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## Experiences of Transgender Men Who Joined National Pan-Hellenic Council Sororities Pre-Transition

Sydney Epps

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

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# EXPERIENCES OF TRANSGENDER MEN WHO JOINED NATIONAL PAN-HELLENIC COUNCIL SORORITIES PRE- TRANSITION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by

Sydney A. Yvonne Epps  
B.A. Ohio University, 2012  
B.S. Ohio University, 2012  
M.A., Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, 2016  
Ed.S., Louisiana State University, 2018  
M.S., Louisiana State University, 2019  
December 2020

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Sydney A. Yvonne Epps

Dear self,  
Let me tell you something  
It's okay to cry  
Whether it be joy or sorrow  
Allow yourself to feel for a better you tomorrow  
If you're only loving on one woman at a time you don't have to lie  
You don't have to pretend you do things that you don't  
The point of this transition wasn't to lose but instead gain  
Not just changed names  
But instead, find peace  
And feel sane  
You don't have to conform to the heteronormative ways  
Aid in eliminating toxicity  
I want my Queens to love me  
Instead of steering clear of me

-Tashan Lovemore

-

In Memory of  
Jaylow McGlory, 29, Alexandria  
Vontashia Bell, 18, Shreveport  
Amia Tyrae Berryman, 28, Baton Rouge  
Chyna Gibson (Chyna Doll Dupree), 31, New Orleans  
Ciara McElveen, 21, New Orleans  
Jaquarrius Holland, 18, Monroe  
Milan Boudreaux (Williams), 36, Metairie  
Akeem Boudreaux, 22, Metairie

This is but a short list of people killed in Louisiana  
due to anti-trans\* violence while this study was in progress.  
We must not wait any longer.

History isn't something you look back at and say it was inevitable. It happens because people make decisions that are sometimes very impulsive and of the moment, but those moments are cumulative realities.

-- Marsha P. Johnson

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To Baton Rouge activists –



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## ABSTRACT

The National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) - affectionately known as The Divine Nine - are places of support and leadership development for students. However, these groups espouse traditional gender role themes that align with sexual orientation and gender rigidity. This paper explores how four NPHC members negotiate their identity as both nonbinary or transgender, and Greek. Using the narrative inquiry approach, the researcher will explore how sorority members who no longer identify as cisgender women are treated post-gender transition by other sorority members.

## CHAPTER ONE. OVERVIEW OF STUDY

### Explaining Terms

As an emerging topic in media but with little academic coverage, this dissertation focuses on the experiences of transgender men, those who were born non-male but now live life as men (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2015; Light, Obedin-Maliver, Sevelius & Kerns, 2014). There are also instances of participants who identify as gender non-conforming or non-binary, or fall within the middle ground of the man/woman gender binary and present as traditionally masculine. This is but the beginning of several instances in which unfamiliar terms may arise during your reading experience. In addition to gender terms that may be unfamiliar to a reader who does not dwell in the LGBTQ community, terms regarding race have also been manipulated - or queered - to create a space for better understandings of self and underrepresented people. To accomplish this, racial specificity was removed from the title. What was originally titled, *Experiences of Black Transgender Men Who Joined Black Greek-letter Sororities Pre-Transition* is now titled, *Experiences of Transgender Men Who Joined National Pan-Hellenic Council Sororities Pre-Transition*. Many of the traditional race categories in extant literature have been removed, as the context in this writing lends itself to centering a group with a particular demographic.

Widdershoven (1993) writes, "stories are somehow important for our identity: They tell us who we are. Again it can be asked what relation these stories have to the persons we are" (p. 6). My personal narratives within the text denote the roles I have in the communities I discuss, as these "stories" play an integral role in "the persons we are" and the persons we present to others. Ahmed does this in her discussions on queer phenomenology as a way of queering the traditional context of research about underrepresented people, in which she has multifaceted experiences

within, allowing her the ability to intimately approach and understand, as well as responsibly critique communities, which distrust and avoid contact with historically trusted faces prevalent in the academy. This juxtaposition, of self-narrative and academic citation, is crucial in order to grasp the need for this work (Bruner, 2004; Freeman, 2007; Wells, 2011).

Ahmed discusses self-orientation in queer research as a home for understanding how one is fit to partake in such observations, analyzing how people come to trust a researcher with the most intimate parts of their life, particularly as people who are unobserved in academic research. Here, Ahmed describes the setting of the queer self in a “home” of straightness:

The field of heterosexual objects is produced as an effect of repeating a certain direction, which takes shape as “the background” and which might be personalized as “my background,” as that which allows me to arrive and to do things.

It is in this way that I am impressed by backgrounds which “pressure” me to “to turn away from queer objects”; that is, ways of speaking and knowing that go against what is traditional belief: sex and gender are synonymous and exist within a rigid binary, and heterosexual (straight) relationships are the only viable romantic relationships (Rupp, & Taylor, 2010). As Levitt and Ippolito (2014) explain, there are important difference between sex and gender:

Sex refers to a person’s biological characteristics (e.g., genitalia, hormone levels, chromosomal makeup), and most cultures recognize two sex categories: male and female. Gender, on the other hand, is a construct based on socially accepted standards of behavior and appearance for males and females. Most cultures endorse two gender categories, masculine and feminine, and assume that they emerge naturally from binary sex categories, male and female. Although sex and gender exist independently of each other, often the terms are used interchangeably (p. 46-47).

Kidd and Witten (2008) give examples of how the conflation of sex and gender erase nonbinary identities:

Like most binary systems, the rigid male-female conceptualization of gender proves reductionist when applied to the more complex “gray areas” of Western

culture. Moreover, when one includes non-Western identities such as the Hijra of India/Pakistan, the Fa'afafine and Fa'afatama of Tonga/Samoa, or the Mak Nyah of Malaysia, it is easy to see that gender constructs span a broad variety of body form, sex, and sexual identities (p. 36).

In this breadth of understanding is the queerness of all nontraditional positionalities, be they inherent or chosen: being anything but male-bodied, man-identified (McIntosh, 2017), Christian, straight (Pfeffer, 2014), American, able-bodied (Drummond & Brotman, 2014; Kafer, 2003), willingly-consumerist, and reproductive (Bell, 2016; Gillespie, 2000, 2003), is socially queered.

As Pulitzer and Nobel prize-winning writer Toni Morrison remarked in a 1992 interview with *The Guardian*: “In this country American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate” (Izadi, 2019, para. 6). I disagree with this long-upheld sentiment and practice, as an occupation, no matter how lengthy, does not afford colonizers the right to norm set without resistance. Adopting the sentiments of Chicano Studies scholar Rodolfo Acuna (1972),

Awareness of [Chicano] history – of their contributions and struggles, of the fact that they were not the “treacherous enemy” that Anglo-American histories have said they were – can restore pride and a sense of heritage to a people who have been oppressed for so long. In short, awareness can help them to liberate themselves (p. 1).

The same address will be used as Acuna to those who align with the terms “Black” and “African-American”, specifically those born in the United States with relatively untraceable direct ties to the African continent. Instead, people identified as such have been racialized – or coded by color – without acknowledgement of their various ties to several ethnicities across the globe. In his study of hip-hop and Afrofuturism, Galli (2009) writes,

It is important to know that when I speak about the “Black race” I am not referring to the peoples who have traditionally inhabited Africa since the dawn of the human species. Since, as history and anthropology have shown us, up until the fifteenth century there was little recognition of a homogenous, pan-African, and most importantly inferior “Black” race, I do not consider those Africans who lived before the early modern period and before direct and frequent contact with Western Europeans to be Black. Just as Europeans had little concept of what it meant to be “White” until the modern era (few would have considered the Irish,

the Italians, the English, the Slavs, and the French to all share one common identity), the idea of Blackness as a racial phenomenon was largely unfamiliar to Africans and Europeans alike. Therefore, when I make statements such as “for the majority of Black history,” I am not ignorantly asserting that people of African descent have no history prior to contact with Europeans, but that within the context of this thesis, it is not functional to refer to Africans of pre-early middle ages times as “Black” (p. 1).

Data on race have been collected since the first U.S. decennial census in 1790. People of European decent in the United States have been enumerated in every census as white citizens (“free white males, free white females”), while those they colonized were noted last, as *slaves*, with no color terms added (Gauthier, 2019).

There is a symbolism both in the color term and in the absence of one, which is often now aligned with the descendants of the colonized. McDaniel (1990) writes that “symbols may operate on several levels and in polarized dimensions, being at once, ‘sensory’ (affective, easily recognized, and physiological) and at the same time ‘ideological’ (stressing a larger societal value)” (p. 31). As Hartman inscribes,

The language of race developed in the modern period and in the context of the slave trade. The very term "slavery" derived from the word "Slav," because Eastern European-Americans were the slaves of the medieval world.

According to studies in Europe and the United States, white symbolizes innocence, and purity, goodness, honesty, cleanliness, and truth (Chen & Bargh, 1999; Frank & Gilovich, 1988; Neumann & Strack, 2000; Stabler and Johnson, 1972). Conversely, those who committed the kidnapping, rapes, and destruction of culture (of both the African and American people) have portrayed blackness (and indigenusness) as maleficent (Redford, 1991). Springate expressed a need for clarity of colonial privilege enforced through language in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, a publication of the National Park Foundation and the National Park Service,



Unlike that of Native peoples, whose colonial-era identities and relationships we understand largely based on the descriptions left by European explorers and colonists, the identity and culture of white colonists have been to a large degree understood through their own written words (p. 03-8).

The failure of respect to the diversity of these native identities – “red, black, brown, and yellow” – culminated to the bulk categorization of groups who compare and contrast in noteworthy ways (Mann & Zatz, 2002). As Ellison, Green, Richardson, and Snorton (2017) write, “*Black* is a modifier that changes everything (p. 166)”. They continue, “The power of blackness to change all that comes after is part of its close relationship to death” (p. 166). As Sherman and Clore write, “ideas of dirtiness and impurity are themselves grounded in the perceptual experience of the color black, which is seen not just as the opposite of white, but also as a potent impurity that can contaminate whiteness” (p. 1019). Lipsitz (1995) argues, “As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations” (p. 369). Those considered white in Europe and the United States of America – those of European-American descent – have institutionalized what to call melanated and melanin-rich people, and made each term inherently phobic. *Minorities. Marginalized* people. The practice of pathologizing blackness centers a community, alluding to the need for its erasure; as DuBois (1903) asks from the colonizing perspective, “How does it feel to be a problem?” To echo the words off of the back cover of children’s book writer Valerie Christopher’s *I Am Not a Minority! I’m Part of the Majority!* (2015):

The word minority in part means smaller and less power. No race should be associated with a word that suggests little or less. Sheer numbers should not determine what degree of power we should expect.

Power forms in creative ways under continuous occupation. In Bailey’s (2014) book on the political voice, spiritual counseling, and critique of hip hop music, Curry writes, “hip-

hop suffers, and like the melanated voices that sing its songs, like the dark bodies that dance its rhythms, their Black pains are often unheard in the academy” (p. ix). Bailey goes on to write, “since [...] many English speakers may not have as big of a choice as we believe they have in choosing ways they speak and write, educators have a responsibility to their students to not privilege one manifestation of language over another” (p. 74).

Africans have held a presence in the Americas since before Columbus, and seeing the Olmec heads and pyramids of the Mayan, being confused for being Mexican while living in Mexico, hued people have inhabited this land for millennia. These histories and visuals have been diluted to affirm the story of hued people as slaves. Civilizations of the Americas are erased or simplified, mentioned briefly in historic texts without credit for their contributions and creations before European-American interference.

In the original definitions regarding this land’s people by one of the United States’ most respected linguists – Noah Webster – the colonization of melanated people is noted. In Webster’s Dictionary, first edition (1828), *American* is defined as,

A native of America; originally applied to the aboriginals, or copper-colored races, found here by the European-Americans; but now applied to the descendants of Europeans born in America (p. 44).

As copper as the face of Abraham Lincoln on the United States penny, I have taken to see my skin as comparable to many a Mexican and an Indian, a Sudanese sister, and a Fijian brother. My tone is both indigenous and universal. To clarify further, Beecher-Stowe (1833) writes,

Before the White people came over to America, it had many tribes of people in it. Some of these tribes still remain in the United States, and in the countries north of it, and in South America. These form what are called the American race. They have a copper-colored skin—long, black hair— small, dark eyes—and very thick lips, and broad noses (p. 40).

Alas, the Olmec heads found along the Mexican Gulf Coast was argued as evidence of an African presence in America before the Maafa (transatlantic human trafficking) and even

before the misadventures of Christopher Columbus (Toldson, 1999; Van Sertima, 2003).

There remains some contention to this positionality (Haslip-Viera, de Montellano, & Barbour, 1997) including Dixon's 1921 study on Polynesians which denotes that in "the conquests of Central America", there "were a tribe of dark skinned, heavily tattooed people with frizzled hair, that were not African negroes" (Dixon, 1912, p. 85). He then inquires, "how should African negroes have ever reached the shores of the Pacific so early as 1513?" (p. 85). British geneticist Adam Rutherford, author of *A Brief History of Everyone Who Ever Lived* and *The Book of Humans: The Story of How We Became Us*, provides this response as he writes in *The Atlantic* (2017):

European-American DNA is found today throughout the Americas, no matter how remote or isolated a tribe might appear to be. But before Columbus, these continents were already populated. The indigenous people hadn't always been there, nor had they originated there, as some of their traditions state, but they had occupied these American lands for at least 20,000 years.

Studies of the first inhabitants of the Americas point to those with features of native Africans and Australian Aboriginals, both being Melanin-Rich groups. In discussing Luzia, the name given to the oldest human remains found in America (in 1975 by the archaeologist Annette Laming-Emperaire), anthropologist Walter Neves, told *The New York Times*,

We can no longer say that the first [...] of the Americas came from the north of Asia, as previous models have proposed. This skeleton is nearly 2,000 years older than any skeleton ever found in the Americas, and it does not look like those of Amerindians or North Asians" (Rohter, 1999, p. F-1).

A follow-up forensic analysis of Luzia proves the oldest American had "the features one associates with Negroid skulls", according to forensic specialist Richard Neave (Rohter, 1999, p. F-1); recent studies with more sophisticated technology affirm this "craniometric analyses" which "suggested an African and/or Australian origin" (Fontugne, 2013, p. 1187).

This review is not to refute the African-ness of Melanin-Rich people in America, nor to erase the presence and contributions of Asiatic-descended Amerindians (nor the rich histories of Pacific Islanders, Caribbean people, and more), but to affirm all of their presences and contributions within American civilization far before European-American colonization and the Maafa. This erasure is deliberate (Asante, 2010; Farmer, 2004; Shapiro, 1997; Smith, 2008) and upholds multigenerational attacks to suppress the primary maritime strength and social influence of indigenous Africans (see Kobishchanow, 1965). Africa experiences an remarkable dearth of diversification in our literature due to its colonization; Mazrui writes, “Africa is a geographical fiction” created by Europe, ignoring the “more than fifty territorial boundaries” which encompass a land the most ethnic diversity in the world (Adibe, 2009, p. 29). Even the positionality that Europe is a continent is false; in a lecture by Dr. Joy Degruy at the National Conference on Race & Ethnicity (NCORE) in 2018, Degruy explained that Europe does not fit the textbook definition of a continent – one of the main landmasses of the globe – and is instead a subsection of the continent of Eurasia; this a concept out of her book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*. There are multiple instances in which researchers have expanded upon this notation (DeGloma, 2009; Gabriel, 2006). This social suppression is the platform in which our present society relies for maintenance of power. Yet melanin-rich skin is a biological advantage (Morison, 1985; Jablonski, 2004) and the continued presence of Melanin-Rich people in America denotes the failure of eras of European-American genocide and systemic attacks (psychological, sexual, ecological, financial, spiritual, and more) against people who share this benefit.

As Hendry (2007) notes, “[n]arrative was, I hoped, a way in which my students would come to know themselves and see themselves as active agents in shaping the world (p. 488). When I write, I write for the younger me, whose classrooms in Philadelphia were gifted with

multiculturalism, yet whose melanated students were still left with literature and histories which “de-centered, dislocated, and made into a nonperson” the scholars within (Asante, 1991, p. 171). This writing experience affords a formal occasion to rename survivors with terms of dignity and call colonizers what they should be called, for “if I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive” (Lorde, 1984, p. 135). Cress Welsing’s breakdown of European-American supremacy against the world majority finalizes the need for abolishing color terms for people:

I reasoned then that in the majority of instances any neurotic drive for superiority and supremacy is usually founded upon a deep and pervading sense of inadequacy and inferiority. Is it not true that the white people represent in numerical terms a very small minority of the world's people? And more profoundly, is not white itself or the quality of "whiteness" indeed not a color but, more correctly, the very absence of any ability to produce color? The quality of whiteness is indeed a genetic inadequacy or a relative genetic deficiency state or disease based upon the genetic inability to produce the skin pigments of melanin which are responsible for all skin coloration. The massive majority of the world's people are not so afflicted, suggesting that the state of color is the norm for human beings and that the state of color absence is abnormal. This state of color absence acts always as a genetic recessive to the dominant genetic factor of color production. Color always "annihilates," phenotypically and genetically speaking, the non-color, white. Black people possess the greatest color potential, with brown, red and yellow peoples possessing lesser quantities respectively. This then is the genetic and psychological basis for the Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation and Racism (white supremacy) (p. 34).

The utilization of the misnomers black and white without question in scholarship asserts the effectiveness of colonization within academia, erasing the hues identities that exist within this binary.

As I utilize feminist and queer theory within this study, I realize facets of this work challenge American institutional norms we hold dear, such as sex/gender conflation. As Keyes (2018) explains,

the assumption that sex dictates gender—in other words, that it mandates social roles, combinations of behaviors and traits and aspects of presentation and

identity—fails to capture the existence of transgender (trans) people, whose genders do not match their assigned sex. Trans people are contrasted with cisgender (cis) people, whose gender roles are congruent with their assigned sex (p. 3).

In addition to conflation are norms like gender essentialism (a la binaries: woman/man, female/male), performativity adherence (i.e. women must act lady-like), and straightness (i.e. women date men). “American education, however, is not centric; it is Eurocentric” (Asante, 1991, p. 171). It is not the story of the Americans, but of highlighting colonizing forces while scrubbing indications of ongoing vehemence (see Frost, 2018; Hall, 2008; Oyedemi, 2016). Within the realm of sexual orientation, Ahmed (2006) reminds us that inherent truth is present, but may contend with what is present in those rearing us from birth, those who emotionally, spiritually, and financially compel alignment with their norms. She writes,

Bodies become straight by tending toward straight objects, such that they acquire their tendencies, as an effect of this tending toward. Sexual orientations are also performative: in directing one’s desire toward some others, and not other others, bodies in turn acquire their shapes (p. 557).

Henceforth, the work of colonization presumes the Anglo-descended, straight, and cisgender to be inherent. The clarification of cisgender and heterosexual will be placed as often as possible to press within the keywords found in research from Western countries (including the United States – as an Anglo-serving platform). Just as references dedicated to explaining phenomena on Greek Life, queer life, or womanhood often dismiss or under-represent the existence of hued Greek-letter organizations, hued queer folk, and hued women, the conflation of sex and gender, and heterosexual insistence inherent in composing intimate arenas related to human inquiry, is irresponsible and contributes to the trauma of invisibility (Sleeter, 2001).

For this reason, the use of color terms (brown, black, etc.) in this dissertation will be limited, and the centering of the Afro-Original/Melanin-Rich people of the United States – a portion of the collective of the Original Americans – should be assumed within all contexts.

Terms such as *Africana* (recognizing the viability of acknowledging the multifaceted identity of “Black Americans” as African and American continent natives), *well hued*, *richly-hued*, *Melanin-Rich* are equitable. *African* is not used unless speaking about experiences that impact a majority or the whole of the continent, or when ethnic or national specificity cannot be determined. The term *underrepresented* is deployed consistently – as opposed to *marginalized* or *minority* – to highlight the intentional limiting of representation of Americans within their land, and insist upon the recognition of melanated people as the North-South American and world majority. When *hued* or *melanated* are used, they are understood as “people of color” in the larger sense, including Latinx, Asiatic, and other identities found outside of the European peninsula (Abes, Jones, and McEwen, 2007). Lastly, I use the terms *European-American*, *colonizing/colonizer*, *Anglo*, *hueless*, and *Caucasian* interchangeably, as is done in the literature I am engaging, short of color terms.

In addition, terms for gender and sex are separated in most contexts, acknowledging that sex is biological yet often assumed, both by laymen and by the medical community. As argued by Kidd and Witten (2008), “the traditional Western biomedical construction of identity routinely conflates sexuality, gender, and birth body” (p. 35). When sex is assigned at birth, sex genes are tested in few instances. Instead, the presence of an infantile genital region determines whether a child is deemed male or female (Ehrenreich & Barr, 2005). When ambiguity is noted (with population estimates of 0.1% to 2% in the United States of America), medical practitioners resist using the medically-viable third sex, intersex, and instead urge parents to allow for surgery to press a binary designation, “and hormonal treatment to reinforce the sex of rearing” (Creighton & Minto, 2001, p. 1264). In some cases, parents may not know their child’s true sex designation, as the “paternalistic policy of withholding the diagnosis is still practiced by some clinicians” (p. 1264). In such ignorance, many transgender people may not know that their

gender incongruence may very well have been a false sex designation from birth (Ehrenreich & Barr, 2005). Nadal, Davidoff, Davis, & Wong (2014) define *transgender* as “an umbrella term that can be used to refer to anyone expressing a gender that does not match their birth certificate” (p. 72). Medical withholding and decision-making without parental knowledge (or lack of informed knowledge) is but the beginning of an invisible, normalized, yet “tremendous scope of anti-transgender violence and discrimination” throughout the lifecycle (Kidd and Witten, 2008, p. 45).

