students of Color on campus. The administration was responsive and invited Bruce alongside other NPHC presidents, the president of the Black Student Association, and the SGA to meet. Together, the students advocated to re-fund the multicultural center and to establish Greek plots. Bruce explained:

Our Panhellenic and IFC fraternity groups have housing that was paid for

by the University and some money donated from each chapter. We are one of four schools in [our state] that has all of the historically NPHC organizations and we had no representation on campus. There was no flags. If a person was to take a tour of the University, they would not know that NPHC was on campus, but they would definitely know that we have the Panhellenic Sorority villages and the IFC housing. So we advocated for us to get Greek plots. Once we advocated for that, we advocated for them to be funded through the University.

Bruce participated in meetings for two years where "a majority of those meetings were educating our administrators, using common terminology, and then finding out how we were going to fund it." Eventually, they were successful in doing so.

Daniel also shared a story wherein his Latinx/o based fraternity had to engage in efforts to get campus administration to acknowledge their organization when their housing was taken from them:

Traditional Greek life organizations and various sororities have all these old big donors to the university. So they all each have huge three story houses that are like mansions, right next to campus. And we had one Multicultural Greek Council house, which could only house 10-12 people...And it actually ended up being destroyed in favor of building more upper division housing so they could sell more apartments to juniors and seniors...a huge issue with that was that they never let us know they were doing it...when they did finally tell us is this is what we're going to do, it was the semester before they actually did it. So we even asked them, so where are we going to live? And they said, we don't know. You have to figure it out... We had one of our members working days and nights for a whole month trying to draft up a proposal to move us to a separate house on campus.

Although Daniel was not the primary author of the proposal, his support as part of the fraternity was a form of resistance against the erasure of MGC space on campus.

In addition to efforts on campus, participants were also part of equity centered activism off within their local communities. For example, Taylor's NPHC sorority engaged in voter registration drives as she recognized:

[my college town] is a beautiful city, it really is and a lot of beautiful people. There's also a lot of corruption and voter suppression here. Last year, before I was a [member of my sorority] I was working at a voter registration drive with [the sorority], and we ran into this issue, because we have voting deputies and NAACP members and all these other people out there registering everyone to vote.

Taylor recognized that engaging in voter registration drives was a form of activism because it disrupted voter suppression.

Bagel also engaged in efforts on campus as well as the local community through an environmental club she was a member of. She explained they met with:

council boards and the city council men and we would talk to them about things that we can do in the city to become more environmentally friendly. We tried to start a plastic ban on campus. We tried to start a plastic ban in the city.

Although the group's plans were not enacted, Bagel was still proud to have been a part of these initiatives.

## Discussion and Implications

Participants in this study discussed their involvement in activism in expansive ways including engaging in educational efforts, service to communities and causes impacted by systemic inequities, and forms of disruption to power dynamics. Thus, our findings show that by engaging in these forms of

activism, participants worked towards raising awareness of inequities, addressing the outcomes of inequities that currently exist, and pushing for transformation of systems that reinforce and reproduce systemic inequities. Similar to previous scholarship on student activism (Linder & Myers, 2018), participants often engaged in activism on campus when their institutions failed to address equity issues. Furthermore, participants' involvement in activism also pointed to important considerations for practice in terms of addressing the potential negative ramifications of their engagement (Lantz et al., 2016; Linder, 2019; Rhoads, 2016).

Similar to Logan et al.'s (2017) findings wherein some participants identified with engaging in forms of intellectual/educational activism, participants in this study referenced informal and formal ways they carried out this form of activism. All participants discussed their experiences organizing and being part of panels and other initiatives that aimed to deconstruct systemic inequities and cultural stereotypes. These efforts were all evidence of Cabrera's (2017) first tenant, "Student activism involves an intentional, sustained connection to a larger collective" (p. 404) and sixth tenant, "Student activism must be guided by a utopian vision or a vision of what social progress looks like" (p. 407). Based on participants' reflections, it was clear these students were committed to addressing systemic oppression that harmed minoritized people—and in the case of Bagel, the environment as well—in hopes of a future wherein these systems of oppression no longer exist.

Participants additionally engaged in what Logan et al. (2017) described as "front line activism" (p. 261). One example of front line activism was through Marisol's experiences engaging in protests and sit-ins fighting against the Trump wall being built on campus. Al Kim was another example in his and his fraternity's efforts to collect signatures to bring focus to the refugee crisis. Another example was Taylor's work engaging with communities in voter registration

drives alongside her sorority. In these cases in particular, we drew connections to Cabrera et al.'s (2017) eighth premise, "Even though student activism seeks to change the political landscape, it is not the same as political governance (or campaigning)" (p. 408).

