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Considerations for Antiracist Practices in Sorority and Fraternity Life: A Critical Race Theory Perspective

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR ANTIRACIST PRACTICES IN SORORITY AND FRATERNITY LIFE: A CRITICAL RACE THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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This conceptual piece uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a way to recognize systemic inequities within sorority and fraternity life (SFL) communities, and to advance meaningful change on college campuses. We engage histories, literature, and current events to aid practitioners and scholars in deeper considerations around antiracist education in action. Further, we provide an accompanying case study to offer practical considerations for SFL practitioners, campus administrators, and scholars seeking to engage antiracist work within these communities.

Keywords: anti-racism, inclusion, sorority/fraternity life, Critical Race Theory

Current events in sorority and fraternity life (SFL) reveal that racism and bias continue to permeate this functional area in higher education. Oftentimes this is displayed in literature and public press (see Garcia et al., 2023; Lane & Elkas, 2020; Marcus, 2020), or found in policy and practical changes impacting the profession more broadly (see Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, 2020; Dodge et al., 2019). Further, our own professional experiences, research endeavors, and institutional service shed light on the need to engage with antiracist work at student, staff, institutional, and organizational levels. We write through a conceptual lens, one that builds on theory, research, and practice; further, we offer a case study for practitioners to engage with as a tool for practical development.

The purpose of this article is to (a) highlight the complicated history of racism and white supremacy embedded in SFL, and (b) offer ways of engagement that are practitioner-centered and might lead to combating racist practices in this area of campus life. To begin our conversation on antiracist practices in SFL, Crystal offers the following reflection:

> *I served as a member of a university hiring committee for a position in SFL that would engage in work across the four councils[1] on campus (NPHC, MGC, NPC, and IFC). The SFL professional staff was diligent in*

[1] Councils vary by campus, though commonly there are four: the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) includes nine historically Black sororities and fraternities; the Multicultural Greek Councils (MGC) include Asian Pacific Islander Desi-American, Historically Native American, Latinx/a/o, LGBTQ+, Multicultural, and additional identity-based groups; the National Panhellenic Council (NPC) includes historically white sororities within the National Panhellenic Conference; the Interfraternity Council (IFC) encompasses the historically white fraternities within the North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC)

ensuring representation from all councils in the hiring committee by inviting a student member and an advisor from each council to serve. I was the advisor representative for the Multicultural Greek Council (MGC), a council that consisted of the only Latina-based sorority and multicultural fraternity on campus. The hiring committee convened for the first time to review the search process, and as we settled in around the table, I sat next to the student representing MGC, whom I had gotten to know quite well over the previous year working with the council. As a group, we opened our materials to review the job call—already posted for several weeks—to see if we had any questions regarding what we would be looking for in a candidate. I noticed the position description required experience working with NPHC, NPC, and NIC groups but failed to mention MGC. I raised my hand, pointed out this oversight, and asked if candidates were expected to have a working knowledge of MGC sororities and fraternities. The committee head apologized for the oversight and noted that it was important for this position though it was not listed. I will never forget how angry and saddened I felt when the MGC student turned to me and said, "Thank you for bringing that up; I was wondering why we weren't included." I could not help but feel frustration with the situation knowing that historically white sororities within NPC or NIC would never be overlooked in an SFL position description. As a critical researcher, I also recognized this was yet another example of how whiteness is centered in sorority and fraternity life.

When conversations arise about the role of racism in SFL, the focus is often on student members of historically white sororities and fraternities (HWSF) hosting racist parties, using racist language, or engaging in racist membership practices (e.g., see Garcia et al., 2023; George, 2023; Joyce & Cawthon, 2017; Sasso et al., 2022). Rarely do we extend beyond these discussions to unpack the ways racism appears in educational practice. We began with this story specifically because it is one example of the pervasive normalization of whiteness in SFL communities that results in culturally-based, multicultural, and historically Black organizations being an afterthought, or not a thought at all. The example mentioned above shows that even professionals with good intentions (e.g., inviting representatives from all councils to serve on the hiring committee) can still cause harm when they lack an intentional focus on antiracist practices.

For the sake of this work, we borrow Gillborn's (2006) explanation of anti-racism, which is the practice of identifying and opposing racism by challenging policies, views, and behaviors. Anti-racism examines how everyday racism shapes the lives and lived experiences of individuals. Anti-racism from an educational context and practice speaks to how institutions aim to produce institutional change and move towards racial equity (Welton et al., 2018). While acknowledging racism is a part of dismantling inequities in education, incorporating anti-racism educational practices ensures that we hold individuals accountable for their racist ideologies. We argue in this piece that moving from addressing

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racist ideologies to anti-racism is necessary as anti-blackness and white supremacy continue to be pervasive within SFL. As such, we write this conceptual piece with attention to practitioners, and it is our hope that there is utility in both the scholarly aspect of this article, as well as the case study included at the end (see Appendix).

Scholars and practitioners have suggested the profession moving from colorblindness toward racial justice in SFL advising (Beatty et al., 2019), evaluating whiteness in relation to partnership organizations (Muñoz et al., 2019), and more clearly committing to diversity, equity, and inclusion (Smith & McCoy, 2020; West, 2020). This article uses these three concepts to engage histories, literature, and current events to aid practitioners and scholars in deeper considerations around antiracist education in SFL. We use Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harris, 1993) in this piece as a way to further focus on how racism has been embedded in SFL. In addition to the accompanying case study, we provide practical implications for SFL practitioners, campus administrators, and scholars seeking to engage antiracist work within these communities.