Instances in which transgender men, transgender women, trans-feminine, trans-masculine, and non-binary identities align are replaced with the all-encompassing *trans*\*; Whittle (2006), Johnson (2016), and the multiple iterations of The U.S. Transgender Survey use *trans* fluently without an asterisk. I resist melding trans with specified gender – though Cromwell (1999) and Ellison, Green, Richardson, and Snorton (2017) do (e.g. *transwoman* instead of *transgender women*) because as race is a modifier, so is being cisgender or transgender. In addition, *LGBTQ* and *queer* are used interchangeably when the community is aligned in experience. I have been cautious not to conflate terms which focus on experiences that impact a particular facet with larger group terms (hued and melanated [non-Anglo people] vs. Melanin-Rich and Africana [“African-American”/“Black people” in particular]).

### Other Key Terms

The following terms will be used throughout the study:

*Active members*: members of NPHC organizations who are consistently participating in the events and service of the organization through an undergraduate or graduate chapter

*Alumni members*: members of NPHC organizations who have completed a Bachelor-level degree.



*Chapter:* a local or university-based subgroup within an NPHC organization; local chapters are for graduated, alumni members; university-based chapters are for undergraduates

*Cis-het:* a portmanteau of cisgender and heterosexual persons

*Financial:* members of NPHC organizations who pay their annual dues to an undergraduate or graduate chapter

*NPHC organizations:* used to recognize the nine international fraternities and sororities founded in the United States for the specific purpose of supporting Melanin-Rich students in college, as well as serving socially underrepresented communities.

*Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs):* “...any historically Black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans...” (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], n.d.), recognizing that these institutions were open to all scholars.

*Gender expression:* refers to the ways a person presents gender through actions, dress, and demeanor, and how those presentations are interpreted based on gender norms.

*Gender-nonconforming:* refers to those “whose gender presentations differ substantially from what is typically expected for their gender” (Ehrensaft, 2016).

*Interfraternity Conference, IFC:* formally known as the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC), this is a trade association representing 74 international and national social fraternities.

*Interest:* an applicant of the organization; a person seeking membership into an NPHC organization

*Masculine of center:* refers to those who present with characteristics in cultural alignment with men, regardless of gender identity.

*National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)*: the umbrella organization of nine historically African American social fraternities and sororities.

*Panhellenic Conference (PHC) or Panhellenic*: formally known as the National Panhellenic Conference, the governing council of majority European-American social sororities.

*Predominately White Institutions (PWIs)*: colleges and universities in the United States where 50% or more of the student enrollment is of students of European descent (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

*Undergraduate members*: members who are currently enrolled at a non-profit, four-year institution (or who have joined at a two-year institution under the promise of completing a Bachelor's degree at a four-year institution).

Any brief clarifications of terms will fall within text.

### Significance of the Issue

The goal of this study is to explore how four transgender sorority members experience Greek life after their gender transition. This survey was motivated by my undergraduate experience of deciding on an NPHC sorority to join. Involved in student leadership within LGBTQ organizations since high school, I paused when a story of queer excommunication from a particular NPHC sorority appeared during my decision-making process.

In spring semester of 2008, student Devin Alston-Smith joined the undergraduate chapter of an NPHC sorority at George Washington University, located in Washington, DC. Alston-Smith identified as an F-to-M (female-to-male) transgender student, presented as masculine and used he/him pronouns, though their legal name (not Devin) and female sex were on the university's formal records (Hess, 2009; Hoff & Cahn, 2009). After initiation into the

organization, chapter members began to urge Alston-Smith to dress more feminine, and refused to use he/him pronouns and his preferred name. Alston-Smith ultimately reported this behavior to alumni members, who deemed Alston-Smith inactive after a formal meeting regarding their tension with the chapter president, who led most of the acts of aggression; the alumni chapter defended Alston-Smith's inactive status as unrelated to the meeting, citing a failure to turn in academic transcripts. Alston-Smith escalated his complaints to the university, which resulted in a review of George Washington's Student Code of Conduct (which failed to address protections for transgender students) and Alston-Smith's declaration of disaffiliation with the sorority. Alston-Smith took a leave of absence from the institution after these events (Hess, 2009; Hoff & Cahn, 2009).

My godbrother joined a fraternity in 2008, the semester proceeding Alston-Smith's induction. His persistence in seeing me join a Greek organization led him to suggest I seek membership in the same organization as Alston-Smith. Though I'd already attended an interest meeting for the organization I would eventually join in Fall 2009, I reflected on his fraternity's kindness for me over the years, along with their promise of support if I were to reestablish the sorority's chapter at the institution (which had been absent for more than a decade). I searched the news regarding the organization and found many highlights to their sisterhood, yet the news which struck a deafening nerve was the story of Alston-Smith, with whom I immediately empathized.

Higher education provides an environment where students explore and define their identities (Catalano, 2015; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, and Cooper, 2003). However, for some populations, the road to degree completion and student development actualization will be more difficult. This process becomes more strenuous when students' peers, faculty, staff and administrators do not recognize them as multifaceted identities (Abes, Jones, and McEwen,

2007). Students on predominantly European-American campuses in the United States often report high levels of alienation and social isolation (McClure, 2016, p. 1036). Likewise, many transgender students experience discrimination and harassment at college, which may have implications for their academic success and retention (Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012). The U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS), a survey of over 27,000 trans adults, found that 24% of respondents who were out as or perceived as trans\*in college reported being verbally, physically, or sexually harassed at that time—with 16% leaving college because of the harassment (James et al., 2016). Melanated and transgender women were especially likely to highlight these barriers (Grant et al., 2017).

With the advent of the 2008 economic collapse, the employment landscape has changed both rapidly and dramatically; many United States citizens now find they need an associate's or bachelor's degree to become gainfully employed and nearly 50 percent of all jobs in 2018 will require postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2011). Degree attainment, particularly a bachelor's degree, leads to higher levels of income, better employment opportunities, increased civic engagement, and an overall improved quality of life (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008). However, the United States is no longer the world's leader in post-secondary education (USDE, 2011).

In 1990, the United States ranked number one in the percentage of young persons aged 25-34 years holding a bachelor's degree or higher, yet in 2012, this ranking plummeted to 14th (out of 36 countries) for the same age bracket holding an associate's degree or higher, and a ranking of 11th for those holding a bachelor's degree or higher (Hughes, 2012). Despite efforts made in the United States to increase educational opportunities for all, the percentage of degrees earned in 2011 is only slightly higher than it was 40 years ago (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; USDE,

2011). Additionally, there is an age gap: while the U.S. ranked 4th in degrees attained by citizens ages 55 to 64, it ranked 6th among young Americans 25 to 34 in 2007 (Lee & Rawls, 2010).

The result is that there may not be enough qualified younger Americans for the current and future jobs that require a degree, which could negatively impact the economic stability and power of the U.S. (Lee & Rawls, 2010; Reyna, 2010; & USDE, 2011). As a response to this scholastic concern, the White House - in conjunction with several philanthropic foundations - had embarked upon a nation-wide effort known as the College Completion Agenda. Launched in 2010, the College Completion Agenda intended to increase the percentage of Americans who hold an associate's degree or higher among those ages 25 to 34 (Lee & Rawls, 2010; USDE, 2011). The Obama administration's goal was for 50 percent of Americans to attain a post-secondary education degree by 2020 (USDE, 2011). The hope is that these efforts will assist the United States in re-establishing its place as a world leader in the number of educated citizens.

One strategy being proffered is to improve data collection and to establish clearly defined metrics that facilitate an understanding of the current education market: which citizens are choosing to further their education and how or where those citizens are being educated (Reyna, 2010). Others believe that more of an effort should be geared towards educating historically underrepresented Americans, including those who are low-income or underrepresented. Lee and Rawls (2010) advocated for the need to "erase disparities in educational attainment" (p.9) among underrepresented groups, as it is estimated that half of the degrees needed to meet the goal would be produced from these groups.

Access to education for underrepresented and low-income groups has been an issue addressed by the mainstream media and academia (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Perna, 2000; Perna, 2006; Shaun, Lori, & Ontario, 2009; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005).

What has received lesser attention is the importance of successful matriculation and retention of students facing the negative impacts of colonization, and students of low socioeconomic status on the path to graduation (Allen, 1992; Flowers, 2004; Harper, & Kuykendall, 2012; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Researchers have addressed the varying challenges to adjustment and transition that make it difficult for individuals in these groups to persist to degree completion. Among those mechanisms that aid in their retention and persistence is an accepting and supportive campus climate (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; D'Augelli & Hersberger, 1993; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), student engagement, which includes relationships with faculty and staff (Allen, 1992; Kuh, 2003; Nelson Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo, Williams, & Holmes, 2007), and student involvement in campus activities, including student organizations (Flowers, 2004; and Shaun & John 2007). More recently, researchers have turned to other disciplines to identify theoretical frameworks that can be applied to student development. The Ecological Systems Theory is one such ideology that researchers are turning to in order to provide additional insight on how environments such as family, schools, and peer groups influence educational outcomes like grade point average (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Dennis, Phinney, & Chautaco, 2005; Renn & Arnold, 2003).

For working-class students and racial minorities who do matriculate to college, higher education can be “transformative,” facilitating their transition to the middle class (Stephens et al., 2007, p. 815). Historically, social, economic, and political systems in the United States presented educational challenges, and sometimes outright barriers, to educational attainment for Americans of African descent. The Higher Education of Act of 1965 granted greater access and funding resources for African Americans, as well as other underrepresented ethnic groups, and women, to address and overcome these challenges. While, college enrollment increased from 10.2 percent in 1976 to 15.3 percent in 2011 for African Americans (Aud et al., 2012),

education gaps between races still exist. Aud et al. (2012) reported that in 2010, 58 percent of European-Americans enrolled in undergraduate studies compared to 15 percent of Melanin-Rich people. Additionally, of all Americans aged 25 years and over who earned a bachelor's degree, 7 percent were African American and 80 percent were European-American. Aud et al. also reported that 23.2 percent of African American people between the ages of 25 to 29 had a bachelor's degree or higher, while 39.8 percent of European-Americans in the same age range had the same degree attainment.

Reasons for lack of degree completion include the difficulty associated with transitioning into college, a lack of social and peer support, and a poor sense of belonging (Allen, Robbins, Casillas, & Oh, 2008; Melguizo, 2008; Walpole, 2008). This is especially true for Melanin-Rich students who attend predominantly European-American colleges and universities (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; Melguizo, 2008; Walpole, 2008).

Nevertheless, college can play an important role in facilitating gender identity exploration—such as by providing the supports and resources needed to allow students to navigate this process while staying in college. For prospective college students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or queer (LGBTQ), it is crucial to find a college with a supportive learning environment where they can thrive. Furthermore, transgender students face unique setbacks from their nontraditional and/or non-binary gender expression (Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012; Richards et al, 2016). In Beemyn (2005), issues involving housing and public harassment were obstacles acknowledged by out trans\* students; “pressure to be silent (52%), verbal threats (48%), graffiti (43%), physical threats (24%), denial of services (23%)” were highlighted as top forms of harassment. Participating in a niche of organizations which have been cited for stricter

policing of heteronormativity as Worthen (2014) notes, could emphasize a desire and search for safe spaces, or could be a lead up to worse treatment after seeing limitations for comfort as an individual. These differences are rarely discussed or trained upon for staff and faculty in the collegiate environment, leading to alienation and harassment of these students. My research seeks to highlight the needs of transgender men, specifically in Greek-letter organizations.

### Statement of the Problem

The participation and graduation rates of Melanin-Rich people in U.S. higher education are major concerns for those interested in the economic and social well-being of the United States, as higher education leads to achieving higher incomes, status advancement, and upward social mobility (Baker, 2005). In 2007, 33% of African people ages 18 to 24 were enrolled in colleges and universities as compared to 43% of European-Americans (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

Researchers posit that early involvement in meaningful and supportive extra-curricular activities, including on-campus student clubs and organizations, can assist with the transition, retention and graduation of students (Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, & Goodwin, 1998; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 1981; Tinto, 1987). These organizations that lead to academic attainment include National Pan-Hellenic Council organizations (NPHC) that were founded in the early 20th century for the purpose of supporting racially diverse college students (Kimbrough, 2003; Harper, Byars, & Jelke, 2005; & Chambers, Walpole, & Coaxum, 2012). As the oldest race-inclusive collegiate fraternities and sororities, the Divine Nine (or D9), are support groups fostering leadership development for students. Khoury (2013) notes that the “most notable among these benefits are brotherhood, creating relationships that are described by



members as familial, connecting members to the campus, social integration, networking opportunities, and establishing strong(er) connections to [...] history and culture” (p. 141).

However, recent research suggests that queer students and alumni are less inclined to pursue and maintain membership in organizations within the NPHC, the nine fraternities and sororities historically serving Melanin-Rich scholars.

NPHC manifested from the need of safe spaces for African-American students in historically-exclusive institutions during their dawn of entry, the post-Reconstruction period (Trotter, 2004). Yet just as the original fraternal organizations before NPHC organizations only extended membership to a certain type of individual, fraternities and sororities today – including NPHC organizations – are also inherently exclusionary (Maisel, 1990; Stuber, Klugman & Daniel, 2011). As Welter notes, “sex-role ideologies, homophobic tendencies, discrimination, and a deficiency in acceptance for sexual diversity” (Welter, 2012, p. 122) turn many queer students away from participation in, and benefiting from the connections made in these organizations (Taylor, Borland, & Vaughters, 1998; Welter, 2012).

Over the past several years, Greek Life departments at institutions across the country have begun to post the aggregate grade point average for each chapter onto the Greek Life section of their respective University web sites. Based on this available data, NPHC organizations are achieving grade point averages below the all-university average and the averages of traditionally European-American Greek-letter organizations. Since aggregate chapter GPAs are a compilation of individual member GPAs, individual member GPAs are also likely to be lower than the all-university undergraduate average. This data appears contrary to available research that has found a positive correlation between academic success and

involvement in Greek letter organizations (Harper et al., 2005; Baker, 2008; Strayhorn & McCall, 2012), as well as the stated value of scholarship espoused by NPHC organizations (Kimbrough, 2003; Parks & Cohen, 2012).

There may be several reasons for such gaps. Students in these organizations place an emphasis on academic achievement and honor but studies have shown these same students participate in academic dishonesty in large numbers (Stannard & Bowers, 1970; Storch & Storch, 2002). There have been reports of European-American Greek houses having test files where members can study older members' notes and returned tests, an advantage these students had over Greek organizations without houses (the case with most NPHC organizations) and non-Greeks. In their review of National Panhellenic Council (European-American Greek sorority) houses, Williams and Janosik (2007) found that "upper-class women in sororities engaged in academically dishonest behaviors at significantly higher rates than upper-class women with no sorority involvement and incoming women with no interest in sorority involvement" (p. 712). Therefore, students in NPHC organizations may seem to perform poorly, given that students who belong to organizations are held to the same academic standards as their traditionally European-American peers (Chambers et al., 2012) yet lack the resources stocked within generationally networked settings to perform on par with their peers.

What is of most concern is the possible missed academic and career opportunities by this subset of Melanin-Rich students by not performing at or above the university grade point average. Improving academic performance among undergraduate BGLO members can be an important area for colleges and universities in improving the retention and graduation for African American students. As aptly stated by Harper, Byars, and Jelke (2005), "As colleges and universities become more focused on improving their retention and graduation rates,

particularly in closing the gaps between white and African American students, they cannot overlook the important roles that NPHC organizations play in African American students' adjustment and success" (p. 410).

Such reasoning is also apparent in the current national environment which continuously deprives and roadblocks success in providing transgender people life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Gender identity awareness is not simply a matter of adult fulfillment of self-actualization. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, gender identity awareness can start in children as young as five (2015). Forty-six percent of transgender men have attempted suicide at least once in their lives; 45% were 18 to 24 year olds. Higher education would maintain responsibility for student leadership development and support of self-actualization for all of scholars in this age range (Haas, Rodgers, & Herman, 2014). In addition, half of transgender and non-conforming gender people have faced family rejection (Choi, Wilson, Shelton, & Gates, 2015).

The National Transgender Advocacy Coalition estimates place murders of transgendered persons at about one per month since 1990, a number which has increase to nearly two per month since the year 2000 (Doan, 2007). Encompassing estimates at less than 0.39% (Meerwijk, 2017) of the population, these deaths highlight the extreme vulnerability of this group to targeted violence, of which a majority is transgender people of color. Nadal, Davidoff, Davis, & Wong (2014) write,

some perpetrators target transgender people because they were explicitly prejudiced toward transgender people; some perpetrators assumed transgender people to be easy victims of robbery; and some perpetrators assaulted transgender people (particularly transgender women of color) because of their multiple identities (e.g., gender identity, race, socioeconomic status). Transgender and GNC individuals experience several types of systemic discrimination and injustice from various sectors: the criminal justice system, health care, family, employment, education, and other public accommodations and service providers (p. 72).

Anti-trans\* violence might serve as an early warning system for deep-seated intolerance present in an urban area, of which African-American LGBTQ are majorly situated (Brooks, 2016; Doan, 2001; Manley, 2014). African American were two times as likely to experience anti-LGBT discrimination compared to overall survivors, and in 2017, 60% of fatal victims of queer violence were African (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2018). Particularly for LGBT students from urban areas (Dinkes, Cataldi & Lin-Kelly, 2007; Warner, Weist & Krulak, 1999), attending college may provide an opportunity to interact and develop relationships with openly LGBT people, thereby decreasing self-prejudicial attitudes and shrouding them from harm (Lambert et al. 2006).

Catalano (2015) writes, “Despite increasing attention on issues raised by trans students in higher education, almost no empirical research has examined the identities and experiences of trans students as a group, or of specific subsets of trans students” (p. 411). The invisibility of this identity within historical leadership organizations for collegiate students and alumni compels LGBTQ issues to remain unaddressed by these organizations. The absence (or closeting) of queer members could manifest into members being ill-prepared to address the expanse of diversity opportunities and issues within corporate and social realms, either shutting them out of - or making them liabilities to - their future environments. Normalizing the absence of LGBT people and group contributions to history and culture contribute to the lack of appreciation of these facets of achievement which are present in all fields of study.

Without a review of the experiences of transgender students and the identification and critique of their campus and social environment, institutions of higher learning miss out on the opportunity to fully prepare students, both cisgender and transgender, for workplaces, organizations and a society encompassing more than binary individuals (Dugan, Kusel, &

Simounet, 2012; Kidd & Witten, 2008). Kidd and Witten (2008) suggest “the federal government routinely invisibilizes the LGBT population and in doing so silently sanctions anti-LGBT behaviors” (p. 46). Without direct attention on queer students in college – where the 18-24 demographic reports is a safe arena – researchers and administrators fail to intercept the “organized campaigns of violence against transgender people” marked through several 2010 decade events. An April 2019 transgender military ban prohibits “anyone with gender dysphoria who is taking hormones or has already undergone a gender transition” from enlisting in the US Armed forces. NBC News reports,

Further, any currently serving troops diagnosed with gender dysphoria after this date will have to serve in their sex as assigned at birth and will be barred from taking hormones or getting gender-affirming surgery (Jackson & Kube, 2019).

Gates and Herman (2014) suggest “approximately 15,500 transgender individuals are serving on active duty or in the Guard or Reserve forces” and “an estimated 134,300 transgender individuals who are veterans or are retired from Guard or Reserve service” (p. 1). Cisgender discrimination against transgender people has morphed into states implementing bathroom access restriction bills, pressing consumers to utilize the restroom assigned to the sex they were designated at birth, instead of the gender they identify and display (Beemyn, 2005; Stryker & Whittle, 2006). This would be impractical for those who are aware of their intersex status or who present as neither considerably feminine nor masculine (Ehrenreich & Barr, 2005). In addition to trans\* identities, the enforcement places cisgender women with masculine builds or attributes (i.e. short cut hair, small chests, large/tall frames, etc.) or cisgender men with feminine builds or attributes (i.e. long hair, large chests, small frames, etc.) in danger of harassment.

As Ellison, Green, Richardson, and Snorton (2017) note, “Black transwomen and transwomen of color have sparked the interests of many because of popular figures like Laverne Cox and Janet Mock; at the same time, there has also been a lot more awareness around Black

transwomen's relationship to premature death". Spikes in the often fatal harassment of transgender women, and the anti-LGBT Pulse club shooting in June 2016 – the deadliest mass shooting by a single person in modern US history – are all symptoms of ignorance which further research and activism from educational institutions could quell (Stix et al, 2019).

### Purpose of the Study

My interest in focusing my dissertation on LGBTQ issues comes from a lifetime of involvement within the queer community. In high school, I became a member of our Gay-Straight Alliance and GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network), a national public school initiative to address anti-queer sentiments. During this time, I started the school's participation in the National Day of Silence, a passive protest against anti-LGBT name-calling, bullying and harassment in schools. With four other high schools, my group petitioned the School District of Philadelphia to recognize October as Gay and Lesbian History Month. In college, I joined several groups that allowed me to continue this work.

As the Treasurer and Community Service Chair for SHADES – a multicultural LGBT organization – I often found myself in the midst of conversations about higher education's need to implement better inclusion strategies for queer students, faculty and staff. We often rallied for gay rights legislation and executed workshops and panels addressing the biological nuances of sex, the social implications of gendered citizenship, and challenged our institution to declare a stance more cognizant of the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums.