Front line activism (Logan et al., 2017) was also evident in demands for change from institutional leaders as in the case of Bruce's collaborative efforts to refund the multicultural office and establish plots for NPHC sororities and fraternities on campus. Notably, in most occasions when participants reflected on their experiences engaging in activism, they did so in conversation about the groups they collaborated with in this work—a primary source of power for participants. Thus, this dynamic was underscored by Cabrera et al.'s (2017) premise one, "Student activism involves an intentional, sustained connection to a larger collective" (p. 404) and two, "Student activism involves developing and exercising power" (p. 405). Participants primarily discussed the connections to their sororities and fraternities as spaces of support in their work and also as vehicles through which they could advocate as a collective. All participants additionally discussed other campus organizations that were crucial to this work, such as Bruce's joint efforts with other NPHC, BSA, and SGA student leaders.

The findings from this study have important implications for practice and future research. First and foremost, sorority and fraternity life offices and student affairs divisions broadly must recognize the labor that Students of Color within culturally-based sororities and fraternities expend to educate their campus communities about systemic oppression. The participants in this study, often alongside members of their CBSFs, regularly hosted panels, speakers, and other educational events to address systemic inequities. This finding in particular mirrored other studies that demonstrated the labor Students of Color engaged in to advocate for minoritized populations (DeAngelo

& Stebleton, 2016; Jones & Reddick, 2017; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; Logan et al., 2017). Students' voices should be centered in these conversations, however they should also be recognized for and compensated for this labor. Moreover, SFL offices should ensure they encourage or even require members of other councils to attend these events. Additionally, in recognizing students' labor engaging in activism, SFL professionals should also evaluate policies and requirements that students are expected to meet in light of these findings. For instance, if SFL offices require students to engage in forms of community service, do they count participation in rallies and protest in meeting those requirements? Are students excused from mandatory SFL events when they are involved in forms of activism that conflict with the scheduling of those events?

Another key implication based on our findings involves considering ways faculty and professional staff members are (or not) supporting students engaged in activism. These efforts require time and emotional labor that may detract from the students' ability to successfully navigate their academic experience. As noted by Al Kim in his efforts to bring attention to mental health resources on campus, the services that are available to students may not actually meet their needs. Campus leadership does not need to conduct another climate study or engage in listening sessions to address these needs. Student affairs divisions and Offices of Diversity & Inclusion are in a particularly strong position to review the immense literature on the experiences of Students of Color and campus climates for equity to ensure they are addressing these needs. These efforts require sustained collaboration across units and should not be solely delegated to minoritized faculty and staff members. Finally, campus communities must be fully engaged in efforts to minimize overt racism and microaggressions students experience within those communities. Students should not be forced to spend two years in meetings to ensure the resourc-

es that should be supporting Students of Color are secured nor should they have to work in shifts over the span of days to sit in to administrative offices to demand that they are acknowledged as humans.

Additional research is needed to understand the role of NPHC and MGC fraternities and sororities in not only providing a space of belonging for students but also as spaces of activism wherein students advocate for the needs of minoritized communities. Our study examined these dynamics across CBSFs broadly; however, because these organizations differ in their missions and founding purposes, future research should continue to unpack nuances among organization types. Future research should also further explore the connection between sorority and fraternity affiliations and their support for members engaged in activism. These data were collected prior to the reinvigoration around the Black Lives Matter movement that occurred in the summer of 2020. Therefore, while Alexandra noted that her NPHC sorority wanted members to keep their activism separate from the organization, that is possibly no longer the case. Further, it would be interesting to see if other sororities and fraternities have changed their policies regarding members wearing letters and receiving support as they engage in forms of activism such as rallies and protests. Finally, future studies can also explore the rationale for Students of Color that are members of NPHC and MGC sororities and fraternities to engage in activism and how they make decisions in prioritizing their forms of engagement.

### **Conclusion**

NPHC and MGC sororities and fraternities serve as important spaces for Students of Color, particularly within historically white institutions. This study extends our understanding of students' experiences as members of NPHC and MGC groups by providing unique insight to ways members of culturally-based sororities and fraterni-

ties described their engagement in activism and the relationship between involvement in their organizations and activism. Our findings showed that participants spent their time in advocating for multiple causes, many of which were intricately tied to their sorority/fraternity involvement. Institutions broadly as well as sorority and fraternity communities specifically benefit greatly from the labor of these students, perhaps unknowingly, and should ensure these organizations are recognized and supported in their work.

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