Understanding Critical Race Theory

To open and center our discussion on the ways racism manifests in SFL and, in response, how educators can be proactive in antiracist practice, we turn to Critical Race Theory (CRT). Grounding CRT is a helpful tool as we cannot assume all have the same knowledge and context when entering this work (e.g., how states have attempted to legislate CRT; see Schwartz, 2021). Although CRT originally emerged from critical legal studies to address injustices in the legal system, scholars have since expanded its focus on individuals and groups in different social and cultural contexts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Though critical legal studies critiques mainstream legal ideologies, some scholars saw a need to create CRT to provide a framework for understanding the persistent racial inequity and discrimination in the United States (Cook & Dixson, 2013). CRT illuminates how racism is a normal part of U.S. society because it is so "enmeshed in the fabric of our social order" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). CRT draws from a wide range of disciplines, including law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women's studies (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016), and helped us actively name the ways race and racism erode SFL and HWSF specifically. CRT is a valuable tool for this work because it highlights power dynamics "between dominant and marginalized racial groups" (Hiraldo, 2010, p. 54).

CRT entails the following tenets: *counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, whiteness as property, interest convergence, intersectionality, and the critique of liberalism.* Counter-storytelling, a "method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016, p. 32), is an important tenet as it illuminates People of Color's lived experiences (Cook & Dixson, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2016). Counter-storytelling aims to expose and challenge the dominant stories of racial privilege while striving for racial reform. In

short, counter-storytelling centers the voices of minoritized people and resists dominant narratives. Whiteness as property recognizes "assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being white" (Harris, 1993, p. 1713). Because whiteness is an aspect of identity and a property interest, it can be both experienced and used as a resource (Harris, 1993). Whiteness also may move from being a passive aspect of identity to actively being used as power. Previously, Smith and McCoy (2020) wrote about experiential knowledge, intersectionality, and social justice in the context of NPHC organizations. For example, Students of Color being denied access to campus amenities, including the benefits and entitlements of sororities and fraternities, displays whiteness as property in the context of CRT (Smith & McCoy, 2020).

Interest convergence, which was conceptualized by Bell (1995), argues that civil rights concessions are only made by white people when they can benefit from such change. Therefore, interest convergence means that People of Color will only see significant progress when their goals and needs are consistent with those of white people. Interest convergence also explains diversity policies, as some individuals and institutions can be unwelcoming and hostile towards Students of Color. Intersectionality, as described by Crenshaw (1989), originally focused on the influences of race and gender, specifically on Black women's employee rights as they experienced racial and gender discrimination in the workplace. Crenshaw argued the need to center multiple marginalized identities of oppression in our societal systems. Intersectionality serves as "(a) an approach to understanding human life and behavior rooted in the experiences and struggles of disenfranchised people; and (b) an important tool linking theory with practice that can aid in the empowerment of communities and individuals" (Collins & Blige, 2016, p. 36). Finally, a critique of liberalism challenges the reality of equal opportunity and colorblindness (Hiraldo, 2010) in society and, rather, demonstrates ways systems inequitably benefit white people.

Ultimately, the historical and contemporary realities of racism and problematic practices in SFL make it appropriate and necessary to use CRT in this work. Further, campus administrators often turn to temporary and often non-performative ways of addressing issues of diversity and inclusion, and in particular race and racism, in policies, practices, and programs (see Goodman et al., 2023; Roland & Matthews, 2023; Rosenberg, 2021; Snyder, 2022). With intentionality, CRT can be used as a tool to move the field of SFL towards anti-racist educational practices. Much like the opening vignette about one author's experience with a campus search committee, there is a real timeliness to doing this work with both intention and confrontation—to be clear about what systems are at play, and to chart a path to forward, antiracist movement.

SFL and Racism

Issues around race and racism are pervasive within the HWSF community (see Garcia & Shirley, 2019; Gillon et al., 2019; McCready et al., 2023) often taking forms of racist-themed parties, recordings of

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members espousing racist messages, and race-based exclusionary practices in membership (Beatty & Boettcher, 2019; Ferré-Sadurní, 2019; Garcia et al., 2023; Gill, 2020; Joyce & Cawthon, 2017). The persistence of these behaviors, beliefs, and practices are reminders of the permanence of racism (Landson-Billings, 1998). Several incidents have happened against Black communities specifically, demonstrating anti-blackness that exists in SFL members and environments. In 2018, a white student and member of Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity at Oklahoma State University posted a racist Snapchat story where he used repeated racial slurs against Black students (Hake, 2018). The next year, a white student and member of Tau Kappa Epsilon at the University of Georgia was suspended after a racist video showed members whipping someone and referring to them as cotton pickers (Osborne, 2019).