I was initiated into the NPHC sorority Sigma Gamma Rho on November 6, 2009. I joined the organization with an eclectic group; more than half of my intake group – informally called a "line" – was queer-identified; it was never a concern or point of contention within my chapter or by the alumnae chapter, which oversaw us. Though one soror (who came out after we

were members) presents herself in a masculine way, transgender, as an identity, was never discussed nor a concern within my experience of Greek life. Our advisor and graduate chapter did not communicate anti-LGBTQ sentiments to us. Nevertheless, other chapters refused to consider publically gay and lesbian members, and a string of NPHC members being “outed” – exposed as queer – during my senior year resulted in chapters socially excommunicating queer members, which lead to student affairs holding a symposium on LGBTQ discrimination in Greek life. Since then, I have wrote about the experiences I witnessed as a feminine-presenting, queer sorority member within NPHC and the Melanin-Rich community.

Focusing my dissertation on transgender men in sororities came from a chance opportunity I witnessed at a diversity conference, in which several of my sorority members attended. Each time I’d walk past a keen eyed woman who’d spotted my blue and gold silicone bracelet – one I’ve worn nearly every day since I earned it back in 2009 – we would gleefully drop our bags and embrace, sharing initiation information and contact details for an eventual sorority dinner later in the conference. Then I saw him, a fellow I had met online through an LGBTQ Greek group. He was a transgender brother who had joined my organization before their transition. I’d only known the details of one instance of a transgender NPHC member; a transgender man who was courted by a sorority chapter in DC, became a member, and was then harassed by members for presenting as masculine. The member left college and eventually disaffiliated; the story was one of a few reasons that deterred me from considering the organization for membership. The sorority I joined, Sigma Gamma Rho, had the diversity I appreciated out of all of the other groups I participated in as an undergraduate; though the majority of the women were feminine-presenting and straight, I knew from my travels that there were also “out” [publically queer] masculine-presenting, lesbian, and bisexual members.

I am always excited to share a meal with fellow sisters, but in bringing up the opportunity to meld our cisgender sisters and transgender brothers, I encountered questioning faces on both ends. It was as if time stood still between both sectors of my people when I asked. The muffled claim of affiliation was communicated from my trans\* brother, though at his earliest convenience, he introduced me to another trans\*person who was a member. With two trans\* members present, their absence from our dinner would be more of a circumvention than an oversight, I rationalized. Yet the suggestion of the presence of men, even at a relatively casual meet up, was one that triggered a bold hesitation by my cisgender sisters. This hesitation is a result of structural ousting of queer people, of which Greek life is only newly adapting to for cisgender LBG members and aspirants. Whittle (2006) writes:

Trans identities were one of the most written about subjects of the late twentieth century. New communities of transgender and transsexual people have created new industries, a new academic discipline, new forms of entertainment; they offer new challenges to politics, government, and law, and new opportunities to broaden the horizons of everyone who has a trans person as their neighbor, coworker, friend, partner, parent, or child.

As a member of the LGBTQ community and a now decade-long member of Greek life, I realized this abandonment of members for actualization of a brand (to bolster masculinity for the fraters, and/or protect the arena of femininity for the sorors) was in tension with our pledge to a lifetime bond. This conversation was necessary, but I was unsure of how to address it.

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of transgender men who belong to NPHC sororities and the influence of those experiences on membership persistence post-transition. This study addresses transgender men's sense of belonging once their gender identity changes to one that is deemed antithetical to sorority affiliation. Qualitative methodology was most appropriate for this study (vs. quantitative research or mix-methods research) as the goal is to understand the participants through their interpretation of their



experiences (Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). The study focuses on participants' lives in four separate eras: pre-college; during college, pre-sorority; post-sorority, pre-transition; and post-sorority, post-transition. Storytellers are prompted to highlight their relationships with family and friends through these periods, as well as how they identified and presented. This research explores how students form a sense of self by reflecting on educational and organizational experiences (Han, 2009; Huber, 2008; Moon, 2011; Simon-Shohan, 2005; Vincent, 2000). The knowledge gained from these studies adds valuable insights to the relationship between experiences in sororities and relational self-understanding as these experiences are still ongoing. This narrative inquiry is guided by the following research question: What are the experiences of trans\*/ transgender men/transmasculine members of NPHC sororities?

### Conceptual Framework

My conceptual framework is guided by three concepts: representation, violence, and survivors oppressing survivors. I will address each of these in detail in the next chapter, but here I offer a brief overview of these concepts and major theorists I associate with each one.

**Representation and Invisibility.** What is representation? Representation is defined as “the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone or the state of being so represented” (Merriam-Webster, 2003). DuBois' double consciousness theory and Butler's theory on performativity lend themselves to this notion. While DuBois initially writes of the identity pull of being of African heritage and a citizen of the United States, his theory overlaps with another identity which is deemed non-African and non-American: being sexually and/or gender queer (Snorton, 2017). Butler's theory begs the question, *if one can balance the racism innate in a*

*culture which owes its existence to the labor of your ancestors, what strategies does one add to their psychological inventory to also exist as one presents, in a realm where neither your country nor your people supports your being?* I will add that representation is not flattened by any one identity, but yearns for the acknowledgement of multiple intersecting identities (Abes, Jones, and McEwen, 2007; Crenshaw, 1989; Parent, DaBlaere, & Moradi, 2013; Ramsay, 2014). When addressing groups which long to be addressed in research, social-structural inequity is a necessary first step to understanding and addressing the complex inequities that people from historically underrepresented groups face (Goffman, 1959). West and Zimmerman's (1987) doing gender theory denotes that transgender representation in media can change the representation of trans\* bodies in social discourse. However, the eye of such a manifestation must be dedicated to diversifying the context in which such faces are brought into view. The diversification of transgender media may include a racialized context, for instance, but often situates it into the passably-cisgender norm, as with *Time Magazine's* 2014 issue highlighting actress Laverne Cox. Cox, a Melanin-Rich transgender woman from the Netflix series, *Orange is the New Black* (2013), is shown wearing curve-defining dresses, cleavage out, and positioned seductively (Steinmetz, 2014). Rondot (2015) continues their discussion of the writer's content in the article,

Katy Steinmetz suggests that because trans\* images and narratives proliferate in contemporary media, the concept of "trans\*" (transsexual, transgender, genderqueer, two-spirit and other non-binary identities included in the term's asterisk) is becoming more understandable for nontrans\* Americans. From 20/20 exposés and talk shows, to reality television and bestseller book lists, trans\* stories are more visible than they were even ten years ago. Though Steinmetz shows how trans\* stories have become much more mainstream, she doesn't analyze the types of representations available or the detrimental effects simplified and sensationalized stories can have on individual trans\* people. Instead, Steinmetz erroneously suggests that heightened trans\* visibility inevitably leads to heightened trans\* acceptance. In reality, most mainstream representations tell a homogenous trans\* story, which makes visible only a sliver of those of us who identify as trans\*. Popular representations reinforce a history of degradation by

displaying trans\* people as objects who exist for the consumption of nontrans\* consumers (p. 1).

As Johnson (2016) writes, “transnormativity is an ideology that structures trans\* identification, experience, and narratives into a *realness* or *trans\*enough* hierarchy that is heavily reliant on accountability to a medically based, heteronormative model” (p. 467-8). Simply put, trans\* people are tolerated if they force themselves into the box of their actualized gender well enough to go undetected.

Higher education adopts such a position through indirect emphasis of the binary: conflation of sex and gender on entrance applications, followed by the categorization of housing, sports (intramural to NCAA-supported), and select scholarships, honors, and organizations with birth sex.

Tinto (1987) argued in order for students to be retained, they need to feel wanted, needed and appreciated by the institution. To accomplish this, the student must come first. According to Tinto, “effective retention is possible only when retention per se is no longer the goal of retention programs” (p. 3). Other researchers have discovered intentional acts of inclusivity, particularly within curriculum development and culturally sensitive programming, aid in the cultivation of a racially and culturally fertile environment for the development of Melanin-Rich masculine beings within the academy (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Walker, 2013).

Violence. Violence takes many forms in the queer community. Stereotyping is the central reason for the rise of street violence against transgender persons throughout the contemporary national culture; in short, the power of place and the status of a person or group are the major shapers. The cultural phenomenon of homophobia and transphobia is an experience which many Americans have witnessed, and while there is decreasing social acceptance for explicit

expressions of homophobia, few of us speak out against microaggressions against the LGBT community. In addition, homophobia and transphobia are perpetrated against straight-identified individuals who are not gender normative as a means of policing gender (Beaver, 2015; Stanley & Smith, 2015). This silence has damaging effects (Sue, 2010). Ahmed (2014) encourages the queer to live life by one's own rules, regardless of the consequences. She states, "The punishment for willfulness is a passive willing of death, an allowing of death" (p. viii). Consider *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*, an initiative of President Bill Clinton, which essentially instructed LGBT service members to hide their sexuality in order to circumvent harassment in the military (Stryker, 2008). This act was not new; in 1981, the Army mandated the disqualification of all homosexuals from the Army without regard to the length or quality of their military service. For instance, Perry Watkins was discharged by the Army after 14 years of exemplary service because of statements he had made about his own homosexuality, though he had entered the military identifying as gay (*Watkins v. US Army*, 1989). After the efforts of many to train Watkins effectively, the years of expertise absent now due to discrimination. The next generation has answered the call to sacrifice the marginal comfort of closeting with the bravery of challenging norms.

A key component of the "doing gender" framework is "accountability": individuals are held accountable to conforming to norms about how women or men are supposed to behave (Beaver, 2015). For example, in March 2019, Johnson High School in Gainesville, GA, forced a 17-year-old student who identifies as male to run for prom queen. Dex Frier was nominated by his friends for prom king, but administrators said that he could not enter the prom king race, because he is legally female. A nearly identical case occurred in Tremper High School in Kenosha, Wisconsin, where Ash Whitaker was not only prohibited for running for prom king, but was also barred from using the boys' bathroom; Whitaker was only allowed to use the girls'

bathroom or staff bathroom (Orenstein, 2016). After a sit-in and online petition with more than 5,000 signatures, a revised policy regarding prom court allowed Whitaker to run.

In Louisiana alone, three transgender women were murdered in an eight-day period in February 2017; cisgender men killed them all (Lane, 2017). It is here where survivors oppressing survivors comes into play; for well-hued cisgender men, police violence was one of the leading causes of death in the years 2013 to 2018. In 2016, the slayings of 26 transgender people were reported; this is the highest reported number to date (Cullinane & Grisham, 2017). Many of the victims had issues securing jobs and housing, and a few worked as sex workers for their livelihood. Because transgender people face discrimination on systemic, institutional, and interpersonal levels, many transgender women view the sex work industry as their only viable career option (Nadal, Davidoff, & Fujii-Doe, 2014; Operario, Soma, & Underhill, 2008).

Survivors Oppressing Survivors. For the first time in four years, studies show that American acceptance of LGBT people is dwindling. Sarah Kate Ellis, GLAAD president and CEO, deduces this as a shift that aligns with the 2016 presidential election, which followed with discriminatory rhetoric and policy rollbacks affecting LGBT people. As I will explain in Chapter 2, other underrepresented groups align with conservative Anglo ideology due to religious views and/or privilege seeking, which ignore those at the intersections of racial, gender and sexual discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989; Parent, DaBlaere, & Moradi, 2013; Ramsay, 2014). As Butler writes (2003), survivors of oppression often strip each other of agency by grasping power through maintaining the social hierarchy:

Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. It may be that one wants to, or does, but it may also be that despite one's best efforts, one is undone,

in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. And so when we speak about my sexuality and my gender, as we do (and we must) we mean something complicated by it. Neither of these is precisely a possession, but both are to be understood as modes of being dispossessed, ways of being for another or, indeed, by virtue of another (p. 20).

Butler acknowledges her racial (Caucasian) and national (as a citizen of the United States of America) privileges, but highlights her sexuality (lesbian) and gender (woman) as places of attack. Butler notes that where she has power, she must relinquish it for the benefit of those who do not have that privilege. Horton and Freire (1990) tie this notion to the mission of higher education. Butler denotes we are violent in our ignorance, whether direct, or through apathy. These researchers recommend people actively learning and participating in their own lives, in order to form a better society:

The more people participate in the process of their own education, the more the people participate in the process of defining what kind of production to produce, and for what and why, the more the people participate in the development of their selves. The more the people become themselves, the better the democracy. The less are asked about what they want, about their expectations, the less democracy we have. (pp. 145-146)

Rousseau's 1755 Discourse on Inequality details my passion for the reparation of society's survivors of economic and educational domestic terrorism. He states, "We may admire human society as much as we please; it will be none the less true that it necessarily leads men to hate each other in proportion as their interests clash and to do one another apparent services, while they are really doing every imaginable mischief" (p. 125). Derrick Bell notes, in *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, that affirmative action commitments – beyond tokenism – must be made in the educational arena, and that access to school that empowers, and welcomes critique and deconstruction of historic truth, will scrub our society of blind patriarchy and the myth of meritocracy.

However, the systemic discrimination against queer people and an ever-present norm of cisgender, heterosexual people (cis-het) limits arenas in which queer people gain support from community leaders. As Muñoz (1999) writes, “essential blackness” demands heterosexuality (p. 6). Even when family and friends are supportive of the individual, they may hesitate or cause the loved one to hesitate in sharing the news, making the coming-out process fragmented or incomplete. According to hooks (2004), “some are willing to change, while others are unwilling, and —many are afraid to change” (p. xvii).

There is a growing body of research about homophobia within the Melanin-Rich community, as well as within NPHC organizations. This research primarily focuses on cisgender, gay men in colleges and universities. Very few of these studies focus on the experiences of women within NPHC sororities. Literte and Hodge (2012) is the only study found on the subject of NPHC sorority members’ views of LGBTQ members, and focuses solely on the knowledge of their lesbian and bisexual members. This study provides more expansive review of NPHC sorority members’ views of LGB members, of which Case, Hesp, and Eberly (2005) include but in scant numbers (where one NPHC sorority member and three NPHC fraternity members participated in a sample of 524 Greek Life participants).

There is a growing body of research about the experiences of transgender students in higher education. Although this research has been innovative on many fronts, it has primarily focused on European-Americans. There is relatively nothing on transgender membership in Greek life. Literature of Greek life may include the inclusive terminology of LGBT, yet in their studies, have not included transgender voices. There is no research which addresses the experiences of transgender students within NPHC. Therefore, this research is guided by this

research question: What are the experiences of trans\*/ transgender men/transmasculine members of NPHC sororities?

## Methodology

The culture phenomenon of homophobia and transphobia is an experience which many Americans have witnessed, and while there is decreasing social acceptance for explicit expressions of homophobia, few of us speak out against microaggressions against the LGBT community (Sue, 2010). In addition, homophobia and transphobia are perpetrated against straight-identified individuals who are not gender normative as a means of policing gender (Beaver, 2015). This silence has damaging effects (Sue 2010).

NPHC organizations offer many opportunities for activism, community-building, fostering cultural pride, and cultural work within communities they serve (Ward, 2005). However, the pursuit of equity and equality for sexual and gender underrepresented people in the United States continues to be rife with obstacles (Ghavami and Johnson, 2011; Harvard Law Review Association, 2009). The stories of these survivors are missing from academia.

The dissertation uses narrative inquiry as the methodology. I was immersed in the various transformations I have had while attempting to recognize cisgender privilege since I began this work in 2016. To understand how other cisgender women might respond to this research, I had to think of all my responses to each scene that would have occurred at all the different times and places of my life during which I grappled with cisgender privilege. I had no choice but to experience the “three dimensional inquiry space” that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write about in narrative inquiry. I immediately understood what it meant to engage in the three dimensional inquiry space by examining personal and social interactions over time and in various contexts. Because I had experienced and interpreted cis-ness differently at



various times and in various places in my life, including during the writing of this dissertation, I could interpret past interactions in various ways.

Collecting stories of lived experience, these narratives are constructed and negotiated between the people involved as a means of capturing complex, multi-layered and nuanced understandings of their world, so that readers can learn from it. Narrative inquiry was chosen due to the lack of representation of transgender experiences in extant literature about Greek life, particularly transgender men and NPHC.

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375).

Three commonplaces of narrative inquiry - temporality, sociality, and place - specify dimensions of an inquiry and serve as a conceptual framework. Temporality captures the players within events, and develops their roles within the participant's life. Sociality is the feelings and expectations of the participants. Place is the physical location of events.

In narrative inquiry, there is an emphasis on co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participants. They are a team in creating the most accurate representation of the reality for the participant. Researchers are involved in, listening to, and reading the conversations, and comparing it with their personal understandings, without filling in any gaps in understanding with generalizations. The researcher's job is inquiring about how pieces of the stories make sense together. The process of data gathering and analysis becomes a single harmonious and organic process. For this study, I interviewed four trans\* members of NPHC sororities.

These members were raised and socialized as female, and transitioned after joining NPHC sororities. They were all raised in the United States and all participants hold at least a Bachelor's-level degree. Two of the four readily identify as transgender men:

Transgender men are individuals who have a male or masculine gender identity but were assigned female at birth. The gender affirmation process may include social, medical, and surgical aspects of transition, although not all transgender men desire medical intervention (Light, Obedin-Maliver, Sevelius & Kerns, 2014).

Two identify as transmasculine non-binary. People who identify outside of the woman-man gender binary are often referred to as non-binary; these individuals may also identify as transgender (Richards et al, 2016). Non-binary gender identity can include identifying as neither or both a man or a woman, or as different genders at different times.

#### Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Before delving into the discovered limitations, delimitations, and assumptions through the study, it is important I define them. An assumption is a self-evident truth assumed to be true regarding the data gathered (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Limitations are entities or events out of the control of the researcher, such as bias. Delimitations are entities or events over which the researcher has control, such as location of the study (Newman, Ridenour, Weis, & McNeil, 1997). A delimitation within this study is that the interviews will mainly take place via phone and audio recorded. A full list of assumptions, limitations, and delimitations will appear in Chapter Four, as is typical for this dissertation format. However, a primary limitation to consider is that the findings of this study cannot necessarily be generalized to all transgender members within the NPHC. Due to the problem identified and unique demographics of the participants, the group interviewed was relatively small. The interview participants were

selected based on similar characteristics of being alumni transgender men or transmasculine nonbinary people who joined their organizations before transitioning; there are also members of fraternities who are transgender men (i.e. female born members of fraternities, who join post-transition) who are not represented in this study. Transgender women will likely have a more nuanced experience, both as pre-transition members of NPHC fraternities, or as post-transition members of sororities. I have, through this research experience, been able to meet organizational members who identify within all of these contexts. Knowing of their existence, future research will cover these experiences.

## CHAPTER TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW

My research question encompasses the subjects of race, gender, sex, sexual orientation, and higher education organizations in the United States of America, as well as changes within these identities and arenas over time. Using narrative inquiry, the experiences of transgender men in NPHC sororities are documented. In chapter two, I will review the literature regarding the history of higher education for well-hued people in the United States, including a review of segregated institutions. I will then discuss the history of higher education for women in the United States, including a review of NPHC sororities. I will then cover the history of higher education for queer people in the United States, including a review of transgender students in higher education. The coverage of these histories culminates to the vehement centering of cisgender men; within women's education, cisgender colonialists preserve their majority presence to the exclusion of Melanin-Rich women (Wilson 2002). Absent from much of the literature are the presence of transgender students of non-Anglo background. Therefore, I will review extant literature regarding theory related to the themes of representation, violence, and survivors oppressing survivors.

### History of U.S. Higher Education

As James Anderson (1988) writes in *The Education of Blacks in the South*, universities serving hueless people charged that educating melanated people was foolish. Faculty chairman of the University of Virginia, Paul Barringer, stated in 1900 that educating Melanin-Rich scholars was an “instinctive form of warfare” and that education “tended to make some [N]egroes idle and vicious” as well as “able to compete with the [European-Americans]” (Anderson, 1988, p. 94). Issues concerning to European-Americans were literacy and access to voting. The *New Orleans Picayune* reported: “as soon as all the Negroes in the state shall be

able to read and write they will demand their rights in the primaries with the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment to back them up” (Anderson, 1988, p. 95). Echoing these sentiments in a positive light was Afro-Original writer Phillis Wheatley. Born into enslavement, “Wheatley believe[d] literacy was incompatible with the institution of slavery and could ultimately lead to its downfall through rebellion as well as educated Blacks demanding the same rights that Whites enjoyed” (Jones, 2018, p. 26). Through violent suppression, literacy growth from 1865-1890 within this group “surpassed Spain and Italy during the same period” (Bracey, 2017, p. 672). Another area of concern for European-Americans was Melanin-Rich people’s access to similar social spheres as European-Americans. For instance, philanthropist Robert Ogden was criticized severely for his association with Booker T. Washington, accompanying him through the Wanamaker clothing store in New York City and allowing “a big, buck Negro” to eat in his first-class restaurant (Anderson, 1988, p. 95).

Funding the development of facilities for melanated people was more preferable to European-Americans than desegregation. The Institute for Colored Youth – the first higher education institution for African-American scholars – was founded in Cheyney, Pennsylvania, in 1837. This school became Cheyney University, the oldest historically African-American educational institution in the United States (Evans, Evans, & Evans, 2002, p. 4). Before and during the establishment of these historically inclusive institutions – referred to in literature as historically Black colleges and universities, or HBCUs – citizens who were not European-American were generally denied admission to PWIs. Yet as one scholar, Booker T. Washington, wrote in one of his memoirs (Washington, 1911), the discrimination he faced motivated his great success.

His misfortune consists in the fact that he has nothing in his life which will strengthen and form his character; nothing to call out his latent powers, and deepen and widen his hold on life (p. 2).

Seeing the opportunities to successful life post-liberation, Washington notes an advantage to his birth within the institution of enslavement was the opportunity to love nature, and expressed displeasure with his disconnection as a public intellectual. He continues:

This will, perhaps, illustrate what I mean when I say that I have gotten a large part of my education from actual contact with things, rather than through the medium of books. I like to touch things and handle them; I like to watch plants grow and observe the behaviour of animals. For the same reason, I like to deal with things, as far as possible, at first hand, in the way that the carpenter deals with wood, the blacksmith with iron, and the farmer with the earth. I believe that there is something gained by getting acquainted, in the way which I have described, with the physical world about you that is almost indispensable (p. 4).

These sentiments come across in Washington's development of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, and his arguments with W.E.B. DuBois on the nature of African-American education. While Washington advocated for citizens to dedicate their energy to pursuing vocational education and becoming formal experts of the land through agricultural sciences, DuBois advocated for a philosophical focus of educational pursuits.

Twelve years Washington's younger, W. E. B. DuBois came from a comparatively privileged background. Born in Massachusetts to a middle-class household, DuBois attended Fisk University, then Harvard University and the University of Berlin. He became a faculty member at Wilberforce University, an HBCU in Ohio, and taught several languages and sociology; then taught sociology at the Ivy League institution, the University of Pennsylvania. After concluding his study of the working-class in Philadelphia, he relocated to Atlanta University, where he worked as a professor of economics and history. Frantz supports, "[t]he well-to-do background and classical education that DuBois received led to a far different path than did the life of Washington, a freed slave and recipient of a very practical education" (Frantz, 1997, p. 89).

Washington attended Hampton Institute after emancipation. While he studied traditional academic topics, he was also talented in the trades (“blacksmithing, carpentry, bricklaying, and agriculture”) (Frantz, 1997, p. 88). When he developed Tuskegee, he focused the education on trades like “foundry, printing, shoemaking, and sawmilling”, which he deemed pragmatic studies (Frantz, 1997, p. 88). DuBois’ background, however, framed his belief that success would come through mastering the “social and political maneuverings of the day,” which placed him at odds with Washington’s conviction that success would come through eschewing Caucasian-led politics in the United States and focusing on being experts in industrial labors.

The reasons for their individual foci were plentiful. Washington’s inspiration comes from a successful, Melanin-Rich town – Mound Bayou – which sparked his dedication to a practical, trade-based education.

Negroes have here, for example, an opportunity, which they do not have to the same degree elsewhere, either in the North or in the South, of entering simply and naturally into all the phases and problems of community life. They are the farmers, the business men, bankers, teachers, preachers. The mayor, the constable, the aldermen, the town marshal, even the station agent, are Negroes.

He continues:

[These] men cleared the land, built the houses, and founded the town. Year by year, as the colony has grown in population, these pioneers have had to face, one after another, all the fundamental problems of civilization. The town is still growing, and as it grows, new and more complicated problems arise. Perhaps the most difficult problem the leaders of the community have to face now is that of founding a school, or a system of schools, in which the younger generation may be able to get some of the kind of knowledge which these pioneers gained in the work of building up and establishing the community.

It is important to note that Washington himself was initially inspired by his background to pursue a social science trajectory like DuBois (Anderson, 1988, p. 102). Washington’s mentorship from Hampton’s president, Samuel Armstrong, changed his desires from becoming a lawyer, to furthering the “pragmatic philosophy” that he received at the Institute (Frantz, 1997,

p. 89). Some critiques of Washington present him as a creator of a more efficient and effective slave-like caste; the *Philadelphia Tribune* newspaper sympathetically reporting on such sentiments, stated that Washington's decriers chastened him as a "'traitor' to his race" (Anderson, 1988, p. 104). His account of Mound Bayou displays that Washington saw a concrete utilitarianism of pragmatic study; his passion rested in creating autonomously-built, self-sufficient communities. Washington was also about to accrue funds for such a plan from those least-likely to support non-European-American enterprises. He successfully guiding the funds of wealthy Anglo men like Ogden, Belton Gilreath (president of two large coal companies), George Peabody (dry goods and banking magnate), and J.G. Phelps-Stokes (millionaire socialist) towards the education of Melanin-Rich students, with the semblance that these formally-educated tradesmen would be beneficial in providing skilled labor in their various companies.

It was with such expectations that the rich gave their support and networked financial connections to the development and sustainability of Tuskegee; Washington secured a \$600,000 gift to the school from Andrew Carnegie and an additional \$400,000 to his alma mater, Hampton University (Anderson, 1988, p. 103). Carnegie chose to fund these institutions due to their focus on trade work over traditional academics. As an industrialist, Andrew Carnegie justified his gifts as strategic in building appeal to Northern industrial developments, like his own steel empire in Pittsburgh. Carnegie's insistence that Melanin-Rich people were not ready to hold the same status as Caucasians led his primary denial to fund Atlanta and Fisk universities, the institutions of DuBois, while pouring money into Tuskegee and Hampton.

For nearly two centuries, European-Americans sustained segregation from melanated Americans, and in such time constructed more than 100 segregated colleges and alternative universities in lieu of unification. Constructed under the United States government's passing of



the Morrill Act of 1890, colonial interests manipulated communities reliant upon education facilities for the underrepresented. For instance, the U.S. Public Health Service used Tuskegee's campus to study untreated syphilis victims for forty years, under the auspice of effective treatment (Brandon, Isaac, & LaVeist, 2005). This violation, the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male, is an infamous reason for mistrust of the U.S. healthcare system amongst non-European-Americans to present (Katz et al., 2016). Nevertheless, universities educating Melanin-Rich scholars have made a significant impact in the numbers of science, technology, engineering and mathematics scholars in the United States. As Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002) write, "students at HBCUs fare better and are more satisfied with their college experience than their peers at PWIs" (p. 336).

De jure desegregation in higher education came by the 1965 Higher Education Act and the 1973 Adams decision (Thomas & McPartland, 1984). This precipitated a decline of attendance at historically inclusive colleges. Among four-year institutions, public and private colleges serving Melanin-Rich scholars suffered the greatest loss in student enrollments between 1976 and 1978. This change was the precursor to less educators; there has been a continual decline in the percentage of hued educators in the United States since desegregation (Lee, 2019). In addition, the shift of Melanin-Rich scholars to colonial institutions, coupled with federal disinvestment, has led to the closure these institutions. Suggs writes that Florida's opening of 11 junior colleges in the 1950s were followed by an immediate closure of the collective after the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Five HBCUs closed since 1989, and several others presently educate under 100 scholars (Suggs, 2019).

History of Women's Education

As Madigan (2009) writes, wealthy colonists established educational facilities in order to bolster their titles and network between other financially-affluent families:

Within 10 to 20 years of the arrival of the Mayflower, Massachusetts colonists had established town schools, a Latin grammar school, and Harvard College. The growing economy in the colonies created an additional need for literacy. Colonial women were often heavily involved in family businesses and commerce. These conditions provided some of the foundation for equal opportunities for men and women in the educational process (p. 11).

Most of the higher education institutions started within the original thirteen colonies, of which Harvard University (1636), College of William & Mary (1693), St. John's College (1696), Yale University (1701), and the University of Pennsylvania (1740) were the first.

Women's education came out of necessity, as women in the home were the primary providers of education for their children. Northeastern states established bastions of higher education remained financially independent, as thus resistant to coeducational facilities. Harvard University, Columbia University, and Brown University allowed women to participate, in a limited fashion. When allowed to study in the same institutions, "women were closely supervised and segregated from men" (Madigan, 2009, p. 12). Coeducation was an "economical and more viable option to single-gender institutions" in the burgeoning western territories in the early and mid-1800's, where the population was much smaller (p. 12).

Founded in 1772 as a primary school, Salem College is the oldest continuously-operating educational establishment for women (US News, 2019). Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia, chartered in 1836 as "first college in the world chartered to grant degrees to women" (Wesleyan, 2019). Toward the end of the 19th century, some state universities allowed women to enroll in their degree programs. The private institutions, however, did not follow this pattern. As a result, Smith, Mount Holyoke (1837), Wellesley, Barnard, Radcliffe, Vassar (1865), and Bryn Mawr were established to provide women with single-gender university environments designed to meet

their specific educational needs. While initially segregated and recognized as the leading institutions for European-American women from high-income clans, Anita Florence Hemming, one Melanin-Rich scholar from Boston, graduated from Vassar in 1897; representation trickled until during the Civil Rights Era of the 1960s, when approximately five hundred Melanin-Rich women graduated from these institutions (Perkins, 1997). Their living environments on campus, however, were still segregated (p. 738).

The Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania, which is now part of Drexel University, trained and graduated the first female physicians in the country, regardless of background.

While the Concord, North Carolina-based Scotia Seminary opened its doors to women in 1867, and graduated its first degree in 1874, it became co-ed in 1930 after a merge with Barber Memorial College (Perkins, 1988). One of Scotia's most famous graduates was educator and integrationist Mary McLeod Bethune, the founder of the Daytona Educational and Industrial Institute, now known as Bethune-Cookman College (Jones, 1999; McCluskey, 1989). The Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary was the first racially-inclusive women's institution of higher education to receive its collegiate charter. After a hefty donation from "Rockefeller, his family, and the Rockefeller Foundation", the Seminary was renamed Spelman College in honor of wife Laura Rockefeller, née Laura Spelman (Lefever, 2005, p. 61).

Spelman College, located in Atlanta, Georgia, was founded in 1881. It is the first institution of higher education dedicated to educating all cisgender women.

While the old Spelman stereotype was that of a wealthy civic-minded wife of a doctor or attorney, its alumni include many women who have made major professional contributions of their own, including children's defense fund founder Marian Wright Edelman, Pulitzer prize-winning author Alice Walker, TV entertainers Esther Rolle and Rolonda Watts, and US ambassador to Kenya Aurelia Brazil (74-75).

It is because of the support from wealthy Africana families that Spelman, along with most schools offering inclusive education, were conservative and restrictive in the activities students could participate.

If a student got married while in school she would have to withdrawal because Spelman felt that serious dating and marriage would distract us from our studies. That's why they also did not allow sororities at the time (p. 73).

While NPHC organizations were producing prominent leaders, including Rosa Parks (Alpha Kappa Alpha), Martin Luther King (Alpha Phi Alpha), Mary McLeod Bethune (Delta Sigma Theta), Ralph Abernathy (Kappa Alpha Psi), Roy Wilkins (Omega Psi Phi), and John Lewis (Phi Beta Sigma), Spelman prohibited Greek organizations until 1979, “under the consensus that Spelman was in itself a sisterhood, and sororities would take away from this concept” (Mu Pi Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, 2019).

Because Spelman very much identifies itself to the world into its students as the ultimate college for black women the students and alumni are fiercely loyal to, and respectful of, this Atlanta Institution (Lefever, 2005, p. 75).

When America writes of the women's suffrage icons, it details the stories of is the right of women to vote in elections. In her 1988 book *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, author Elizabeth V. Spelman writes that when suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton said that women should get the right to vote before “Africans [and] Chinese”, she was relying on the concept of “woman” that denied womanhood to women who were not European-American.

Speaking on behalf of women of racial resilience, Cannon (2016) notes that these sentiments were at work in the classroom as well:

In view of the history of women of color as educators, especially in the academy of religion, we are fully aware that the increase of racist misogyny we experience did not instantly pop up on its own. In coming to terms with the painful struggles and disrespectful exchanges women of color encounter in religious studies classrooms, we know these existential realities are neither happenstance nor accident (p. 114-115).

While religion served as both a limiter and delimiter within justifications of equity, pragmatism fostered through education provided legalistic and gender-relative ties to the need for representation across gender and race. In contrast, suffragist Adella Hunt Logan wrote,

If [European-] American women, with all their natural and acquired advantages, need the ballot, how much more do [Melanin-Rich] Americans, male and female, need the strong defense of a vote to help secure their right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?

Spelman (1988) discusses feminism in its sphere of otherness in comparison to the centering of men when speaking on the human condition. In the same way cisgender European-American men philosophers have historically determined “what is essentially human,” European-American women center themselves when writing feminist theory. European-American feminists exclude the majority of women by rationalizing that “women have and share in common despite the racial class religious ethnic and cultural differences” (p. ix). Spelman continues, “it obscures the heterogeneity of women and cuts off examination of the significance of such heterogeneity for feminist theory and political activity” (p. ix).

Melanin-Rich women experience both racism and sexism, as well as misogynoir (the discrimination uniquely merging both racism and sexism). As bell hooks (1981) notes,

No other group in America has had their identity socialized out of existence as have [Melanin-Rich] women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from [Melanin-Rich] men (p. 7).

In regards to the workplace and higher education environment, she may be used to fulfill multiple diversity quotas; “she may be considered a ‘twofer,’ someone hired because administrators could count her as both a female hire and a racial minority” (Allen, 1995, p. 8). Because of this, “people with whom she interacts may explicitly or implicitly question her right to be there” (p. 8).

There is also an arena where a third unique status complicates this experience. Bringing the theories of double consciousness and the queer art of failure together is a conceptual melding of work done by several queer women of color, including Crenshaw (1989, 1991), Lorde (1984, 1988), Walker (1983), Johnson (La Fountain-Stokes, 1999; Lindsey, 2015), hooks (1994, 2001) and countless others, for good reason; misogynoir – the discrimination of melanin-rich women – and queer misogynoir, differ from racism and misogyny alone (Bailey, 2013; Bailey & Trudy, 2018). In a study done by Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black and Burkholder (2003), an interviewee recounted that when she had experienced workplace discrimination, “quite frankly, I [didn’t] know whether it’s because I’m Black or because I’m woman, or queer” (p. 98). This experience encapsulates the essence of intersectionality, a theory which posits that “oppression in one place is intricately linked to oppression everywhere else” (Hahn-Tapper, 2013, p. 421).

Lorde states:

If white American feminist theory need not deal with the differences between us, and the resulting difference in our oppressions, then how do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of Color? What is the theory behind racist feminism? (p. 2)

As European-American women critique their exhaustion with informing men of their unique struggles and the ways in which European-American men’s insistence on centering himself degrades Euro-women, Lorde explains that Euro-women use the same cop out to justify their failure to include and listen to women who make up the world majority, yet remain colonized through invisibility in literature and agenda-building:

Now we hear that it is the task of women of Color to educate white women -- in the face of tremendous resistance -- as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought (p. 2).

Patton, Flowers, and Bridges (2011) note that, “[g]reater involvement, academic achievement, and an overall level of comfort are fostered at HBCUs”, or historically-inclusive universities (p. 115). Scholars at these institutions fare better “largely due to the racial composition at these institutions, as well as opportunities to interact with faculty and administrators in a supportive environment” (p. 115). With the strides made by single-sex women’s institutions like Spelman and Bennett (founded 1873 in Greensboro, North Carolina) Colleges comes the persistent threat closure due to disinvestment. Women’s shifts into historically-exclusive institutions spread them out, leading to less representation and increased invisibility and silencing. Carroll (1982) writes, “there is no more isolated subgroup in academe than [cisgender] Black women”. Most collegiate institutions in the United States are led by cisgender, hueless men, of which they have “neither race nor sex in common with” yet “who dominate the decision making stratum of academe” (Carroll, 1982, p. 118).

Women are structurally edged out of reaching higher level administrative positions which would likely influence and increase within student representation; they are sparsely represented in extant literature due to a dearth of presence in the editorial boards of mainstream journals, and committees awarding scholars, leaving little room to discuss necessary changes to expand inclusion. Nevertheless, hued women continue to excel within colonial education (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Survival for women is contingent on their ability to find a place to describe their experiences among persons like themselves. Thus, the university community should be prepared to support Melanin-Rich women when they seek a safe haven within predominantly Africana student associations, sororities, and mental health support groups.

Within higher education, Literte and Hodge (2012) note the women who were “out” had a harder time joining the sorority. One Greek interviewee noted that her sorority turned down a

potential member several times, divulging their concern of her sexuality to her; she was ultimately offered membership after proving she could “pass” (as ladylike/straight) and that she would not use the sisterhood for romantic exchanges. As a lesbian, Lorde (1985) examined such silencing by cisgender, heterosexual women in *I Am Your Sister*. Literte and Hodge (2012) note “gays and lesbians too often find themselves compelled to wear ‘masks’ and conceal their identities even when around those people who are supposed to love them” (p. 696). They continue, “the presence of homophobia and lack of dialogue about homosexuality is not only damaging to the gay or lesbian individual, it is damaging to black organizations, institutions, and the larger community” (p. 696). Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly (2013) discusses the patrolling and policing of African-American men’s masculinity. They note that in (presumably cisgender) men’s circles in college, “accepting, adhering to, and performing traditionally masculine norms” was the path of least resistance into community acceptance, particularly in environments where representation is limited (PWIs); they also discuss how this relates to the acceptable men eligible for fraternity membership (see McClure, 2006).

### History of Greek-Letter Organizations

In the introduction of *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and The Vision*, Tamara Brown (2005) writes that the year 2006 marked the centennial anniversary of the intercollegiate Greek-letter organization movement in the United States. She writes:

Born at the dawn of the twentieth century, these organizations not only served to solidify bonds among African American college students but also had (and continue to have) a vision and a sense of purpose: leadership training, racial uplift, and high scholasticism (p. 1).

The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century featured the heyday of neoclassicism within European-American societies; this movement pressed the importance of the decorative



and visual arts, encompassing “literature, theatre, music, and architecture” drawing from the classical period of Ancient Greece and Rome (Chambers, 2014, p. 254). This movement inspired non-Anglo students to apply for and gain membership in Greek-letter fraternities and sororities. Once denied access to join European-American social sororities and fraternities (those which are presently organized under the Interfraternity Conference, or IFC, and the Panhellenic Conference, or PHC) the necessity of Greek organizations that mirrored the Melanin-Rich social experience came into existence. Jenkins (2012) writes,

African-American fraternities and sororities aimed to uplift the community as a whole, immersed themselves in African culture and provided leadership skills to many of its members while enduring a segregated society that was completely hostile to any claims of black self-worth (p. 227).

There are nine organizations that are members within the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), the umbrella body for the largest African-American fraternal organizations.

Organizational data was collected from the international websites of all organizations; none of the websites provide precise numbers for living, financially active members. Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. was founded at Cornell University in 1906. The organization notes a total membership of 200,000 members, with 70,000 “current members”. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. was founded at Howard University in 1908. The organization has inducted “nearly 300,000 members”. Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. was founded at Indiana University in 1911, and “has over 125,000 members”. Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. was founded at Howard University in 1911. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. was founded at Howard University in 1913. They have initiated “more than 200,000 women” since their founding. Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. was founded at Howard University in 1914, and states 185,000 members have been initiated since their founding. Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., founded at Howard University in 1920; they claim a membership of more than 125,000 women. Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. was founded at

Butler University in 1922, and asserts a membership of more than 85,000 members. Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. was founded at Morgan State University in 1963; their estimated membership is 30,000 members. A resolution made at the 58th NPHC National Convention notes, “The National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc. is comprised of 1.2 million educated, professional and accomplished African-Americans in the United States, Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and abroad” (National Pan-Hellenic Council, 1995). The purpose and mission of this umbrella organization – colloquially called the Divine Nine – reads:

Unanimity of thought and action as far as possible in the conduct of Greek letter collegiate fraternities and sororities, and to consider problems of mutual interest to its member organizations (NPHC, 2017, para 3).

Characteristics and Qualities. Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. are the only three of the nine organizations founded at predominantly European-led institutions. Brown, Parks & Phillips (2005) write that for the founder of these organizations, navigating a violent college environment together allowed for them to creating extracurricular activities for scholars, and limited their risk of pre-graduation departure. African cultural artifacts and traditions shaped numerous NPHC practices (Anderson, Buckley, & Tindall, 2011). In addition, participation and leadership in churches for African diasporic Americans, as well as benevolent and secret societies provided NPHC founders with a template for organizations founded on religious or spiritual faith, group solidarity and community uplift (Kimbrough, 1997, 2003; McClure, 2006; Parks & Offord, 2007). These organizations are unique in that they provide service, leadership development, and networking to a Melanin-Rich collective. Parks and Offord (2007) write,

The members of [NPHC] organizations are educators, attorneys, judges, congressional representatives, mayors, senators, doctors, entertainers, journalists, ministers, law enforcement officers, athletes, engineers and entrepreneurs. But

most importantly, we are public servants. And no one can argue that the African-American community' has not been greatly influenced by our work (p. 142).

Stephanie McClure notes the value of fraternity membership as a social network tie after college in her 2016 research on NPHC men at PWIs. Membership in NPHC organizations help create an environment for scholars which has been shown to increase success in college, a sense of satisfaction with their campus experience, and positions them with networks which aid in occupational success and continued service and philanthropic endeavors after college (McClure, 2006).

Mitchell's (2012) dissertation detailed the influences of NPHC organizations on the persistence of scholars attending primarily European-American-led institutions. His study of eight interview participants at a colonialist college in the Northeast found that students felt that support services were important in their academic matriculation, but that there were no noticeable efforts to retain melanated scholars. Harper discovered cisgender men experience the worst college completion rate among both sexes and all ethnic groups in U.S. higher education (Harper, 2006a). As Bronzaft (1991) wrote in concern of the future of intimate relationship viability:

During the 1980s college enrollment for Black men declined and the enrollment for Black women increased; moreover, fewer Black men left college with bachelor's degrees than did Black women. In 1988 the ratio of Black women to Black men enrolled in college was higher than that same ratio among other racial/ethnic groups (Marriott, 1990). Concern has been expressed that the increasingly disparate ratio of Black women to Black men in college will cause a serious socioeconomic gap between them (p. 111).

Harper and Quaye (2007) and Sedlacek (1987) offer comprehensive syntheses of twenty years of research on Melanin-Rich collegians, wherein they elaborate on the racism, isolation, sociocultural challenges, and academic obstacles that many of these students face at colonial institutions.