Importantly, these discriminatory behaviors do not exclusively stem from racism. In terms of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), systems of racism combine with heterosexism and transgender oppression and may also prevent both Queer and Transgender Black, Indigenous, People of Color from embracing their sexuality and gender identities within the context of their sorority or fraternity (Garcia & Duran 2020, 2021). SFL communities, locally and inter/nationally, have grappled with their histories and how they have been at odds with an openness to diversity and inclusion (see McCready et al., 2023), and, in particular, those histories involving exclusion based on gender (Freeman, 2020; Ispa-Landa & Risman, 2021), sexuality (Duran & Garcia, 2021; Garcia & Duran, 2021; Literte & Hodge, 2012; Rhoads, 1995), and race and ethnicity (Gillon et al., 2019; Ray, 2013; Ray & Rosow, 2012; Smith & McCoy, 2020; Syrett, 2009).

Historical and Contemporary Connections to Racism

Early on, HWSFs constructed exclusionary clauses in their membership documents that specifically excluded People of Color and other minoritized populations from their membership (Barone, 2014; Syrett, 2009). Overt race-based exclusion is a prime example of the concept of whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), wherein students garnered benefits of membership in sororities and fraternities simply on the basis of being white. An example of interest convergence in action (Bell, 1995), these clauses were later removed, though the decisions to do so were not universally embraced by members or leadership of these organizations (James, 2000). Racism is central to the fabric of the United States and interconnected to historical practices within SFL. From organizational founders and leaders enslaving and lynching Black people to the connections of Black people building campuses (Hevel & Bureau, 2014), white people have a history of anti-blackness, violence, and exclusion of Black and Brown people. These examples of racism speak to why organizations such as NPHC exist, specifically, and why they have often been unfunded and underserved on college campuses.

Yet even though contemporary membership documents do not overtly support racist membership selection practices, the centering of

whiteness persists in these spaces through membership recruitment messaging (Beaird et al., 2021), racist incidents and campus response (Garcia et al., 2023), and even in the ways SFL Professionals of Color are minimized in the field (George, 2023). In some instances, where resources and knowledge are expected to be housed may render some SFL departments and organizations to prioritize HWSF in the design of their staffing. For example, some members of historically Black, culturally-based, and multicultural organizations who are campus-based professionals, at times, feel a pressure to be an 'expert' on all things related to their community (Goodman & Templeton, 2021), yet they do not feel it works the other way around. Larger national and international organizations have also perpetuated problematic practices in centering whiteness. This was exemplified in a case where a chapter of Kappa Alpha Order Fraternity spoke out against the organization's use of Robert E. Lee as its spiritual founder because of his connections with the Confederacy and anti-Black ideologies; the organization eventually suspended the chapter (Marut, 2020).

Historically Black, Multicultural, and Culturally-Based Sororities and Fraternities

One way racism appears within sorority and fraternity communities is through the marginalization of historically Black, multicultural, and culturally-based sororities and fraternities (CBSFs), those that are racially/ethnically based and predominantly serve Students of Color. Although the media tends to overemphasize HWSFs and center whiteness in SFL, CBSFs have existed for well over a hundred years (Torbenson & Parks, 2009), which points to the importance of counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016) to disrupt dominant narratives that minimize or attempt to erase these organizations from SFL discourse and center HWSFs. Although limited research focuses on these dynamics, findings from studies focused on historically Black sororities and fraternities within NPHC showed that members and chapters experienced higher levels of visibility, surveillance, and punishment when compared to HWSFs (Bourke, 2010; Ray, 2013; Ray & Rosow, 2012), exemplifying the function of whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) as a privilege that shields white sorority and fraternity members from these experiences. Furthermore, even though CBSFs often endure higher levels of negative scrutiny, students in HWSFs often fail to recognize the existence or purpose of CBSFs as part of SFL communities, thereby contributing to their erasure within campus communities (Garcia, 2019). Beyond students, CBSFs are often afforded inequitable resources and support from SFL professionals and financial resources compared to HWSFs, exemplifying CRT's critique of liberalism (Garcia, 2019). Further, policies such as membership minimums among others within SFL communities in historically white institutions (see Oxendine, 2017) were created to serve HWSFs and, when enforced, center whiteness and can be harmful when applied to historically Black, multicultural, and culturally-based organizations.

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Racial Reckoning and the "Abolish Greek Life" Movement

We acknowledge the origins of sorority and fraternity communities on college campuses, understanding that it would be impossible to ignore how SFL evolved as access to college and universities shifted (see Brown et al., 2012; Freeman, 2020; Sanua, 2018; Sasso et al., 2020). Similar to the campuses that host sorority and fraternity chapters, questions around inclusion and belonging continue to plague these organizations. Amid a global pandemic and calls for reconciliation, undergraduate students questioned their place in fraternal organizations and the existence of these entities on the college campus. This became a call to "Abolish Greek Life," a movement demanding institutions ban SFL. The University of Richmond, Vanderbilt, American University, Northwestern, Emory, the University of North Carolina, and Duke are all institutions where the petition to rid these organizations of their racist, misogynist, and exclusionary roots have been most documented (Ispa-Landa & Risman, 2021; Marcus, 2020). At the same time, this is only part of the story. "Greek Life" in this Abolish Greek Life movement tends to center HWSFs specifically, and negates the presence and importance of CBSFs. Still, Abolish Greek Life calls attention to the many inequities in SFL, including these very racist histories and practices, which reflect CRT's assertion of the permanence of racism; such a history displays resistance to racial inclusion and justice between both organizations and members, and throughout time (e.g., Syrett, 2009).