Achievements. Forty years after the Emancipation Proclamation, de facto segregation was still in effect through the United States. Few institutions of higher learning gave non-Anglo scholars the opportunity to matriculate. Jenkins (2012) writes,

While American society was being shaped by overt Jim Crow segregation, seven African-American students: Henry A. Callis, Vertner W. Tandy, George B. Kelley, Charles H. Chapman, Nathaniel A. Murray, Robert H. Ogle, and Eugene K. Jones who attended Cornell University during the 1906–1907 academic year created one of the most influential fraternal organizations of all time, the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., a brotherhood based on *Manly Deeds, Scholarship, and Love for All Mankind*. The overall mission of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. is to responsibly enhance the social and academic pursuit of its members (p. 227-8).

Literte and Hodge (2012) write “while BGLOs [Black Greek-letter Organizations] are purportedly non-partisan, their history clearly indicates that these are highly politicized organizations that have played an important role in the struggle for civil rights” (p. 675).

Benefits. As it relates specifically to connecting members to the university, Tinto (1993) hypothesized that student attrition is highly correlated with the level of social and academic integration of the student. Greek life is a mechanism of social integration; several studies highlight that students who join NPHC organizations during their undergraduate years are “the benefactors of leadership experiences unique to their cultures” (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998, p. 97). Case (1998), Graham (1999) and Jones (2015) celebrate NPHC organizations for creating unique career preparation and networking for their undergraduate and alumni members. Graham writes that these organizations “provide a forum, post-college, through which some of the best educated [...] in America can discuss and agenda to fight racism and improve conditions” for Americans (Graham, 1999, p. 85). McClure’s (2006) study concludes that affiliation within an NPHC fraternity is positively associated with retention and successful completion of college for cisgender men.

NPHC sororities. NPHC sororities are unique civic and social organizations, whose focus is on service to the community. Long before mainstream society accepted women and/or Melanin-Rich persons, NPHC sororities supported the cultural development and leadership of ethnically-diverse women (Anderson, Buckley, & Tindall, 2011). In addition to hued American scholars, historically-exclusive institutions in the United States denied access to Caucasian women as well, denying their ability and need for scholarship. In the Jim Crow era, professional women engaged in socially responsible individualism that balanced private and public sphere responsibilities. Historian Stephanie Shaw examined these women "who stood for something" in her book, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do*. As educated women, they bore a special obligation to change the world for the better. Privilege brought responsibility (Harper, 2008; Harper & Harris, 2006; Kimbrough, 1995, 1997; Patton & Bonner, 2001). Fulfilling the responsibilities of an educated elite group - as called upon by W.E.B. DuBois, NPHC sorority Sigma Gamma Rho played a role in workplace training for the Black community. Sigma Gamma Rho created national initiatives to aid the community in preparing for the booming industrial revolution of the 30s during the Great Migration. Its goal was to transition Blacks in the south out of the agrarian caste system into more technological fields (Parks & Neumann, 2016).

Even in present day, students' everyday peer relations create and maintain gender inequality. Examining gender relations on a predominantly inclusive and a historically European-American campus in the United States, Holland and Eisenhart (1990) found that the differences between women by ethnicity did not overshadow the importance of the gender barriers that all the women faced. Their primary finding was race neutral: African-American and European-American women both were "on a sexual auction block," consumed with romance or finding male companionship. However, they found that hued American college women were less single-

minded in their focus on men than European-Americans were, and were less likely to believe that marriage would support them economically in the future. As McCandless (1985) attests,

[Afro-Original] women and [Anglo] lower-class women might work for wages even after marriage, but middle-class [Anglo] women were supposed to restrict themselves to work in the home and to the rearing of a [...] family (p. 273).

Anglo-led sorority life sought to socialize women to find a husband rather than prepare them for careers (Risman, 1982).

Parks and Neumann (2016) denote that there is significant attention paid to highlighting the roles leaders from within Black Greek-letter Organizations (BGLOs) played in the progress of civil rights in America, yet history tends to focus more so on a few individuals - mostly men - and their fraternal ties. With a progression of research focused on the groups they represent, Parks has continuously sought to fill the gap remaining for the women's organizations involved in the process. As sacred as the language espoused in Melanin-Rich language and art forms, NPHC sororities were perhaps one of the first ways in which groups of Africana women could organize, converse and disperse their dissatisfaction with being doubly oppressed by all cisgender men, and cisgender European-American women. Lerner's (1979) study of NPHC sororities described turn-of-the-century women's clubs whose goal was to "uplift the race" from oppression and to dispel negative stereotypes about Melanin-Rich women. Such stereotypes are found perpetuated within historically-hueless sororities, as Boyd (1999) writes:

Masculine appearance, then, has its place in rush, as long as it remains cloaked in play. In a similar way, racial spoofing is okay as long as it is clearly an act. Just as the wailing, Aretha Franklin-ish witch at [Kappa Delta] gets the biggest laughs and applause, the Tri Delts' Motown skit, complete with Supremes, gets the biggest hoots. With plenty of laughing at themselves and each other as they let loose, gyrate, and shout, there is an insider-joke quality to it all, as if to say, "Isn't this funny? This is what the blacks do!" In the Kappas' circus-themed skit, clowns with brightly colored, Afro-like wigs and large, painted lips take the stage. What begins as an improvisational, standup-comedy routine quickly deteriorates into

shucking and jiving in a surreal, if unintentional, approximation of the black vernacular. Within the safe seclusion of the sorority house, the already chosen feel free to play around with cultures decidedly Other. In contrast, the members' elite, chosen status stands out in sharp relief. As recently as 1979, the Chi Os performed a skit in blackface at their annual party. (The "Chi Omega choo-choo" skit featured a blackface mammy emcee.) (p. 66-67).

Lerner's study concluded that abundantly-hued women are not merely victims of oppression but generators of their own successes. Berkowitz and Padavic's (1999) study reiterated these findings.

Women assumed central leadership roles in the community and in liberation politics. As King (1988) noted, "We founded schools, operated social welfare services, sustained churches, organized collective work groups and unions, and even established bands and commercial enterprises. That is, we were the backbone of [...] uplift" (p. 266).

From this leadership came the involvement of women in the hip hop movement, burgeoning from the work done by these groups in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. With the Civil Rights Movement being led and achievements doled to cisgender men, and the wave of feminist movements preceding it led by European-American women, Morgan (1999) describes "hip-hop feminists as those born after 1964 who deconstruct and reconstruct feminism within the context of their own unique experiences," including the worlds they garner a perception of control and visibility.

As a theory, hip-hop feminism gives voice to years of dominating opposition, sexism, and discourses that attempt to dis-empower women of color and render them powerless in the utilization of their own bodies. As a movement, hip-hop feminism uses the political, cultural, and racial climates of the hip-hop era as a backdrop (Durhan, Cooper, & Morris, 2013; Morgan, 1995; Pough, 2004; Rose, 1991; Rose, 1994). Thus, hip-hop feminism presents a critical view of Black women of the hip hop generation, including the roles these women select for themselves, and the ways in which Black women are viewed, positioned, and portrayed in the media (LaVoulle & Ellison, 2018, p. 77).

Therefore, in discussing the positionality of cisgender women in sororities, we must understand that their representation is closely guarded due to the limited spaces in which they have been free to gather, to lead, and to enact change; sororities “allowed women to become leaders and enhanced their academic experience” (Patton, Flowers, & Bridges, 2011, p. 115). While this dissertation seeks to understand how transgender men fit and do not fit into the historical dynamic of NPHC sororities, it does so with the respect of institutions guarded tightly for survival’s sake.

Challenges. Membership in NPHC organizations facilitates closer bonding with other men, a stronger connection to the campus environment, and greater knowledge regarding their history. However, the NPHC experience is exclusive in nature. Case, Hesp, & Eberly (2005) write,

Although social attitudes toward GLB people are becoming more positive, and GLB men and women are becoming more visible, homophobia and heterosexism still pervade both our culture and social systems (Rust, 1996). No place is this assumption of heteronormality more true than within the college fraternity/sorority culture (p. 16).

Some organizations - fraternities and sororities, and athletics – have been described as organizations that reify stereotypical masculine and feminine gender roles (Kalof & Cargill, 1991; Worthen, 2014). The stereotypes within Greek organizations may also create prejudices toward gays and lesbians (Hall & LaFrance, 2007; Worthen, 2014). Because of this stigma, Austin, Lindley, Mena, Crosby, and Muzny’s (2014) note that queer noncollegiate sororities and fraternities exist for Melanin-Rich people to participate in organizations that mimic the chosen family and service dynamics of NPHC groups. While NPHC organizations utilize terms such as soror and frat to denote membership within the same organization, some LGBTQ groups organize utilizing the familial structure and familial titles, and offer housing within their personal residences for homeless and unemployed members:



Family members use the language of blood relations, siblings, step-sisters and step-brothers to refer to the complex relationships among family members that develop over time. Family members identify strongly with the family name (some even using it on social networking sites to identify themselves) and there is broad awareness of the complex genealogies that connect the various families throughout the country (p. 26).

While college education is not a requirement or primary focus of these organizations, almost a quarter (74%) of the members within the Austin et al (2014) study had some college experience; 43 percent were current students. Members in these “families” noted a main reason for joining “was the belief that they would not have been welcomed in a traditional Black sorority” (p. 27). As NPHC is tasked with “shaping potential leaders, educators, and [Melanin-Rich] culture as a whole”, that scarcity of publicly queer members should raise question to how inclusive these organizations have been to their community members (Literte & Hodge, 2012, p. 676).

### History of Writing on Queer Identities

While representation of transgender people has its foundations in the United States in the mid-1900s, the positivist-focused studies regarding them amassed injurious results, lending more time to anatomical survey and giving limited time to collecting the lived experiences of trans\* people. The concept of gender as distinct from sex was developed by John Money, who did work on sex hormones and societal gender formation, the nature versus nurture testing of LGBTQ+ attitudes throughout the lifecycle (Money, 1955, 1994; Money, Hampson, & Hampson, 1957; Money & Russo, 1979). Societal differentiation between gender and sex was fleshed out thoroughly in the late 1980s in West and Zimmerman’s *Doing Gender*. Within, West and Zimmerman review the scientific methods of understanding the lost third sex – intersex people, referred to in the text as “hermaphrodites” – and the compulsory and culturally

performative aspects of gender (Ehrenreich & Barr, 2005; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Judith Butler

followed up on their effort, discussing how humans perform their alignment and mutiny against established gender norms (Butler, 1988). Butler writes, “there are strict punishments for contesting the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations” (Butler, 1988, p. 531). Though Butler resists naming the transgender body, here she gives greater conscience to the entrapment of the flesh, in which Butler writes,

Considering that "the" body is invariably transformed into his body or her body, the body is only known through its gendered appearance. It would seem imperative to consider the way in which this gendering of the body occur (Butler, 1988, p. 523).

In addition, Butler notes that feminist theory may privilege womanhood over manhood, but cannot do so without understanding the dominant ideologies of women who are centered on its stage. Without pointing out the details of who benefits from this “western philosophy”, she admits she is a recipient of some of its setbacks. She writes,

My only concern is that sexual difference not become a reification which unwittingly preserves a binary restriction on gender identity and an implicitly heterosexual framework for the description of gender, gender identity, and sexuality. (Butler, 1988, p. 530)

Similar to the lack of early writing on sororities, transgender populations lacked a space within higher education literature until the early 2000s. Historically, the term “transgender” was absent from research before the late 1980s and was tagged onto research focused on mainly cisgender, gay and lesbian participants in the early 1990s into the 2000s.

Transgender as a status was first researched by Magnus Hirschfeld, a German physician, and Havelock Ellis, an English physician (Bullough, 2000). Hirschfeld is deemed the first person to systematically describe and work with trans\* people. Ellis published *Sexual Inversion*, the

first English monograph on homosexuality (Ellis, 1915). The term “transsexual” has been used in early medical literature since the late 1800s, as well as in one of the first documented accounts of gender reassignment surgery. Danish painter Lili Elbe wrote in 1933 of their personal experience with surgical transition (Elbe, 1933); this was preceded by a personal autobiography by Christine Jorgensen, a World War II veteran, Las Vegas performer, photographer and filmmaker. Noted as one of the earliest, internationally famous transgender women, Jorgensen accounts her Danish gender reassignment surgery in length, but a marked quote in a letter to her parent post-surgery states: “Nature made a mistake, which I have corrected” (Jorgensen, 1967). At the time, gender reassignment surgery was not available in the United States.

Medical experts discussing the surgical and pathological circumstances of the transitioning body made up a majority of the inquiry (Abramowitz, 1986; Fiumara & Di Mattia, 1973; Thurston, 1994). For instance, an increase in “surgical sex reassignment[s] of the male transsexual” sparked survey of sexually transmitted diseases in this population (Fiumara & Di Mattia, 1973). While the testing and treatment of genital warts and gonorrhea were noted, a bulk of the writing denotes early accounts of bias within the medical field towards transgender patients. The researchers refer to the sole patient as “her” in quotations; they then denote that “[s]he appeared to be a beautiful female” and that the discharge in which they sought treatment for was described as “vaginal” in quotes, though the patient had completed multiple gender affirmation surgeries. The researchers then detail the contours of the women’s body, which have nothing to do with the diagnosis and treatment of their patient. For instance, the patient is discussed as having “soft, white, non-hairy skin” and “well-developed breasts” (p. 478). These descriptions are rife with the violence occurring within the medical field against transgender bodies. Even when a transgender woman risked surgery in the earliest accessible years of

medical investigation to fit within the acceptable constructs of womanhood, they were not afforded the assignment and instead of having their ailments directly attended to, were smeared as medical wonders. There is a significant lack of detail on the physical and visible symptoms of the diseases, or if the treatments differ from cisgender patients, though the story of the women's legal gender affirmation by courts is present, and discussion of social act and dress of all transgender women is denoted as fact. Fiumara and Di Mattia state that "true" trans women avoid "the activities considered by society to be typically male" and want "to get rid of the penis" (Fiumara & Di Mattia, 1973, p. 478). Abramowitz improves on the study by Fiumara & Di Mattia by including a compassionate view of the state of distress trans\* identities live, noting "[t]he lives of these individuals often become a quest to find a sympathetic physician" (Abramowitz, 1986, p. 183). Abramowitz's meta-analysis of research on gender reassignment surgery discusses the case of Christine Jorgensen as well as heavy critiques of earlier, poorly controlled research. He notes that researcher bias resulted in a plethora of poor studies, citing "[s]tatistical procedures [...] applied in an arbitrary fashion" and "sufficiently lacking in scientific credibility" (Abramowitz, 1986, pp. 187-188). However, Abramowitz does find that surgery aids in the physical fulfillment of transgender women, noting "greater improvement in interpersonal life and lesser improvement in economic well-being" and a reduction of "frequency of arrests" for this population (Abramowitz, 1986, pp. 184-185).

Much of the work on capturing transitioning experiences comes from human resources and organizational behavior. Schilt and Connell (2007) notes that even when transgender workers set themselves to challenge gender norms through their transition, their coworkers react with acceptance or challenges, yet both factions exercise their process with rigid gender role policing; therefore, transgender people "have little leeway for resistance if they wish to

maintain job security and friendly workplace relationships” (p. 596). Subverting the ideology of respectable presentation in the bureaucratic work place may come with benefits, however, if done well enough to pass (socially, as their actualized gender), particularly for transgender men (Goffman, 1959; Schilt & Wiswall, 2008; Zuckerman & Simons, 1995). Schilt and Wiswall (2008) conclude that “for many male-to-female workers, becoming a woman often brings a loss of authority, harassment, and termination, but that for many female-to-male workers, becoming a man often brings an increase in respect and authority” (p. 1).

A handful of studies exist which denote the experiences of gender transition struggles from the F-to-M transgender men’s point of view (Cromwell, 1999; Devor, 1993, 1997a, 1997b; Rubin, 2003). Brown notes in their study of transgender men’s intimate relationships, with the increased “visibility of, and available resources for, transsexual men, more genetic females with significant gender conflicts who perhaps previously mistook themselves for lesbians are deciding to transition” (p. 561). My study documents the experiences of men and nonbinary transmasculine people, of which many previously identified as cisgender, masculine-leaning/masculine-of-center (often referred to as “butch”, or “stud” within the LGBTQ community) lesbians.

Queer identities in higher education. Kristen Renn (2010) provides a succinct history of LGBT representation in higher education, of which I will follow for this section of the paper.

Willard Waller’s 1932 book *The Sociology of Teaching* encompasses the initial writing guiding scholars’ and educators’ approach to LGBTQ students (and faculty) before the 1970s. Waller believed queerness was contagious and sinful, and could be characterized by “carriage, mannerisms, voice, speech, etc.” (Waller, as cited in Tierney & Dilley, 1998, p. 51). Expelling scholars caught in—or suspected of engaging in—compromising same-sex activities was commonplace, yet kept quiet (Sanders, 2013). This practice has continued into the 2000s,

particularly in the South and within religious institutions (Graves, 2009; Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett, & Saltzburg, 2009; Whitlock, 2007).

A professional field of student affairs burgeoning in the mid-1900s led to a new approach that ultimately led to a new way of thinking about homosexual college students: treating queerness as a curable disease. This conversion strategy allowed for administrators to use campus medical staff to enlist suspected queer students in psychological treatment (Bailey, 2002; Dilley, 2002a, 2002b). This was at the time when homosexuality was listed as a disease in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (1968); as Renn writes, "keeping students in higher education was a way to offer them treatment that they might not get if they returned to disapproving families" (p. 133). This allowed for students to persist through their degrees, though institutional shaming of their orientation was common.

Ivy League institutions led the front for queer student activism on American college campuses. Columbia University student Stephen Donaldson – a member of the of the New York City chapter of the Mattachine Society - founded the first collegiate gay rights group, the Student Homophile League. Donaldson founded the group in 1966 after he was kicked out of university housing for openly identifying as bisexual. Inspired by Donaldson, Jearld Moldenhauer founded a similar group at Cornell University in 1968. After graduation, Moldenhauer moved to Canada and founded the University of Toronto Homophile Association (UTHA) in 1969, the first gay student organization in Canada.

While the activism of queer students and allies towards the address of LGBTQ issues in higher education began before the significant milestones like the removal of homosexuality from the DSM and

the 1969 Stonewall Riots, gay liberation was most closely linked to other cultural and political movements of the of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

As former student activist and Gay Liberation Front member Carl Wittman wrote in his widely circulated 1970 "Gay Manifesto," most "of us have mixed identities, and have ties with other liberation movements." Thus for Wittman, gay liberation was not only about securing social space and rights for queers but transforming sexual behavior throughout all of society (Churchill, 2003).

Gay activism by students at Columbia, Cornell, and a handful of other universities played a critical role in laying the groundwork that would enable a militant movement to emerge following the Riots.

Following the creation of the Detroit Gay Liberation Movement in 1970, "students and members of the larger community came together to initiate the U of M chapter of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), seeking to battle stereotypes of gay people, fighting homophobic prejudice, and invalidating the mental illness model of homosexuality" ("Our History," n/d). After pushback from the Board of Regents and the UM President at the time (Robben Wright Fleming, 1968-1979), the University established a one-room office in September of 1971, provided funding for two quarter-time positions to be filled to deal with gay and lesbian issues on campus.

The University of Michigan at Ann Arbor opened the first LGBTQ resource center in the United States in 1971. There are presently more than 110 LGBTQ resource centers on non-profit American campuses; acknowledgement details that the space is professionally staffed by at least a part-time staff member (though many are graduate assistants). The University of Pennsylvania was the first Ivy League institution to have a LGBTQ resource center; opened in 1982 (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2010). Penn also hosted

the first meeting of what was to eventually become the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals in 1994.

Since 2000, more than 95 LGBTQ resource centers opened at public and private colleges and universities in the US. This presence has inspired a burgeoning of literature on queer identities in social spheres. In the past decade, research addressing issues on transgender populations can be found in law, medicine, as well as secondary and postsecondary education research. Nevertheless, most queer research still focuses on cisgender gay European-American men. Although many universities have financed the construction of centers for queer students and queer student organizations, the “T” within their names alludes to inclusiveness which is more “symbolic than substantive” in addressing roadblocks for access and support for trans\* students. Research on transgender populations has grown as outcomes for transitioning persons have been noted as differing from cisgender queer identities.

As Beemyn writes, Kim Howard and Annie Stevens’s *Out and About Campus: Personal Accounts by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered College Students* (2000) was the first work on college students to include the stories of transgender youth (Beemyn, 2003). There are a plethora of studies related to the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students in college (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998; Renn, 2000; Sanlo, 1998). Most of this early research is concentrated on student leadership development for queer identities (D’Augelli, 1989; D’Augelli & Rose, 1990; Fine, 2012; Kosciw, 2004; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Renn, 2007). However, most of these studies are feigning interest in transgender populations, or involved a negligible sample of trans\* representatives. Most focused transgender research comes from researchers who have experiential knowledge with



the subject matter (Beemyn, 1996; Stryker, 1994, 2004) or those who work aside trans\*-identified researchers.