Students across the southeastern United States have been wrestling with their racial pasts and presents. From racist chants to inappropriate party themes to Blackface, these incidents persist, and organizations cannot afford to continue looking away. For example, Marcus (2020) highlighted that the latest attacks on the SFL community are coming from within as students across the nation are calling for abolishing SFL and HWSF in particular. In Duke University's independent news organization, *The Chronicle,* Torrence (2020) reported an internal attack on the SFL community through the student group, "Abolish Duke IFC & Panhel." Former members of NPC and NIC chapters led the movement after specific instances where their national organizations failed to act or respond to the racism on campus (Torrence, 2020). In some cases, leaders of the group cited conflict with their national headquarters—one chapter's president was prohibited from signing a list of demands created by the campus's Black Coalition Against Policing that outlined steps that included doing away with the campus police department (Torrence, 2020). Moreover, two NPC chapters sought to relinquish their campus charters yet were denied by their national organization from doing so (Torrence, 2020). The rippling effect of incidents such as these may also lead students and staff to wonder why an institution is not responding (Garcia et al., 2023), or what specifically happens after statements are made (see Roland & Matthews, 2023). Are these incidents, too, only prompting performative reactions rather than intentional changes in practice that lead toward more inclusive and antiracist work?

Students who have chosen to affiliate with HWSFs are deciding to

leave the community rather than watch little to no change occur. For example, Taylor Thompson was the first of five Women of Color to disaffiliate from her sorority, citing concerns about why no one talked about racial injustice and the ongoing protests from the summer of 2020, even questioning her original decision to join (Wellemeyer, 2020). One NIC fraternity at Duke saw 35 upperclassmen disaffiliate as of August 2020. Thompson acknowledged that her organization had hosted diversity and inclusion workshops, yet nothing happened when it really mattered (Marcus, 2020). However, the Director of Student Engagement for Leadership at Duke wrote in an article for the Association of Fraternity and Sorority Advisors' (AFA) *Essentials*, "Let them leave" (Dye, 2020). Many of these organizations began on foundations of white supremacy, with some still building off that foundation. Dye (2020) suggested that White students leaving these organizations do not deserve "a gold star," and instead, should be the ones who use their power to improve the environment (p. 2). There is a danger in institutions and administrators assuming incidents such as these are single cases and absolved to only one group or set of students (Garcia et al., 2023); oftentimes, these incidents actually shed light on larger SFL and campus culture.

Implications: Practical Considerations to Counter Embedded Racism

As previously explored, the purpose of this article is to illuminate the complicated history of racism and white supremacy embedded in SFL. In the opening vignette, a student shared, "I was wondering why we weren't included." While there was subtlety in this statement, it highlights one of the ever-present ways racism appears with SFL. Indeed, SFL can uphold anti-blackness and white supremacy norms that often fail to acknowledge the permanence of racism. Moreover, on campus and throughout scholarship, there is often a centering of HWSFs without recognizing the salience of racial oppression that NPHCs and MGCs experience. As members ourselves (two as members of an NPHC sorority, one as a member of an NPC sorority, and one as a member of an NIC fraternity), we believe in the power of SFL and veer away from complete abolishment on college and university campuses. Instead, we call on members, alumnx, higher education and student affairs leaders, and the organizations themselves to acknowledge their racist pasts and move swiftly into the future. This includes disrupting history and proximity to whiteness, as well as enacting, and continuing, organizational movement toward racial justice.

Disrupting History(ies) and Proximity to Whiteness

As evidenced in earlier discussions, scholars have raised issues regarding historical racist policies within HWSFs, and SFL more generally. Yet often, these historically-based conversations only live in academic and trade publications not disseminated directly to college students. In contrast, campus SFL communities and inter/national HWSFs largely ignore conversations about race, exemplifying what scholars have deemed as color evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2017). Broadly across

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all layers of SFL work, practitioners might consider bringing CRT scholars to campus or organization programs to educate about racist histories, racial oppression, and whiteness; using CRT as a lens to address these issues, shifts CRT into SFL praxis as a way to dismantle racism and uphold racial justice. For organizations to center antiracist practice and disrupt proximities to whiteness in addressing racist policies, procedures, and cultures, they must explicitly address the racist and racialized histories of all SFL organizations. These histories encompass those of campuses, chapters, and organizations.

Campus Histories

Campus histories may not seem relevant to movements toward antiracist practice in SFL. However, these spaces are crucial as they are how student members experience their organizational involvement. SFL offices have the opportunity to recognize the historical legacies of racism on their campus, how these legacies have shaped the contemporary context in which students exist on campus, and, more specifically, how their chapters came to be. The histories of campus-based SFL chapters are often known only at a surface level (i.e., the dates of charters, charter member names). Still, more significant questions linger that are foundational to understanding present organizations and those that are no longer on campus. What were the motivations for founding these chapters? Did chapter charter members espouse foundational values and beliefs that were grounded in racist ideologies? Or perhaps chapters were explicitly established to promote equity and racial justice. Were there chapters that attempted to form on campuses that were pushed out or could not sustain membership due to racist policies and practices? These histories are crucial because they can certainly be repeated.

One area of campus history that is particularly important to deconstruct in the movement towards antiracism within SFL pertains to real estate. Within sorority and fraternity communities, it is well-known that few sororities and fraternities within MGC or NPHC councils have houses on historically White campuses. What is perhaps not as commonly understood are the histories that defined how HWSF houses came to be. At what point were organizations given access to space? College campuses mirror discriminatory lending practices and redlining in society at large. For example, Chi Alpha Delta was refused in their efforts to purchase a house on UCLA's campus when the owner of the building stated they would not sell to "Orientals" (Torbenson & Parks, 2009). How have these racist histories been accounted for in the space organizations are afforded today?

An additional historical piece to attend to that may involve more proximal histories involves SFL community guidelines. What are the histories of today's policies that dictate how chapters should operate and the expectations that student members must meet? In what ways do these policies center whiteness? Who were those policies intended to serve? In what ways do they attend, or fail to attend, to the ever-chang-

ing dynamics of the campus SFL community? For instance, Minthorn and Youngbull (2020) explained that Historically Native American Fraternities and Sororities face challenges with campus facilities, particularly when engaging in rituals associated with their member initiation (e.g., a cedar or blessing ceremony). If a classroom or campus student center is the only space available to Historically Native American Fraternities and Sororities, and its guidelines include no open flames or smoke, then ceremonies may be impacted and forced to amend, a reality not faced by those HWSFs that have a house or campus property. All of these questions offer opportunities for campus-based professionals and student members of SFL organizations to deeply reflect on how their communities have come to be and in what ways these communities continue to perpetuate harm to minoritized people.

Chapter Histories

Campus communities and broader organizational membership must also unpack local chapter histories. For instance, at what point did HWSF chapters begin accepting People of Color? These historical points are pivotal but should not be interpreted as a sign that the organization erased all racist practices, policies, and ideologies. To begin, was there pushback against this decision? What has the history of membership intake for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color looked like since that time? Furthermore, in the case of HWSFs, if indeed organizations once had discriminatory exclusionary clauses built into their membership intake processes, in what ways have they historically addressed practices to ensure they no longer center racist ideologies? Finally, how often have chapter members engaged in explicit conversations about their historical racist legacies and how they engage in antiracist practices? Syrett (2009) writes about an institution where one chapter had deep ties to the Ku Klux Klan; in instances such as these, how do chapters engage with their histories and the extent to which, if any, they are part of their own individual or collective reckoning? Have they simply "moved on?"

It is also important to consider ways race has played a role in the historical development of chapter culture. For instance, what are the traditions that have become staples of organizational culture? How do these traditions center or push against whiteness? These questions can also be asked in terms of how chapters select the philanthropies they support. More specifically, who do these philanthropic efforts serve? For example, NPHC organizations have made a core commitment to social activism, which "provide[s] tangible avenues by which they can each contribute to society" (Smith & McCoy, 2020, p. 149). For NPHC organizations, these contributions are often made through philanthropic partnerships (Smith & McCoy, 2020), and all organizations should consider these same connection points and the ways they are actualized as threaded through the chapter and not done in a vacuum.

National and International Organization Histories

A final context to consider in efforts to center SFL's racial historical

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ties is national and international organizations. Many of the same conversations addressed within chapters may also apply in the context of organization histories. However, some nuances should be raised in these discussions. For instance, recall that exclusionary clauses were a way for organizations to explicitly prevent People of Color from being admitted into their membership. What did the process of removing these clauses look like at the organizational level? Historically, what efforts have national and international organizations engaged in to address race and racism? Have these initiatives been proactive or primarily reactive to larger societal/SFL issues? In other words, what has been the motivation for engaging in action to address race and racism? In addition to interrogating these important questions, organizations might also consider the ways alumni respond and engage with these concepts (e.g., see Syrett, 2009, and the role of alumni in addressing exclusionary clauses and practices).

In the case of CBSFs, what has been the historical response to issues of race and racism within the organization and the greater society? Do these responses only cater to the primary racial/ethnic identity of the organization's founding, or has the organization engaged with topics of race more broadly? In recent work conducted by two of the authors of this article (Garcia & Goodman, in press), we explored ways sororities and fraternities addressed topics around social justice in their most followed social media platforms. We found that organizations more often explicitly addressed racial issues that pertained to their organization's identity and rarely advocated against racial discrimination more expansively. To this point, it is also essential to consider how often members of CBSFs are offered opportunities for guided reflection about their founding and commitments to Communities of Color. These questions provide a starting point for organization staff, campus-based professionals, and members to critically reflect on ways SFL histories intricately tie to race and racism. Importantly, these stakeholders must also engage in action to address these topics.