Little reliable data exists to fully understand the prevalence and nature of the problem of violence perpetrated against LGBT students (Green & Wong, 2015). An Association of American Universities (AAU) study (Cantor, Fisher, Chibnall, Townsend, Lee, Bruce & Thomas, 2015) reports that “60.4 percent of gays and lesbians report being sexually harassed compared to 45.9 percent of heterosexuals” (p. xx). Another highlights, “rates of sexual assault and misconduct are highest among undergraduate females and those identifying as transgender, genderqueer, non-conforming, questioning, and as something not listed on the survey” (Cantor, 2015, p. iv). Additional studies highlight issues of those concerned with assisting the victim with the consequences of the incident (e.g., health care providers; victim services) and the lack of resources trained for LGBT patrons (Poteat, German & Kerrigan, 2013). As Meinke writes in the first person on the value of LGBTQ historic sites, as a part of the Springate (2016) study,

If you’re lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or any of the other iterations of the gender and sexual minorities, you have probably spent your youth trying to understand yourself, to accept your same sex affections or your gender identity, in the face of a society that is only just beginning to accept that such affections and identities exist and are acceptable. Youth today have many more options for support than I did. Fifty years ago, in my youth in a small midwestern town, there was no support and there were no sources of information. There were no queer-identified places that would reassure me that I was not a hateful anomaly (p. 01-8).

In Beemyn (2005), issues involving housing and public harassment were obstacles acknowledged by out trans\* students; “pressure to be silent (52%), verbal threats (48), graffiti (43%), physical threats (24%), denial of services (23%)” were highlighted as top forms of harassment (Beemyn, Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005). Housing concerns are also documented in Krum, Davis, Galupo (2013); “to better accommodate transgender and gender nonconforming students”, gender-inclusive housing is offered at limited yet increasing levels of

colleges for students “who may feel uncomfortable or be unsafe rooming with students of their legal sex” (p. 65).

While the dismantling of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, the fall of the Defense of Marriage Act, the passing of same-sex marriage by the United States Supreme Court are all momentous victories for the LGBT community, higher education has tiptoed in comparison with steps towards equality and acceptance for sexual and gender minorities. For instance, the 2016 Dear Colleague Letter on Transgender Students - summarizing a school’s Title IX obligations regarding transgender students and compliance measure - was rolled back by the 45th presidential administration just a month into its commencement (Kreighbaum, 2017).

Racial minority LGBT students have the challenge of integrating at least two central identities that can be highly charged in our society (race and sexuality). Constantly negotiating between and within different cultures may leave these students feeling as if they are caught between mutually exclusive worlds that may be antagonistic to other aspects of their identity (Croom, 2000).

In addition, research on Melanin-Rich LGBTQ populations in higher education are focused on cisgender gays and lesbians (Literte & Hodge, 2012; Means & Jaeger, 2013; T. Strayhorn, Blakewood, & DeVita, 2010; T. L. Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013). Most of the research done on gay men notably presumes cisgender status (Case, 1998; Jones, 2015; Kimbrough, 2003; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Literte & Hodge, 2012; Parks & Project Muse., 2008; Yeung & Stomblor, 2000). Only one study focused on “Black and African American” students noted the existence of trans\* identities, in which, “no students chose to identify as transgender, transsexual, or nonheterosexual” (Stewart, 2009, p. 259). The emergence of the academic journal *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* (established in 2014 at the

University of Arizona) has aided in the publication of content focused on trans\* people from all racial, as well as national, religious, and educational backgrounds (Duke University Press, 2020).

*Queer Identities in Greek-Letter Organizations.* Research on NPHC organizations is heavily focused on the experiences of presumably cisgender gay men. A search of *TSQ* archives provided no results found for searches of NPHC, and no relevant results for “Greek letter organizations”. A search for “sorority” garnered two results, in which neither related to collegiate sororities. However, one article denoted the history of the first organization for drag queens, which organized under several names since its founding in 1961, of which Phi Pi Epsilon was one of its iterations (Davis, 2015). Founded by Dr. Virginia Prince, a transgender woman who worked as a drag queen, professor, and queer activist, the organization upheld exclusionary membership requirements:

Phi Pi Epsilon (FPE) [...] limited its membership to heterosexual cross-dressers and prohibited gay men or transsexuals from joining. The questionnaire was the first filter designed to confirm that the prospective member either fit the policy or was at least willing to lie in order to enjoy the benefits of membership. The application was used to qualify prospective members for an interview, which determined whether they would be invited to attend a meeting of the group (p. 626).

These requirements were written as Prince utilized multiple names and gender identities through their positions as entertainer, scholar, and queer activist.

Virginia Prince used four names to manage her identity— two female and two male. Her trans\* community femme name was Virginia Prince. She lived as a woman and used the name Virginia Bruce outside the trans\* community. Her male trans\* community name was Charles Prince (Docter 2004: 45). Though some people may have known her legal name, Arnold Lowman, it was essentially hidden until 2004, when it appeared in Richard F. Docter’s *From Man to Woman: The Transgender Journey of Virginia Prince*, a book written with Virginia Prince’s full knowledge and cooperation (p. 626).

Literte and Hodge (2012) provide the closest understanding of the experiences of presumably cisgender, heterosexual women in collegiate sororities, and their views of lesbians and bisexuals obtaining membership. They concluded that personal and conservative religious views by older members, strict adherence to traditionally feminine ways of dress and communication, and the power and control from alumna chapters over undergraduate recruitment and initiation effectively prohibit the discussion of sexual orientation in the organizations. The study does not touch on if transgender populations already exist within the sisterhoods. The study reveals that lesbian and bisexual women who were “out” had a harder time joining the sorority; one Greek interviewee notes that her sorority turned down a potential member several times, divulging their concern of her sexuality to her; she was ultimately offered membership after proving she could “pass” (as ladylike/straight) and that she would not use the sisterhood for romantic exchanges (Literte & Hodge, 2012).

T. L. Strayhorn and Tillman-Kelly (2013) discuss the patrolling and policing of African-American men’s masculinity. They note that in (presumably cisgender) men’s circles in college, “accepting, adhering to, and performing traditionally masculine norms” was the path of least resistance into community acceptance, particularly in environments where African-American representation is limited (like predominantly European-American institutions, or PWIs); using McClure, they also discuss how this relates to the type of men eligible for fraternity membership (McClure, 2006).

Participating in a niche of organizations which have been cited for stricter policing of heteronormativity as Worthen (2014) notes, could emphasize a desire and search for safe spaces, or could be a lead to worse treatment after seeing limitations for comfort as an individual.

Chambers (2014) notes: “Due to social mobility, status, and other privileges associated with membership into one of these organizations, many young African Americans began to gravitate toward the NPHC organizations in the hopes of transcending racial discrimination” (p. 255). However, in creating such a space in spite of denied access to join Eurocentric Greek organizations, NPHC organizations created their own standards for the ideal member. Gittings, B. (2007) and Herek, Chopp, and Strohl (2007) note how homosexuality being dropped from the DSM. In addition, the growing control of HIV/AIDS and thus, a lessening of the church shunning LGB members and gay sex, slowed (or lessened) the communication of anti-gay rhetoric within the community, though the remnants of this health-related trauma exist. However, Literte and Hodge (2012) note that “religious organizations and pastors explicitly encouraged the community to vote in favor of Proposition 8 [California’s “straight marriage” bill] through sermons, public proclamations, and mass mailings” (p. 675).

In his dissertation, Harris (2015) uses autoethnographic personal narrative to discuss the experience of being a gay, cisgender male student in the South. Harris is an alum of a PWI and active in a NPHC organization. He details his coming out process within family, friends, and members of his fraternity, as well as the pride and shame which culminates from years of hegemonic indoctrination and overcoming multilayered obstacles of earning success as a student leader of multiple underrepresented statuses at a historically European-American college. Harris covers the role of gender performativity through hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) in his discussion of male-to-man upbringing; the impact of conservatism (mostly through religious ideology) on his hesitation and shame through the coming out process.

Harris argues that gay men at PWIs in the Southeast have experiences that remain uncovered due to the national statuses of these men being the forefront of most research.

While Harris, as well as Dancy (2010), McCune (2014) Strayhorn and Tillman-Kelly (2013) and Washington and Wall (2006) all do research on men's experiences in higher education, their research does not note or detail if all of the men who are interviewed and studied are cisgender. Due to the wording of these articles – using the terms male and man interchangeably – I presume that their participants identify as both male and man, thus their research is cisgender-focused.

Parks and Neumann (2016), Chambers (2014), and Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998), and Du Bois (1903) discuss the academic/professional/social support of NPHC organizations as well as the social qualifications and responsibility of BGLO members (Literte & Hodge, 2012 thematically touches on this but it is not a focus of the paper). However, Worthen (2014) notes that fraternity and sorority members (as well as collegiate athletes) tend to be two higher education groups which heavily police sexuality, requiring the guise of heteronormativity for all and (hyper)masculinity within men. Parks (in Torbenson & Parks, 2009) questions the effectiveness of NPHC organizations if gay potentials are barred and gay members are silenced and driven into exile. These studies lead further researchers to expand from what experiences or thoughts drove their inactivity, and if this is true, where are they going for the support?

*Transgender identities in higher education.* Little empirical attention is paid to the experiences of transgender college students, though the number of students identifying as transgender - or questioning their gender identity – is rising (Beemyn, 2003; Carter, 2000; Effrig, Bieschke, & Locke, 2011; Lees, 1998).

Pusch's study of eight transgender undergraduate and graduate students (five identified as transgender women and three as transgender men) sought to find out how students identifying

at transgender and/or transsexual came to understand their identities. This qualitative study was conducted via private email and an open listserv in which participants were able to interact over seven months. All students remaining and participating in the entirety of the survey period attended different universities throughout the United States and Canada, and were varied in their openness about their transness. For instance, only three of the participants were living out their true gender; the rest were still identifying as their birth gender for at least part of the time. The study highlights that trans\* students often divulged their identity to family and friends first. Parents were the most reluctant to initially accept their child's identity, and friends were most supportive.

Pusch's findings show that family and friends offered varying levels of resistance and support to those transitioning, and students were unapologetic towards their coming out process no matter if their circle accepted or resisted their transition. Pusch notes (p. 50): "While parents may feel that responding negatively will discourage their children, the participants did not allow negative parental responses to dissuade them from presenting as transgender." Once *out* (living publicly as queer), students felt more affirmed to clarify their identity to those who did not understand the transgender identity (through workshops, programs and personal conversations) though some found actualization in post-discovery trans\* invisibility, the state of being accepted as their true gender and not being seen as trans\*.

Melanin-Rich transgender men within higher education are given minimal attention in research literature; only three studies found included them (Follins, Walker, & Lewis, 2014; Singh & McKleroy, 2010; Singh, Hays, & Watson, 2011).

*Transgender identities in Greek life.* Welter's 2012 study involved in-depth interviews with eleven LGBTQ students, and sought to gain an understanding of the sentiments of, and detail queer involvement within the "Greek system". Three of the eleven were members of

Greek-letter organizations, and three attempted to become members. Findings highlight that “there are fewer women attempting Greek life” in comparison to cisgender men and, “there are more closeted women within sorority culture than gay men in fraternities” (p 126). While terminology throughout the paper states “LGBTQ students”, none of the interviewed identified as transgender; this is also noted by the demographic sample table, which categorizes participants only by sex (male/female) yet uses gender and sex terms interchangeably within the paper. In addition, the terminology used in discussing the membership intake process (“rush”) suggests that the study focused on historically-European-American organizations (p. 112-115, 117); the absence of racial demographics lends credence to this assumption, and a failure to consider race within drawing themes suggests that all of the participants were European-American.

Case, Hesp, Grahaeme, and Eberly’s (2005) study on LGB members of Greek life denotes the existence of several collegiate Greek organizations for gay people and allies. “Delta Lambda Phi (DLP) was founded in 1986 in Washington, D.C., and modeled on the traditional programs, policies, and activities of the older and more traditional fraternity groups” (p. 17). This article also discusses the Lambda 10 Project, a nonprofit which focuses on queer issues within Greek life.

D’Augelli (1994) wrote that heteronormativity existing in American society allows for few visible socializing forces for queer students; queer students joining Greek-letter organizations, thus tend to hide their sexual and gender differences. Previous research within higher education typically insists that Greek organizations include members whose birth sex and social gender align with traditional expectations: those assigned as female at birth will identify as women and join sororities, and those assigned as male at birth will identify as men and join fraternities (Wittig, 1993). This presumption ignores the existence of intersex, transgender,



nonbinary and gender non-conforming populations, and does not engage the possibility that transgender, nonbinary and gender non-conforming members would seek membership into these organizations. Several recent examples within historically-Caucasian fraternities have proven this false (Lourgos, 2017; North, 2010; Van Syckle, 2016); in addition, research on queer identities in Greek-letter organizations ignores that members may go through gender transition while holding membership within these organizations (McGuinness, 2013). For instance, a fraternity chapter at Emerson College not only accepted a transgender man into their organization, but also raised money for the member to undergo their female-to-male gender confirmation procedure (McGuinness, 2013). Alpha Chi Omega – a historically Caucasian sorority founded in 1885 – announced its acceptance of transgender women in membership consideration in 2017 (Alpha Chi Omega, 2017; Casey, 2017; Ragan, 2017). The only consistent story regarding transgender membership in NPHC organizations was discussed in the Introduction, regarding one NPHC sorority in 2009 (Hess, 2009; Hoff & Cahn, 2009; North, 2010). These news reports have yet to reach survey in published research on transgender students in Greek life, highlighting a lag in academia to discuss this growing group.

## Conceptual Framework

My conceptual framework is guided by three concepts: representation, violence, and survivors oppressing survivors. Representation is defined as the ways in which people are shown through various media; this imagery either produces, reinforces, or challenges the knowledge, beliefs, and expectations of a social group. Violence is a means of causing injury to an individual or group, and can transpire directly or indirectly, through physical, spiritual, and emotional means. The theories in this research draw from an interdisciplinary, social constructivist perspective about how transgender men internalize manhood and negotiate masculinity while

tied to NPHC sorority membership. Theories draw from thinking about racial consciousness, gender role construction, and college engagement. This critical perspective encompasses both the historical and social context in which queer identities consider organizational affiliation. An eclectic theoretical perspective that draws from studies of African-American students in higher education, gender studies, sociology, and psychology is also guided by the assumption that African-American trans-masculinity is rooted in African-American LGBT's unique raced and gendered experiences in American society (Harper, 1998).

It is in the 1903 text of *The Souls of Black Folk* when DuBois constructs the foundations of double consciousness, in which representation and violence appear:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (DuBois, 1903, p. 8-9)

DuBois continues to build upon this theory in his later writings, though this would be his last usage of the terminology.

In referring to the “Negro is a sort of seventh son”, DuBois borrows from a Judeo Christian theology that suggests that seven is the number of completion (Biedermann, 1994; Carroll & Prickett, 1997; Crump, 1990). The number seven in the Bible represents divine perfection, totality or completion and mentioned at least 490 times, also making metaphoric comparisons to the children of Israel (Mizrachi & Herzog, 2012; Wagaw, 1993). Allusions to these theological and tribal sentiments appear within the methodology section, where I considered using several Hebrew names as pseudonyms for participants.

In referring to being “Born with a veil,” the veil is “a piece of fine material worn by women to protect or conceal the face,” but also describes “a thing that conceals, disguises, or obscures something” (Merriam-Webster, 2003). However, according to folk tradition, children born with a caul – a piece of membrane that can cover a newborn's head and face – is supposed to mark the child as having special abilities or “second sight” or simply born lucky (Forbes, 1953; Perkinson, 2002; Rucker, 2001).

Ahmed (2006) affirms that non-normative bodies – whether differed by race, class, gender or sex, or even levels of physical or mental ability – are queered. Therefore, double consciousness can also conceptualize as the stress of being a sexually underrepresented person, as Stryker (2000) does in describing the worlds in which transgender individuals are ostracized:

On January 5, 1993, a 22-year-old pre-operative transsexual woman from Seattle’s queer community, Filisa Vistima, wrote in her journal, “I wish I was anatomically ‘normal’ so I could go swimming. ... But no, I’m a mutant, Frankenstein’s monster.” Two months later Filisa Vistima committed suicide. What drove her to such despair was the exclusion she experienced in Seattle’s queer community, some members of which opposed Filisa’s participation because of her transsexuality – even though she identified as and lived as a bisexual woman (p.85).

In this queer world, cisgender European-American gay men are given voice above all other citizens; Logie and Rwigema (2014) note that race and class underrepresented are negotiated to construct “LGBQ communities as white and privileged” and thus necessary in the economic viability of a capitalist and race-constructed society (p. 175). When cisgender European-American male queerness is normalized, the “economic imperative of free-market capitalism” becomes stronger for the colonial demographic, allowing for the deleterious effects of socioeconomic disenfranchisement to continue under the guise of inclusion and progress (Fasching-Varner, Mitchell, Martin, & Bennett-Haron, 2014, p. 441). This affirmation of this normalization through sitcoms is upcoming within this text.

Discarding the particularities of the transgender women – particularly those of native and non- European-American international experiences – these doubly-underrepresented identities are given second sight and at heightened threat. DuBois continues in *Souls* with describing the Afro-Original experience as one of being aware of the two (or more) worlds and contexts in which African-American people move. While they may go to a majority African-American church, live in an African-American community, and have African-American friends, African-Americans have to spend significant time outside of that context and must have to learn to navigate between the world of the oppressors and Melanin-Rich people. This dissection denoted where they are likely the underrepresented or non-authoritarian group (i.e. work, school, local businesses, government-run agencies, etc.) and where they are overrepresented (i.e. the home, local organizations, and non-suburban neighborhoods). Different behaviors and speech are applicable for each world, as compared to how “bilingual individuals possess two separate linguistic varieties, which (ideally) they employ on separate occasions” (Nilep, 2006, p. 5). Nilep uses the term *diglossia* to define “the existence of a divergent, highly codified variety of language, which is used only in particular situations” (p. 5). Because the function of the differences it to bond with others who share common injustices, humor between people of resilience are deemed sacred; therefore, certain things are not funny, translated the same, or even understood in both worlds (Hahn Tapper, 2013).

The alternative languages created by underrepresented identities are a source of psychological well-being, and a lens through which others perceive them (Allport, 1954; Coll, Crnic, Lamberty, Wasik, Jenkins, Garcia, & McAdoo, 1996; Rivas-Drake, Seaton, et al., 2014). Colorblind ideologies press that inclusivity with this language of the oppressed equates to acceptance of these groups in mainstream culture. Yet without substantive activism, colonists’

insistence on participation in coded language actually discourages acknowledgment and discussion of racial difference and results in cultural appropriation (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012; Pauker, Apfelbaum, & Spitzer, 2015; Plaut, 2010).

European-Americans have a higher chance of avoiding significant periods of time without shifting schemas, by choice or by nature (i.e. states where most of the whole/majority is Caucasian, or communities that are all Caucasian). When overly represented people do not have to shift schemas, they speak callously and unemotionally about the experience of those they see as unfamiliar (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012). Most people experience life through a heteronormative, cis-normative schema, so they may not be sympathetic towards queer communities and their issues. They may feel uncomfortable within those contexts and thus avoid conversations on difference; alas, “color-blind norms” are inconsistent with a process of healthy racial identity development for Melanin-Rich students (Pauker, Apfelbaum, & Spitzer, 2015, p. 887).

For the oppressed, it can be difficult to have one unified identity due to oppression; the individual sees himself or herself as they are, and as the world perceives them; this is represented within Cooley’s concept of the looking glass self (Catalano & Chase, 2015; Welter, 2012). Because the standards they have for their own life are at odds or are limited by how the world expects them to act (and where the world expects them to end up), the criticism and judgement from others can cause diminished outcomes on the person’s life (Catalano & Chase, 2015). Another theory which emphasizes this reality is minority stress theory. As noted by Russell and Fish (2016),

Minority stress theory has provided a foundational framework for understanding sexual minority mental health disparities. It posits that sexual minorities experience distinct, chronic stressors related to their stigmatized identities, including victimization, prejudice, and discrimination (p. 468).

These health disparities justify my inquiry to my participants regarding their access to healthcare coverage. When social constructs favor the individual due to privilege, outcomes can meet or exceed those perceived by the individual. The Johari window - a useful tool for understanding self and personal growth – works best in high trust environment (Luft & Ingham, 1961). NPHC organizations are denoted as such, due to their small sizes, group identity correlation and emphasis on student leadership development and educational persistence. Problems develop when the information an individual is learning is not about them personally but is based upon stereotyping, which results in tension between the self and the organization (Hase, Davies, & Dick, 1999; Hudson, 1995; Hughey & Hernandez, 2013). The organization can be “as small as a club or classroom, or as large as society” (Hase et al, 1999, p. 1). Whereas in the Johari window, the person is trying to understand themselves asks for feedback from trusted individuals, double consciousness highlights that competing and oppressive interests force themselves and their thoughts into the minds of historically-oppressed people, but also have the ability to influence others perceptions of strangers. This can cause people to feel negatively about themselves or restricted, resulting in tension and possibly self-fulfilling prophecy (Glover, 2018; Glover, Pallais, & Pariente, 2017; Luft & Ingham, 1961, p. 3).

Strayhorn, Blakewood, and DeVita (2010) discuss this self-fulfilling prophecy in African-American men, who are often described using critical terms like “dangerous, endangered, at risk, uneducable, threatening, and lazy,” resulting in some African-American men internalizing such beliefs (Majors & Billson, 1992; Steele, 2000, p. 614; Strayhorn, 2008; Strayhorn, Blakewood, and DeVita, 2010, p. 92). Internalized racism and internalized oppression result from consistent miseducation (learning negative facts about one’s group that are inaccurate) and acceptance of views regarding the superiority/inferiority of groups, which are

almost always presented as binaries (i.e. men/women, gay/straight, American/foreigner) (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000).

As noted in his study on immigrant cashiers and manager treatment (where an Implicit Association Test paired more biased managers, then less biased managers with immigrant staff on different shirts) Glover writes, “since discrimination depresses minority productivity, underrepresented become less productive on average, thus potentially confirming the discriminatory priors of the firm” (Glover, 2018, p. 1). Self-disclosure – which would result in the reduction of hidden areas of one’s personality – can also become ammunition for the oppressor to use to further stereotype and link one’s status to very limited, personal causes.

In the same way the “white gaze” is seen in the works of African-American and Caribbean writers like Ralph Ellison, W.E.B. Du Bois, Franz Fanon, Toni Morrison, and bell hooks - in which their work analyze and deconstruct the history of restricting African-American’s inalienable rights to exist as human beings - a straight gaze exists in dominant ideology and within the African-American community towards LGBT African-American people. Whereas with *Souls*, Dubois hints are the question: “What does it mean to be a problem?” for African-American identities, the queered question remains similar, but also highlights what it means to be a problem viewed not only by European-Americans for being African-American, but by cisgender, heteronormative African-Americans for being LGBT. Because of this overlap, double consciousness is useful for understanding the psychological and sociological division existing in American society, as well as division within the African-American community through organizations.

Failure to Succumb to Assimilation. According to Halberstam, the American Dream is a belief that only certain people are destined to be successful, and these people are centrally-placed

figures in our news and history (Halberstam, 2011). Halberstam notes success as those who excel at accruing money, privileged and high titles, and reproduction. The antithesis is seen as queer, things like “nonconformity and non-reproductive lifestyles” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 89). Failure is defined as not being a man, European-American, or Christian; but also encompasses failing to perform as instructed by society based on one’s perceived statuses (i.e. race, class, gender). This definition is inspired by Scott’s (1987) *Weapons of the Weak*, in which Scott states that those who are off-center from the cultural ideal are the peasants of society. The non-Caucasian, non-Christian, queer and poor are deemed ill-fit and diseased; left on the outskirts of society, forced into obscurity are these socially-deemed failures, which is justified for the greater good (i.e. everyone else’s safety). The queer art of failure rests within balking at “the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable” (p. 88). As noted earlier, Ahmed (2006) affirms that race, class, gender or sex, or even levels of physical or mental ability outside of colonialist norms are queered. The desire to embrace the non-normative is a facet of the passive resistance Halberstam details as a weapon of the weak. Padavic and Stomblor (1997) speak similarly of evasiveness as a form of rebellion in this study on the differences between NPHC and IFC fraternities’ little sister programs, a practice which went out of favor in its official recognition in the 1990s for most Greek-letter organizations but is echoed in the informal relationships between sororities and fraternities:

Everyday resistance can be most useful for oppressed groups, particularly women, who find it tactically convenient as well as necessary to avoid openly challenging the dominant ideology. Real gains are possible, in other words, so long as the larger symbolic order is not questioned. Thus, acts requiring little or no coordination, such as individual acts of foot dragging and evasion, are often the only recourse open to oppressed people. (p. 258)



Bawer, who recoils at queered desires to remain separate from dominant ideology, believes that standing out causes aggression towards underrepresented groups, which he describes as “accredited victims group[s]” (Bawer, 1984, p. 210). Bawer describes the affirmed queer as doubly-conscious, aware of their setbacks through discrimination, but driven by a desire to own and love their difference over being an accepted part of the masses:

He doesn’t want to be assimilated. He enjoys his exclusion. He feels comfortable at his little table. Or at least he thinks he does. But does he? What is it, after all, that ties him to his little table—that drove him, in other words, into a marginal existence? Ultimately, it’s prejudice. Liberated from that prejudice, would he still want to sit at his little table? (Bawer, 1984, p. 70)

It is important to question who is still left out when examining what Bawer’s assimilation appeal looks like when brought to action: hued, less-educated, and poor people. How do the less-educated and poor fake a class dynamic which they need money to access? If tinted skin assumes lowliness, even well-to-do hued people are prohibited from full assimilation if they desired it. As Becker notes, “notions of a unified American identity privilege the values of a firmly entrenched Caucasian, Eurocentric, patriarchal, and heterosexist culture” (2006, p. 191). As he continues his study on the receptivity of gay-themed and gay-suggestive television to American viewers, Becker notes that the ideal gays promoted on television fell within the traditional guidelines of paleness, maleness, and were unconcerned about addressing the implications of their sexuality, as if it were a nonissue in their everyday interactions. Shows like *Roseanne*, *Friends*, *Frasier*, and *NYPD Blue* featured recurring queer characters, and later shows like *Queer as Folk* and *Will & Grace* presented lead gay characters. He writes,

Although victims of political discrimination, gays and lesbians, it seems, were also economically self-sufficient. Reported to be affluent and well educated with a disproportionate amount of disposable income, gays and lesbians were something of a model minority (Becker, 2016, p. 187-8).

Without implications, gay-inclusive sitcoms offered straight viewers “a painlessly passive way to affirm their open-mindedness” (p. 188). As gay representation increased with shows between the 1990s and early 2000s, the passively supportive slumpies – the “well-educated and upwardly mobile Americans” – helped forge an identity where voting racial underrepresented into office and “expressing one’s moral indignation over the ban against gays and lesbians in the military were marks of distinction—signals that helped identify one’s educational level, class standing, and cultural identity” (p. 194).

Bawer (1984) argues that the intent of edginess on behalf of a few network producers snowballed into a sought-after product. The slumpies had money, and “marketers quickly realized that multicultural difference could be profitably commodified, packaged, and sold” (p. 194). However, the market allowed limited degrees of difference. Queer people of color (including indigenous peoples), transgender people, bisexuals, people with low incomes or without status, the single and non-monogamous, as well as many women do not have a place in the Caucasian, well-off, well-educated lesbian and gay dynamic, as consumerism is driven by a suppression of those desiring basic needs due to their identity. Several researchers highlight this capital-based approach to queer inclusion as a way to accept the financially-secure without addressing the blatant and socially-supported oppression they once endured (Kumashiro, 2001; Logie & Rwigema, 2014; Puar, J. 2002).

Parental indoctrination. The parents, as first educators, are to train their child to act normal – as a male, cisgender, Christian, straight, able-bodied, financially sound American – or as tolerant/understanding (and even longing for the communion/partnership) of the ideologies which develop from such an American standard. Thus, a parent emphasizing such ideals – even if they are contrary to the reality for the child – is a normal parent (Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell, & Hubbard, 2005; Hill, D. B., & Willoughby, 2005; Pauker, Apfelbaum, & Spitzer,

2015). While indoctrinating their offspring to perform assumptive behaviors in line with their race, class and gender (which may not fall anywhere within the American ideal) a normal parent, or good parent, additionally trains their child for success in a normative-privileging, queer-phobic and violent world. This is a macro example of stifling the freedom of individual representation. For instance, Butler discusses the widespread practice of “performing coercive surgery on infants and children with sexually indeterminate or hermaphroditic anatomy” (i.e. intersex children) as a means of doctors enforcing the culturally-enforced sex binary (Butler, 2004, p. 4). Sparrow echoes Butler in smiting the medical response in compelling parents to rush the erasure of difference from the body of their intersex child, and refers to this phenomenon as “gender eugenics” (Sparrow, 2013, p. 30).

While surgeries to make infants’ genitals culturally acceptable (as explained, and with circumcision) are common, changing these visual features does not guarantee escape from social scrutiny. Children born with varying skin tones, hair types, body shapes and less extreme forms of difference are still subjugated to harassment and disciplinary action for innocuous reasons. Coercive gender affirmation surgeries are one extreme, yet rare way in which authorities pressure parents into creating norms for their children. Depending on the aspects of the child, the parent may need to cross-train them to move within several environments. Strategies highlighted by Scott which parents may use towards their child include “ridicule, petty acts of non-compliance, and foot-dragging” (Scott, 1985, p. 350) to build social resilience in underrepresented children. This practice lends itself to the protection of children and family members from being deemed high-value during enslavement, which likely led to the sale of the person and the splintering of family units. Perceiving access to a higher socioeconomic status as unachievable or fearing talent will relocate and splinter low-income families still, some working class hued families may still emphasize the uselessness of kin (Degruy-Leary, 1994; Gabriel,

2006). Instead of bolstering learning and achievement, they may teach children negative traits like “resisting mastery, privileging the nonsensical, and copycatting the average over the exceptional” (Dolmage, 2014, p. 158), negating their special traits (DuBois, 1903). Degruy called the act of justifying the negative aspects which are residue of trauma Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome. The legacy of this trauma is not an easy fix, as the memory of life norms before such a drawn out history of abuse has been dissolved from the memories of the impacted and the books of the inflictor. As written by Hicks (2015) in her dissertation on the legacy of slavery,

A legacy is something that endures. Something that lasts. Something that has been left behind. It lives. It breathes. Its stench permeates space and time. A legacy is deep-rooted in our past and passed down psychically, socially, behaviorally, and spiritually in our mannerisms, beliefs, practices, and emotions through generations and centuries of human connectedness. A legacy is a remnant. It is a residual. It is a lasting effect. It is an aftermath (p. 23-24).

In this way, parents may also instruct their children to adhere to gender rigidity, both for the ease of rearing and to fit into the gender norms of a society proven violent against queer people. Hicks reminds us that within the Maafa, “the enslavement of African peoples was not limited to men, for women and even children were viciously shackled”, and “enslavement was justified based on intelligence theories, Christian-based beliefs, and bio-scientific race-based inferiority theories. It is in these ways that genderism against Africana people impacts the ways violence is enacted against both adult transgender women but also intersex newborn’s bodies (Ehrenreich & Barr, 2005). Presuming that transgender women are a threat to the masculinity of cisgender straight men and the safety of cisgender women is how gay panic defense has expanded to justify cisgender men’s violence against transgender women as intimate partners. Presuming rearing through the male-to-man and female-to-woman binary is the most effective way to raise successful children, it is more socially acceptable to surgically change the genitals

of an intersex infant than allow them to mature as they were born. Because Biblical references to not address the fusion or negation of the sexes, the binary is solidified in Christian-majority arenas.

There is a value associated with sexual designation, as well as sexual expectations. Women are supposed to bear children and tend to the home. What is the value of woman whose body cannot bear children, questions a participant in a study of menopausal women (Mendell, 1988). A 2018 study on infertility notes that, “the ‘barren woman’ has always been frowned upon by every social group” (Lombardi, 2018); even when her decision to not have children is voluntary, a woman’s uselessness and exclusion from womanhood is a testament to how fecundity is central to the worldly and historical definition of being female (Gillespie, 2000; Kelly, 2009; Pearce, 1999). As I made in the comparison of voting rights between racially-oppressed groups and Anglo women, if the cisgender woman is intimately isolated and excommunicated from her viability for not exercising her duty to reproduce, what worse is thought of and done to transgender and intersex bodies, which may find pregnancy challenging or impossible? Transgender and intersex bodies have been deemed pathological because of the likelihood that a cisgender person will deny, insult or violate the person living within it, not for the safety of the public. However, perhaps the consideration made by those who attack bodies resistant to pregnancy are that their presence wastes the time and efforts of men in caring for them. A study by Dyer, Abrahams, Hoffman, and van der Spuy (2002) begs the question: Why care for a woman who cannot fulfill the man’s wish for children? Though this study occurs in South Africa, there are similar studies on how reproductive viability impacts HIV-positive women (Fair & Albright, 2016) and women with epilepsy (Pennell et al., 2018) in the United States. These studies show that women of all health disparities could be considered less womanly, but may not face the violence non-cisgender women face. Another overlap to note is

that transgender women face elevated HIV rates in the United States, of which they have medical disparities similar to those of cisgender women (Fair & Albright, 2016; Poteat et al, 2019; Sherman et al, 2019; Waters, 2016).

Strategies for maintaining multiples denies as a means of survival are ever-present in groups lacking positive representation and economic influence. For instance, code switching is a skill in which the underrepresented emphasizes or feigning sameness with the oppressor group (Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black, & Burkholder, 2003, p. 97). While NPHC organizations themselves can be seen as facsimiles of historically race-exclusive Greek organizations, this may explain why students who identify as LGBTQ seek acceptance and participation in NPHC organizations. While development of a positive group identity is a goal of BGLSSs, there are institutions which serve underrepresented people while also balking at servicing, educating or caring for members of other underrepresented groups in productive ways (McClure, 2016; Means & Jaeger, 2013). Halberstam argues that techniques of evasion and resistance - put into practice within systems of oppression - are the most significant and effective means of class struggle progress over a time period. Therefore, transgender members within NPHC organizations, in their transition disclosure, may aid in the progression of thought, address, and action for these groups.

Intersectionality is the deliberate focus on multiple identities of privilege and oppression a person may experience throughout their lifetime (Bowleg, 2008; Cheshire, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; Parent, DaBlaere, & Moradi, 2013; Ramsay, 2014; Watts-Jones, 2010). Though some colleges may develop initiatives for bolstering success for students with academic and SES barriers, few focus efforts of detailing the unique experiences of racial and ethnic underrepresented at PWIs (Covarrubias, Gallimore, & Okagaki, 2018). These colleges may also

add to the discomfort of underrepresented students by not hiring diverse faculty and staff, or pigeonholing all of the workers of underrepresented groups in the same place (i.e. Dining halls, maintenance and custodial staff; within the ethnic, arts or educational departments).

In addition, students from strong religious backgrounds (like the South) or certain ethnic/racial backgrounds may seek more welcoming queer environments, even as possibilities for discrimination in other contexts loom (Alexander & Mitchell, 2018; Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005). This is a carefully thought-out process for students with multiple underrepresented identities.

A growing body of research demonstrates the relationship between identity development, the development of citizenship, and the pedagogy of service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jones & Hill, 2001, 2003; Rhoads, 1997; Youniss & Yates, 1997). Inman and Pascarella (1998) found that extracurricular involvement in student clubs and organizations had a significant positive effect on critical thinking. Astin (1993), Brown (2000) and Erwin, Jones, Killian and Woodie (2004) express the role involvement has in persistence, particularly for underrepresented groups at PWIs. Membership in a fraternity is one possible mechanism of success for undergraduate African-American men (McClure, 2016, p. 1036). For African-American students, colonialist ideals encouraging assimilation to European-American culture persist both on college campuses and in American society, highlighting a continued need for NPHC fraternities. Dickinson's work shows that the ties between the intake process for fraternities and traditional West African rites of passage provide a way for students to bond closely to a small group of scholars seeking a similar goal. This extensive and challenging intake process – of aiding each other through academic, extracurricular and workplace demands, while learning a great deal of historical and classified information together – solidifies one's fitness for membership and lifelong commitment (Dickinson, 2005). In addition,

organizations can provide class mobility for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. However, if NPHC encompasses narrow-minded views of member eligibility, this tradition may refute the impact of academic dedication and resiliency for queer students.

For this study, I will look at the impact NPHC organizations have on the social, emotional and professional outcomes of F-to-M (female-to-male) transgender students and alumni. More specifically, this research seeks to delineate the influence and function of NPHC sororities in the lives of transgender men who joined pre-transition, and to garner their experiences with organization members during and after gender transition. In doing so, it addresses the experiences of an emergent population and adds to the diversity of the literature. It is important to highlight that due to the possible closeting of their trans\* identity (though they may be “out” as LGB) (Billard, 2019; Davis, 2009); selective disclosure (not telling everyone at the same time) (Blackwell, Hardy, Ammari, Veinot, Lampe, & Schoenebeck, 2016; Carpineto, Kubicek, Weiss, Iverson, & Kipke, 2008; Pelton-Sweet & Sherry, 2008; Vaughan & Rodriguez, 2014); and costs associated with surgery (if desired) (Khan, 2011; Rowan, 2017), participants identifying as transgender may not encompass the culmination of these trans\* markers, hence the inclusion of all NPHC sorority-affiliated, man/masculine-identified and –presenting, female-born individuals in this study.



## CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGY

I will begin this section restating the topic of the study and research question. A rationale for the use of narrative approach that I have chosen for this study is provided narrative approach that I have chosen for this study follows, along with the data collection and analysis methods used for this study. How participants were chosen and recruited is described. I address trustworthiness and ethical considerations in the design of this study. I will conclude with my motivation to embark on this research and highlight its importance to higher education.

### Rationale

As I cover the experiences of a newly researched group, narrative analysis lays the foundation for their unique stories to come to the forefront (Mischler, 1991, Chase, 2008, Pushor & Clandinin, 2009). The study examined how the intersections of race and gender shape the beliefs of belonging amongst transgender men who joined American sororities before they identified as men or masculine nonbinary people.

The following research question guided this study: What are the experiences of trans\*/transgender men/transmasculine members of NPHC sororities? My research on transgender members of collegiate Greek Life revealed a lack of peer-reviewed studies. The information that does exist on LGBT in Greek Life, based on the literature review presented in Chapter 2, examined cisgender men and women and their barriers to success in recruitment, the significance of homophobia and gender norm adherence, and various challenges queer students encounter while pursuing leadership positions throughout the campus. I discovered the majority of the studies on Melanin-Rich queer people in higher education were primarily qualitative in nature. Johnson (2001) posits that studies pertaining to “raced” LGBTQ communities are limited because the experiences of dominant groups (e.g., European-American, cisgender queer) are

viewed as the face of the community. As a result, studies of underrepresented populations within (e.g., bisexual, transgender, world-majority/“raced”, low-income, etc.) can be excluded from mainstream journals without much notice on the part of the research community.

This study employs a qualitative approach, using oral narratives, to provide the life stories of three transgender men and one transmasculine, non-binary person, who joined NPHC sororities before their gender transition. Utilizing oral narratives to tell stories of Melanin-Rich trans\*people is significant because the study and interpretation of their lives typically has been subsumed under Melanin-Rich cisgender issues and lesbian women’s issues. Melanin-Rich transgender people have not had many opportunities to tell their stories in meaningful ways; there is an assumption that Melanin-Rich transgender persons’ stories are included in those of cisgender LGB or Melanin-Rich women’s stories. However, the unique experiences in history, language, and culture of Melanin-Rich transgender men suggests otherwise. Etter-Lewis (1993) postulates membership in two traditionally oppressed groups sets Melanin-Rich women apart because they experience a form of intersectional discrimination as a result of this dual status (Bowleg, 2008; Cheshire, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; Parent, DaBlaere, & Moradi, 2013; Ramsay, 2014; Watts-Jones, 2010). I expand on this suggestion by saying that membership in two traditionally oppressed groups sets Melanin-Rich transgender men apart because they experience a form of double discrimination as a result of their dual status as transgender and Melanin-Rich, though their entry into manhood may provide unintended privilege (Schilt, 2010).

Consequently, the focus of this research is to understand the perceptions of transgender members of NPHC sororities within their sororities, and to capture the experiences of gender and sexual orientation understanding and to think about them in terms “of continuity and wholeness of an individual’s life experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). The

experiences of non-Anglo transgender men in United States higher education are scantily discussed in extant literature, and their participation in Greek-letter organizations is nonexistent. Thus, a study focusing on this group is long awaited, and exploring it narratively is compelling due to narrative thinking being “a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18).

Noting work done by Bal and Bal (1998), Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) write, “Narrative inquiry engages plotlines, character, setting, and action” (p. 20). Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience, specifically with his notions of situation, continuity, and interaction, inform this work. While procedural ethics are called for by IRB training, ethical considerations are more critical due to the intimacy of the culminating content. In my work as a researcher, I constantly remind myself of a reason why I use narrative inquiry: narrative inquiry allows me to study people’s experiences which are part of their lives. Empathic listening – developing a mindset of believing the participant, controlling for the reflex to anticipate a storyline, and creating a safe environment – is necessary in narrative inquiry. This methodology has cultural implications as well.

In *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* by Senge (2014), the most common greeting amongst the tribes of northern Natal within South Africa, is the expression: “sawu bona,” which translates to, “I see you.” To this, a member of the tribe responds with, “sikhona,” or “I am here.” The exchange is important as a sign of recognition and respect; caring enough to acknowledge a person’s presence begins the communal conversation; one must be acknowledged before they trust the community with their stories (Guba & Lincoln, 1989); credibility, transferability (external validity), dependability (detail of research methods), and confirmability (objectivity) of

the findings are all encompassed in establishing this trustworthiness between researchers, participants, and readers.

The rationale for the research is multifaceted. Primarily, this research serves to raise the voices of an underrepresented student population. This study will continue to build on the unprecedented research of Literte and Hodge (2012), which note the experiences of Melanin-Rich, presumably cis-het women and their views of cisgender lesbians and bisexuals obtaining membership, and their activity in the NPHC sororities they represent. They concluded that personal and conservative religious views by older members; the strict enforcement of feminine ways of dress and communication; and the numerical power and financial control of supervisory alumna chapters essentially prohibit the discussion of non-straight sexual orientation in the organizations. My study will question if similar de facto blockages experienced by cisgender lesbians and bisexuals are denoted by trans\* members.

Secondly, it serves to highlight how effective NPHC organizations have been in their goals of service and social uplift through their members. By social uplift, I am adopting the definition by De Cordier (2010) as the establishment of “infrastructure and services including health care, education and juridical support” to underrepresented populations (p. 479). If NPHC organizations exist to develop culturally competent student leaders of its members in order to educate their communities, conducting enough trainings and offering adequate coursework/events to inform members of the history, presence and condition of intersectional communities such as LGBTQ student issues (as well as women, faith, other racial underrepresented and international topics). Stolzenberg and Hughes (2017) found that almost 19% of transgender first-year students reported major concerns about financing their college education, compared to 12% of a national sample. Therefore, this research may provide additional reasoning to why transgender students may pass on NPHC membership, as the up-

front costs are high. As Parks (2007) notes, “though they have maintained their philanthropic and community service presence in underserved communities, NPHC organizations do not seem to address modern civil rights issues with the same force and tenacity as they did during the civil rights era.” Members who are outwardly a part of the LGBTQ community and are experiencing potential roadblocks to educational and social fulfillment may have ideas for reform that Greek life, educators and student affairs professionals have not considered. Lack of support, from either violent or apathetic organizations, or financially-unsupportive families could deter their interest. In addition, this study may also lend itself to understanding the financial risk some students take to receive the benefits of NPHC organizations (e.g. a large support system and networking base, exclusive scholarships and select leadership opportunities).