National and International Organizations Moving Toward Racial Justice

In HWSFs, racist behaviors and problems do not go away by simply removing organizations from campus (e.g., abolishing Greek Life); "The issues are much deeper than a name on a t-shirt or a house" (Lahrman, 2020, p. 1). As such, moving toward racial justice in SFL—and HWSFs, in particular—requires an active commitment to *de*centering whiteness within the organization. Freeman's (2020) research on the histories of NPC sororities reveals a deep and long history of how racist and exclusionary practices have been unchecked and under the radar for generations of sorority membership. Further, such problems and histories (e.g., Old South themes, especially in alignment with the founding of many NPC sororities in Southern geographies) directly influence the problematic behaviors of today (Freeman, 2020). This is evident in more recent literature related to how NPC sororities brand themselves in recruitment videos (Beaird et al., 2021), and how they (re)emerged

with commitments to racial justice after George Floyd was murdered by police in 2020 (Roland & Matthews, 2023). While these organizations have been a place to foster friendship over the years, "they have always been conservative in nature and inherently discriminatory, whether they be selecting members according to social class, religion, race, or physical attractiveness" (Freeman, 2020, p. 4).

One historically White sorority grappling with its history of racism and exclusion is Delta Gamma, which published a study of their membership history alongside the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. In 2019, Delta Gamma's council voted to study their entire known history of racism, prejudice, and bigotry (Dodge et al., 2019). In an article in the organization magazine, *ANCHORA*, Dodge and colleagues (2019) named much of the painful past associated with the organization's history, including examples of "hurtful emblems, images, vocabulary, and other racially offensive materials" found in their archives (p. 15). Further evidence of tangible manifestations of bigotry includes members in Blackface, party themes reinforcing Asian stereotypes, Confederate flag symbols, "Old South" convention themes, and a documented history of the organization closing their Beloit College chapter in 1962 when the chapter pledged an African American woman (Dodge et al., 2019).

Delta Gamma's ultimate objective was to acknowledge their past, identify and remove barriers and bias, and work toward a more inclusive future for the organization (Dodge et al., 2019). To engage in this work in such a public manner, rather than to move swiftly past a racist history, is an example of the path more HWSFs should take to change the trajectory of the SFL community. Such an example contains the radical transparency needed for racial reconciliation and systemic change in SFL.

Commitments to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, From Policy to Practice

In 2020, NPHC organization Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated established D4Women in Action: DST for African American Women for Political Power ("D4Women in Action"). The entity enhances the organization's presence and builds a pipeline that advances the status of Black women in politics (D4Women in Action, 2021; James, 2020). The pillars of the new entity involve advocating and educating on policy priorities, legislation lobbying, and developing the Chisholm-Jordan Institute that will train Black women to run for office (James, 2020). The importance of this entity in SFL and society more broadly offers an enacted value of racial uplift that is core to the organization itself. Creating D4Women in Action under the organization's umbrella affirms that the organization commits to elevating Black women in the political realm. To move toward racial justice in SFL is to move toward uplift in this way, especially given the racist history of U.S. politics and the dearth of Black women in elected office.

For HWSFs, it is not merely enough to espouse antiracist values. Organizations, and respective members, must engage with antiracism in

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action. This includes acknowledging history (e.g., Delta Gamma's *ANCHORA* article) and historical policies that must be evaluated and eliminated. For example, historically, NPC enlisted the argument of freedom of association to uphold racist rights to be private organizations that had the power to discriminate in their membership selection processes (Freeman, 2020). As such, legacy policies, wherein special exceptions are granted to children and grandchildren of members, can also be understood as rooted in whiteness. Thus, organizations can eliminate legacy policies to disrupt this outdated reliance on freedom of association, which can lead to the inclusion of students with multiple racial identities outside of the (White) identities that comprised the organizations at the commencement of their legacy policy.

But what does it mean to grapple with the past and name the actions associated with the future existence of SFL? Following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020, HWSF organization staff members for Delta Delta Delta (NPC) and Pi Kappa Phi (NIC) published the following in AFA's *Essentials*:

> Some organizations have made statements in solidarity, openly supporting our collective membership. Some have made a statement but have yet to state three simple words, "Black Lives Matter." And for those who made a statement, now what? For those who posted a black square on social media, now what? It's too easy for white people to make a statement and let the movement subside over a couple of weeks in an effort to get "back to normal" – but what was "normal"? (Callais et al., 2020, p. 1)

The authors suggested taking a *big swing* and pushing organizations to acknowledge their racist and elitist past, to listen to Black members' lived experiences, to dismantle systems and practices in place that exclude their joining, and for individuals to do self-work in this area (Callais et al., 2020). But what does it mean to *dismantle* a system? In what ways are the systems built to resist such dismantling? Is *this* the call for abolishing? Further, how might a group like Delta Gamma, as previously mentioned, continue the dismantling they started in their *ANCHORA* publication?

Finally, campus departmental policies require updating. For example, specific policies in departments of SFL are often based on the privileges of HWSFs and overlook the ways they (further) marginalize CBSFs (Garcia, 2019). These policies include prescriptions of minimum numbers for an organization to be in good standing, participation percentages for programming, and accreditation rules that maintain different expectations for student programs and activities on campus (e.g., privileges for those with houses compared to those without). This also may relate to how institutions create financial burdens that are inconsistent across all types of organizations (who pays what and how much; e.g., "sorority/fraternity tax" programs that fund specific SFL endeavors). The prevalence of White SFL professionals impacts the way policies and practices are enacted as illustrated by one of George's (2023) participants:

> This was a white people's game and that was, they were the purveyors of the fraternity and sorority experience…Because it manifested in policies, practices and norms that exists within IFC and [NPC] serving of the lens through which MGC, NPHC and other types of organizations were policed and policy'd. (p. 7)

Beyond policies that specifically govern the organizations, personnel policies for campus-based practitioners should be reviewed. Often the structures of SFL departments convey which councils are prioritized by the department and institution. For example, within a smaller department, there may be two full-time professionals each advising the IFC and NPC councils. NPHC, MGC, or additional councils may be advised by someone external to the department or may be the add-on to the primary responsibilities of the full-time staff. Further, experience with IFC or NPC recruitment is a commonly required qualification, a background George (2023) found that provided more job and career advancement opportunities and professional experiences.

SFL professionals should increase their familiarity with—and understanding of—the cultural and structural nuances of every council, not just IFC and NPC. At the same time, leaders should resist expecting new professionals, specifically, to be 'experts' on all things SFL (Goodman & Templeton, 2021). Mentoring Students of Color into the field can contribute to an increase in professionals with experience in culturally-based organizations. With increased representational diversity among SFL professionals, it is crucial that SFL Professionals of Color, particularly those who are members of CBSFs, no longer have their experiences minimized as the student members of CBSFs on their campuses do (George, 2023). The lack of cross-cultural mentoring/advising between White SFL Staff Members and Students of Color (and SFL Staff of Color and White SFL members) widens the gap between councils in SFL communities and allows for the HWSF experience to dominate policy and practice.

Conclusion

Here, there is an opportunity for historically and predominantly White sororities and fraternities to be antiracist in their mission, values, purpose, and practices. Using CRT as we have done in this piece allowed us to recognize many of the historical and systemic inequities in SFL communities. With this in mind, we believe meaningful change can occur by understanding these contexts and histories, as well as making precise and thoughtful commitments toward action. Writing a conceptual piece such as this also allows us to offer practical applications inspired by the reading.

As such, we end with a set of discussion questions and a case study (see Appendix) that campus-based practitioners, organization and regional representatives, alumnx, and post-graduation stakeholders can engage with as they better understand the need to counter the embedded racism that permeates SFL communities in higher education. For example, the interrogation of practice as informed by these topics

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and this case study is something that can be done in groups or teams. In instances where there are multiple people in an SFL or student life/involvement office, organization department, or committee, senior or key leaders may use this article and its resources as part of professional development. In sum, consider the following:

For Campus-Based Practitioners:

1. What types of questions do you ask consultants, alumnx, and volunteers regarding the organization's efforts toward antiracist practices?
2. Do you simply provide chapter updates and move on, or do you spend time with each other talking about the need to address and disrupt racist behaviors and practices?

For Consultants, Alumnx, and Volunteers:

1. What types of questions do you ask campus-based practitioners? Specifically, what questions focus on campus equity issues around race and racism?
2. What forms of support, or lack thereof, are offered to CBSFs?
3. What is the nature of departmental and institutional response to incidents of racism?
4. Do you have an understanding of what is happening at an institution outside of your organization, and how do you understand your chapter's proximity to those happenings?

For Administrators with Supervisory and Organizational (Hierarchical) Power:

1. What is the demographic and membership makeup of your SFL department staff?
2. Who is advising which organizations, and how much time is dedicated across councils and chapters?
3. What constraints exist—be it financial, structural, staffing—that leave you unable to make systemic change? Are senior administrators complicit in those constraints?
4. What type of labor is expected of specific staff members (e.g., one individual only working with a certain [HWSF] council, while staff advising CBSFs are left to advise multiple councils and understand multiple iterations of the work)?
5. Who advises CBSFs, full-time staff or graduate students?

For Alumnx and Graduate Members:

1. How does your organization hold members accountable beyond their undergraduate chapters? For example, are there clauses that hold individual members accountable, no matter their proximity to college, for racist sentiments?

2. Are those clauses intersectional, considering gender diversity, sexuality, socioeconomic status, ability, and religion?
3. What mechanisms exist for individuals to develop beyond the undergraduate experience?

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Appendix
Case Study

Purpose/Site

The purpose of this case is to highlight the ways culturally-based, multicultural, and historically Black sororities and fraternities are often treated as additive rather than integral to the sorority and fraternity community on college campuses. This case in particular takes place at Sunny Days University, a large, public, historically and predominately White institution in the southern part of the United States. Sunny Days is affiliated with the Southern States Athletic Conference, and has a large sorority and fraternity life (SFL) community, which makes up approximately 22% of the student population. Around 3% of the SFL community are culturally-based, multicultural, and historically Black sororities and fraternities. There are three full-time SFL professionals working at Sunny Days, and six graduate students who take up a majority of the chapter and council advising for the Multicultural Greek Council (MGC) and National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC).

Key Actors

Sy

Sy (they/them) is an incoming coordinator of SFL at Sunny Days University. Sy is a member of an LGBTQ+-based historically White fraternity, and has many friends and colleagues who are members of historically Asian Pacific Islander Desi American, Black and African American, Latinx/a/o, Native American, and multicultural sororities and fraternities. Sunny Days is not Sy's first professional position, and they previously worked as a coordinator of SFL at Pebblestone University in the Northeast part of the United States.

Keith

Keith (he/him) is the current assistant director of SFL at Sunny Days University and is a member of a historically and predominately White fraternity. Keith has worked in SFL at Sunny Days for over 10 years, and is the primary advisor of the Interfraternity Council (IFC).

Susana

Susana (she/her) is the current director of SFL at Sunny Days and a member of a historically and predominately White sorority. Susana is an alumna of Sunny Days, and while she was an undergraduate student served as both Chapter President and Panhellenic President.

Scenario

The SFL professional staff met together during the summer for their first monthly meeting since Sy joined the team. The focus of their agenda was planning ways to support chapters during their intake/new member recruitment processes at the start of the fall semester. As Sy read the agenda they noticed that a major feature of the fall planning was around an "open house" event intended to introduce new students to sororities and fraternities on campus. During the event, new students would have the opportunity to tour sorority and fraternity houses and meet current members. From their previous experience, Sy learned that open house events are not the best way to showcase culturally-based, multicultural, and historically Black sororities and fraternities since they typically do not have residential spaces on campus. Furthermore, when Sy interviewed for the position at Sunny Days, they engaged in conversations with students within these organizations and asked if there was anything they would change about the community. All students in the group agreed that the "open house" event was not made with their organizations in mind, and it often felt like a waste of their time. Since none of these chapters had a residential space, the SFL office reserved rooms in the Student Center for prospective members to come by and visit. Unfortunately, the members noted, students rarely came by their rooms, and they felt that the event overall was intended to recruit members to the historically and predominately White sororities and fraternities (HWSF) that had houses on campus. Sy decided to speak up and share their concerns about the event with the other staff members.

Keith, the assistant director, explained that until three years ago, the culturally based chapters were not even involved in the event. "We've come a long way in the past three years," Keith said in the meeting. He then proceeded to share that the SFL staff wanted to integrate all organizations more into the community and decided one way would be to add culturally-based, multicultural, and historically Black organizations to the "open house" program. Since these chapters, and others that were new to the community, did not have houses, the staff agreed that reserving spaces in the Student Center was the best option. Keith said he knew it was not ideal, but that the event was too important to HWSF to do away with it. Susana replied that she understood Sy's concerns but was worried about the backlash the office would experience if they changed a traditional event. Although Keith and Susana were apprehensive, they were open to hearing out some alternatives from Sy.

Implications

- What happens when we continue to prioritize the feelings/perspective of HWSF? Susana mentioned the possible backlash for the office if they took away the event. Should that be more important than ensuring that culturally-based, multicultural, and historically Black organizations feel included and as an equal priority? If the

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SFL office is meant to serve all students and all organizations, then events must also serve all groups.

- There's also the leadership required to value the contributions of a new staff member. There continues to be a "status quo" approach in this office and even with a new staff member, people are hesitant to change. What message are Keith and Susana delivering to Sy if they ignore their contributions and the information they gathered during their interview? How might Keith and Susana's position prevent Sy from the relationship-building they began with students?

- Continuing to prioritize HWSF over culturally-based, multicultural, and historically Black organizations lies at the crux of our chapter and the necessity of dismantling White privilege in SFL communities. Too many campuses continue to operate in a manner in which HWSF recruitment is the main opening event for the academic year, while culturally-based, multicultural, and historically Black organizations that primarily gain new members through "deferred" and independent recruitment processes are a literal afterthought. Structurally, SFL staff are less involved in facilitating the recruitment, intake, and new member processes for culturally-based, multicultural, and historically Black organizations, and as a result, little is done to support their efforts. Perhaps a key takeaway from this case study is that SFL staff should be doing more to support the recruitment efforts of these groups to bolster their membership and enhance the work of chapter members and advisors. While the idea of rooms in the Student Center may be a new idea and "step forward," it is clearly falling short of what these organizations need in terms of recruitment support.

- The SFL staff in this case must set aside their comfort, and the comfort of HWSF students, and be prepared for the backlash that may come should they work to create an event that more effectively incorporates all organizations. As campus-based professionals committed to the mission of an institution (that most likely has diversity and inclusion initiatives at the center, or nearby), SFL staff need to take control of how that university's community will function—e.g., what will and will not be tolerated should be established by the staff in real time, not based on "how things have been done in the past." Chapters of these national organizations are guests of the institution and do not have to operate on any given campus. SFL staff should set the standard, communicate it clearly, and hold firm to how things will be done at their institution.

Recommendations

- Perhaps the first step in the recruitment process is a tabling/organization fair for all SFL organizations. Each table is given the same amount of space, number of members present, and located in the same Student Center or part of campus. After this initial event, the

"open house" becomes "Night 1" of any centralized recruitment process by which the SFL groups participate. Since culturally-based, multicultural, and historically Black organizations conduct new member activities differently, they may not need to be included in a process that begins during the formal recruitment process for HWSF.

- There should be an outcome that provides each group with what they need, not the same thing; essentially, SFL staff should focus on equity rather than equality.

Discussion Questions

- What message is SFL staff sending to multicultural, culturally-based, and historically Black organizations should they continue to hold the event in the same way?
- What message is SFL senior staff sending to Sy should they choose to dismiss Sy's concerns?
- What are the pros and cons of altering the event to be more inclusive of culturally-based, multicultural, and historically Black sororities and fraternities?
- What might a "meet and greet" event for sororities and fraternities look like on your campus? If such an event already exists, what change(s) should be considered?

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