Third, this research seeks to open the door for both transgender and cisgender stakeholders of single-gender organizations and institutions to hold frank conversations on the boundaries we wish to maintain and disestablish as members of colonized groups. What trans\* groups are welcomed into NPHC organizations, if any? Are sororities resistant to claiming existing members because they live as men, because they fear the privilege of men will reduce their abilities to govern organizations led by women, or both? The stories of the participants of this study are vital to an understanding of sorority and Greek life within a contemporary perspective. Within their stories lie larger societal problems that African and hued people, men, female- and intersex- bodied people, queer Greek-letter organization members, and underrepresented students and professionals face.

There will be individuals and groups which push back against such a study focus. To center non-Caucasian and/or ignored queer identities would damage the successful draw of the passively liberal, which succeed only by reinforcing “stereotypes of gay economic prosperity”

(Bawer, 2006, p. 202). Hiding transgender and nonbinary people allows for the socially-constructed gender and sexual binary to remain unchallenged, and conflated with biological sex (Ansara & Hegarty, 2014; Grossman & D'augelli, 2006; Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). The American Dream, Halberstam argues, teaches seekers and competitors to hide their losses. In comparison, the queer art of failure emphasizes the resilience of the oppressed and implicates societal norms and their benefactors as responsible parties for sustaining inequality (Fischer and McClearen, 2019; Leslie, 2018; Wagner & Yee, 2011). Halberstam's theory also challenges those who marginally benefit to acknowledge how they, too, lack levels of access and knowledge through systemic normalizing and hierarchical privilege castes (Bell, 1992; Matias, 2016; Reich, 1978). This recognition of queerness – no matter the marginality or ease of masking – allow for bridges to connect between visually-different and visually-acceptable (or passing) social entities (Pfeffer, 2014). This makes the underrepresented group more viable in social justice and equal rights initiatives.

Hendry (2007) writes,

My concerns with rigor and validity have to do with staying true to our informants' stories and not imposing our narratives on them. I would maintain that to increase our rigor we need to be more faithful to our relationships and not impose more methods (p. 493).

### Researcher Positionality

Marshall and Rossman (2015) explain a researcher's voice, in the way of values, experiences, and identity positionality, impacts their road to finding meaning in stories. I introduce study participants through vignettes in Chapter Four. Here, I will detail my background, which informs my lens in research, from the topics I choose, the research I include, and how I analyze information.

As a researcher I must explain who I am, recognizing that no research is without bias and that the researcher is also a subject of his or her own research (Peshkin, 1988). “Research processes are necessarily entangled with our identities” (Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008, p. 136). I, Sydney Epps, am a native of Philadelphia, PA, though my parents’ occupations as military service-people have given me a unique view of the world. I self-identify as an Aboriginal, an Original American, a Hebrew, and Melanin-Rich as opposed to color terms (e.g. black, brown, etc.), though I respect the use of these terms in historical research on people in which I share macro-experiences (Anzaldua & Moraga, 1983). Citing Vidal-Ortiz (2004), “the proposition that all people of color share similar experiences of discrimination dismisses the powerful effects of other qualifiers such as class, sexuality, gender and country of origin or political agenda in relationship to the U.S.” (p. 199). I self-identify as queer, for my attractions lie within individual circumstances rather than socially-defined groupings (McCune, 2014). I am a cisgender female (Stotzer, 2014), which describes “people whose biological sex match their gender identity/expression, or ‘non-transgender’ people” (p. 264). I have enrolled and been employed at historically exclusive institutions only.

I am the product of a religiously and spiritually diverse family, of which I have consistently found home in the practices of Judaism; yet the practices and views of these belief systems interweave my upbringing, and inform my understanding of religion’s role in liberation, oppression, and cognitive dissonance. The Tikkun Olam – a Jewish credence which professes individuals have a right and responsibility to heal the world and progress the conditions of suffering people – is the teaching which guides my research, community service, and progressive political stance.

I started my dedication to service within the LGBTQ community at an early age. In high school, I joined a multicultural Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Ally (LGBTQA) group. I

started the school's participation in the National Day of Silence, a passive protest against anti-LGBT name-calling, bullying and harassment in schools. With four other high schools, my group petitioned the School District of Philadelphia to recognize October as Gay and Lesbian History Month. In college, I joined several groups that allowed me to continue this work.

As the Treasurer and Community Service Chair for SHADES - a multicultural LGBT organization - I often found myself in the midst of conversations about higher education's need to implement better inclusion strategies for queer students, faculty and staff. We often rallied for gay rights legislation and executed workshops and panels addressing the biological nuances of sex, the social implications of gendered citizenship, and challenged our institution to declare a stance more cognizant of the sexual orientation and gender identity continuums we ignore in our cisgender, heteronormative, binary Western culture. I have expanded my programmatic lens since then, executing more than 50 unique programs during my student affairs career while continuously updating my trainer certifications focused on sexuality, mental health, and inclusion through programs like SafeZone, NCBI, and Mental Health First Aid USA.

Joining a sorority affirmed my dedication to service. Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., founded in 1922 at an institution much like my undergraduate institution – a European-led college with a continued history of local hate groups – was the only sorority founded by Melanin-Rich members outside of the HBCU circuit. The organization humbled my undergraduate experience in widening my perspective of what struggle looks like in America; taught to see the story behind every face I encounter, no matter how different it is from my own. My experience and knowledge of the educational system as a member of the LGBT community, student, educator, Greek advisor, and 10-year member of a Greek-letter organization strengthen my position as a researcher.



The relational responsibilities tied to narrative research are understood as long-term; my inquiry is attentive to the lives of my participants and my own, before, during and after inquiry (Huber, Clandinin, & Huber, 2006). While disclosure of my cisgender status may be relevant in my address of transgender experiences, participants and I share racial identity and queerness. Hatchett and Schuman (1975) tell us that “the race of the interviewer is significant when assessing subjects responses to topics such as education” (p. 525). However, I realize that while I was compelled to bring attention to the chasm of literature on transgender students in higher education, I am not transgender, and cisgender researchers can never address this issue with the benefit of experiential knowledge that only a trans\*scholar holds. As noted in Young’s writing on the multiple streams of oppression:

Foucault (1977) suggests that to understand the meaning and operation of power in modern society we must look beyond the model of power as “sovereignty,” a dyadic relation of ruler and subject, and instead analyze the exercise of power as the effect of often liberal and “humane” practices of education, bureaucratic administration, production, and distribution of consumer goods, medicine, and so on. The conscious actions of many individuals daily contribute to maintaining and reproducing oppression, but those people are usually simply doing their jobs or living their lives, and do not understand themselves as agents of oppression (p. 6).

While identifying as a queered individual who is an NPHC member may settle hesitation of understanding in acceptance towards LGBT people in Melanin-Rich spaces, normative cisgenderism is ignorance (privilege) I acknowledge; in addition, I am conducting this work at a university serving mostly European-American students, which absorbs me as a tokenized individual. My training as a scholar is marred with Euro-cisgender-hetero-male constructs which result in colonialist, patriarchal undertones, even as I call as on as many queer, ignored, attacked, survivor-celebrating scholars as a study can fit.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed a set of terms for narrative inquiry based on Deweyan foundational principles where personal and social represent interaction; past, present,

and future are associated with continuity; interaction and continuity are combined with the notion of place forming context and situation. These terms create “a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension, and place along the third” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50).

For this reason, I find it important to note that narrative inquiry was not my initial tradition consideration. In my initial review of the five major traditions discussed by Creswell (1998), I used McCaslin and Scott’s (2003) table of questions to aid emerging researchers on how to choose a qualitative design. From this table, I believed the closest question to what I desired to learn was: “If I could discover the shared lived experiences of one quality or phenomenon in others, I would want to know about \_\_\_\_\_” (p. 450). This question aligned with the phenomenological approach.

“Phenomenology is described as the study of the shared meaning of experience of phenomenon for several individuals” (McCaslin and Scott, 2003, p. 449), yet I realized my values (axiology) appreciate stories and personal insight. Narrative inquiry focuses on the person’s story considering context, the person telling it, and the person researching (Clandinin & Roskiek, 2007; Syed, 2010). I reflect on my time as a student and professional within journalism to realize what gets covered and ignored, and the approached used in reporting the facts are all based on and individuals’ background and biases. As a radio director, television producer, reporter, editor and writer, I have researched, written and edited on topics including local politics, the arts, new media and popular culture on entertainment, talk, music and news radio, and television news. My ability to choose what to cover impresses my values onto my work and the reputation of my agency. Narrative inquiry highlights this; that there is no separation of the story, the teller, and the listener; narrative compels the researcher to

acknowledge an interweaving of the phenomena, the context, and the people within. As Tatum (1997) describes, identity “depends in large part on who the world around me says I am,” and it is complex, “shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts” (p. 18). The goal in this approach is to co-conduct research with the participants (as opposed to on them), thus “generating scholarship that transforms the ontological condition of living” (Clandinin & Roskies, 2007, p. 49). Wiklund, Lindholmb, and Lindström note (2002):

When interviewing, data are gathered orally and then transcribed into text. During the interview a narrative is cocreated between participant and researcher, not only with actors and their acting but also with an underlying meaning, a plot that constitutes the narrative’s non-ostensive reference (p. 115).

Each interview is an attempt to understand the speakers’ perspectives and experiences through their words. Participants narrate their history selectively, sequence events to their own accord, depict and implicate people and institutions, and position themselves to tell stories that convey intentional meanings.

This approach assumes that narrative is not simply reporting what a person says during an interview, but a meaning-making activity.

Narrative research is Wiklund, Lindholmb, and Lindström note (2002):

The trick is to interact with data and yet keep some kind of distance from it by dealing with the researcher’s preunderstandings during the interpretation process. Inherent in our pre-understanding is a struggle to approach the text with an open mind, as pre-understandings tend to direct the researcher’s ‘eye’ in a particular direction. By dealing with pre-understandings it is possible to take account of the barriers they create, and to approach data from new and different perspectives (p. 114).

The participants of the research were students and alumni who identify as transgender men or transmasculine/nonbinary persons who are/were members of NPHC organizations. Because of

the small size of the NPHC (vs. the general public) and the queer niche group within the organizations, anonymity and confidentiality take on added importance. There is a challenge in maintaining anonymity while also producing rich descriptions of events and circumstances, especially within such a unique demographic (Bickford & Nisker, 2015). As a person who is active in queer and NPHC centered social (real and online) groups and organizations, many may know and be able to potentially identify participants (Walford, 2005). Research participants themselves may be a threat to confidentiality by disclosing their participation in research in ways that identify other informants (Helgesson 2014; Kennedy & Cram 2010). Therefore, strategies such as fictionalizing and blurring identities and places are often used. Caine et al (2017) note that fictionalization allows for, “(a) protection of the identities of participants, (b) creation of distance between ourselves and our experiences, and (c) a way to engage in imagination that enriches inquiry spaces and research understandings” (p. 215).

## Context

The four participants all attended institutions where the bulk of the population was of European-American descent. Two of the participants attended institutions which were large, public universities (approximately 30,000 students) in the Southeast for their undergraduate degrees. Two of the participants attended institutions which were small, private universities in the Midwest (approximately 3,000 students) for their undergraduate degrees. One attended a religious institution.

For one of our participants, joining a sorority on campus was unachievable, due to policies at their institution forbidding sororities and fraternities. In this instance, the student’s interest was expressed at a nearby institution. The other three institutions encompassed a variety of the Divine Nine (NPHC) organizations, yet none of them had all nine at the time of our

interviewee's undergraduate career. The average chapter size for individual organizations was ten members, and the NPHC on these campuses ranges between 30-100 people, indicating a representationally small Greek community.

NPHC organizations do not traditionally boast large numbers, particularly at historically-exclusive institutions. This presents challenges for recruitment and remaining continuously active: unlike European-American fraternities, they often will not take students in their first year of college; the organizations do not have student housing that European-American schools offer to their fraternities and sororities; they are not as financially supported as the European-American organizations (Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2009). Lloyd writes, "NPHC chapters at PWIs tend to have smaller new member groups, which presents a risk not inherent with other studies of fraternal organizations, where the number of members offers more anonymity" (Lloyd, 2007, p. 60).

### Participants' Profiles

Four participants agreed to interview for the study. They joined their sororities during their undergraduate experience. There are four NPHC sororities; a majority of the sororities were represented by interviewees. The participants represent a variety of backgrounds in terms of class, gender, sexuality, religious affiliation, and region, and brought to the study different motivations for participation. In this section, I offer a brief biography of their backgrounds, including familial and organizational experiences, and identity development, which will highlight their relationship to the study goals.

Ethics guidelines recommend that the names of individuals and place names are disguised in research to protect anonymity and confidentiality of research respondents. Davis

(2015) writes on the importance of confidentiality with particular consideration on transgender subjects:

The use of aliases underscores both the bigendered nature of these community founders and their desire for privacy. Such privacy, according to Michael C. Oliveira, project archivist at the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives [...] at the University of Southern California, is “regulated by a patchwork of state and federal law” [...] and, for the vast majority of people, ends at death, famous people being the exception. Marjorie Bryer, managing archivist at the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco [...] agrees with this assessment. In her mind, the central question for the researcher when deciding whether information should be made public is, “Is this person still alive?” [...] Those researching trans\* communities have another consideration: what is ethical to reveal about these people who may have literally led two lives? [...] Researchers must be scrupulous to ensure that the data they publish cannot be “crunched” to reveal [...] identity. Archivists Oliveira and Bryer said that there is a general consensus that at one hundred years after a person’s death any information can be published, which is based on the fact that medical records are frozen for one hundred years. Prior to that, researchers should limit discussion of [...] lives to untraceable, aggregate data or information presented using aliases (p. 627).

Names were initially preselected by the researcher to assure unlinkability. A paper on Privacy Enhancing Identity Management (PIM), Borcea-Pfitzmann, Franz, and Pfitzmann (2005) explored the implications of self-representation on risk of violating the anonymity of users. It was found that participants find it difficult to choose names for themselves that are devoid of meaning to them. In addition, Creswell (2013) places the responsibility of assuring participant anonymity in researchers’ hands and instructs researchers to assign “aliases to individuals” (p. 174). However, users enjoy taking part in naming themselves, and this act gives credence to the power of self-identification. With respect to the need for empowerment of underrepresented groups, the researcher reconsidered the limitations regarding constricting naming and gave participants the opportunity to choose their names. Two interviewees sent in chosen names. Two did not respond to the request for pseudonyms, and names were randomly chosen for them.

Participants represented one racial identity yet different ethnicities; all participants identified as African-American or Black (n=4). Participants' ages ranged from 25- to 35-years-old at the time data were first collected (Spring 2019) although the average age of participants was 27 years old. All participants (n=4) attended 4-year institutions, but institutions were more diverse in terms of both type and location; participants graduated from public and private institutions, and participants graduated from schools in the Southeast and Midwest regions of the United States. Additionally, participants' majors, and NPHC organizational affiliation represented the diversity available on college campuses. No questions were asked regarding medical or surgical transitioning. Rondot (2015) notes that in collecting life stories, researchers recognize the gratuitousness of delving into one's anatomy in ways never concerning stories of cisgender and cis-presumed people. Steinmetz's (2014) article on Cox affirms,

While there remains a public fascination with whether any trans person has had "top" or "bottom" reassignments, these are highly personal decisions that can have as much to do with economic status or the desire to have kids as physical preference. No matter their anatomy, transgender people want to live—and be identified—according to how they feel: to be able to dress and be treated like a woman or a man regardless of what their parents or delivering nurses may have assumed at birth (para. 8).

Trans\* identities are viable with or without medical intervention, and to insist upon one's divulgence steers away from seeing participants as whole.

Jalen is a female-born, Trans-Masculine/GNC (gender non-conforming) queer person who was born and raised in the northern East Coast region. At the date of their interview, they were in their 30s. They completed their undergraduate career at a large research institution in the Southeast, and hold a post-graduate level degree. They work part-time in the healthcare field and have entrepreneurial enterprises. They are single (never married) with no children in their home and currently reside in the northern East Coast region. They are registered to vote and do not hold health insurance coverage.

Elijah is a female-born, pansexual transgender man who was born and raised in the Southeastern region. At the date of their interview, they were in their 20s. They completed their undergraduate career at a large research institution in the Southeastern region and hold a post-graduate level degree. They work full-time in the service industry. They are single (never married) with no children in their home and currently reside in the Southeastern region. They are registered to vote and do not hold health insurance coverage.

Treyvon is an intersex-born, nonbinary queer person who was born and raised in the Midwest region. They were assigned female at birth, and this designation has not changed on their birth certificate. At the date of their interview, they were in their 30s. They completed their undergraduate career at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest and hold a post-graduate level degree. They work full-time in the education field. They are married with no children in their home and currently reside in the Western region. They are registered to vote and hold health insurance coverage.

Alton is a female-born, trans\* queer person who was raised an urban epicenter within the South. At the date of their interview, they were in their 30s. He completed his undergraduate career at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest and hold post-graduate level degrees. He works full-time in education as a professor and pursue entrepreneurial enterprises. He is partnered with one child in their home and currently resides in the Southeastern region. They are registered to vote and hold health insurance coverage.

Using the words of these experiential experts, the lives of trans\* members of NPHC organizations reflects some overlapping dynamics of other Africana majority environments. Multiple studies focus on the experience of Africana students attending historically exclusive



and historically inclusive universities. To this effect, Kimbrough (1995) denotes the importance of Greek-letter organizations in fostering a sense of belonging for Melanin-Rich students:

If [...] college students need to develop meaningful interpersonal relationships and if membership in a fraternity or sorority leads these students to develop stronger bonds with their peers and families, then it seems likely that these organizations would play a crucial role in facilitating and improving [...] students' perceptions of the college environment, especially at PWIs. If being a Greek is a viable means for increasing students' motivation and performance as well as enhancing their cognitive and leadership development, then assessment of [...] students' involvement in these organizations on predominantly [Anglo] campuses seems particularly warranted (p. 64).

With this consideration, it is imperative to disclose that all participants joined their prospective sororities on campuses where they would be considered racially underrepresented.

#### Data Collection and Case Selection

Matters deemed pertinent to its members (Wenger, 1998) inform communities of practice. The members were not questioned in-depth about their birth sex or their present sex organs; they are denoted as trans\* because of their personal experience. The study solely reflects those members – NPHC-affiliated sorority members who are transgender and masculine-of-center – because it is their perception that adds to the breadth of literature (Creswell, 2003) and exposes voices which have been excluded (Kimbrough, 2003; Hendry, Mitchell, & Eaton, 2018). Criterion, purposive, and snowball sampling were used to secure participants. Criterion sampling involves predetermined criteria, which offers an opportunity to identify those participants with desired characteristics, while purposive sampling focuses on information-rich cases with limited resources (Patton, 2002). The criteria for NPHC sorority members sample was that the participant (a) is a graduate (Bachelor's degree-holding) member of an NPHC sorority; (b) self-

identifies as Black/African-American/Melanin-Rich; (c) identifies as a transgender man, or transmasculine person; and (d) began their transition after joining an NPHC sorority.

Before solidifying the study topic, research related to transgender activists' histories and transgender students' histories in higher education by the researcher for two years, which attracted many contacts in the queer community. These networks led to membership in several LGBTQ-focused groups on social media platform Facebook. These groups informed the researcher of the multitude of queer-focused Greek-letter organizations functioning outside of colleges. These organizations provide fraternal experience with service to the queer community as a foundation of their groups. This led to seeking members at conferences focused on underrepresented identities, like the National Conference on Racial Equality (NCORE) and the Black Transgender Advocacy Conference (BTAC). These conferences precipitated into contact with about 15 transgender members of NPHC organizations.

Once the dissertation topic solidified, these associates were contacted to gauge interest and to share digital and paper calls for participants. Online social media profiles provided an opportunity to verify that criteria have been met prior to collecting data from the participants. The study sample initially included three participants. Participants were encouraged to share study fliers, which resulted in two additional interests; one additional interview came from these contacts. Copies of these fliers are included in Appendix A.

Interested participants received emails from the researcher's institutional email address in May 2019 which contained an introduction about the topic of the dissertation, contact information for the researcher, and study qualifications. Prospective participants were asked to send three dates and time intervals that suited their schedules between late May and early June 2019. They were told to place two hours aside for the interview. Participants were informed there was a possibility for one or two follow-up interviews. They were told interviews would be

audio recorded. Demographic data was also requested through the initial interview. Sex, gender identity, age, educational level, and household information were collected. This list of questions is in Appendix B.

Interviews. Vygotsky (1987) notes that stories from participants are important data sources, as stories reflect human consciousness. To collect data on the impacted parties, I have conducted limited question, life-sequenced, thematic interviews with several transgender men. I am choosing to conduct interviews by telephone in order to maximize my geographical access, as well as access a hard-to-find and hard-to-reach population. This interview structure also allows for access to those who may deem the study topic sensitive and may be reluctant to speak face-to-face (Jamshed, 2014; Novick, 2008; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Because transgender people are a target for violence, those who may participate would risk outing themselves to the general public if face-to-face interviews occurred. These interviews focus on the participants' lives before college; during college, before BGLO membership; college life post-membership, pre-transition; and life post-membership, post-transition. They were asked to answer four questions which denoted these four life sections:

- 1) Could you start off by telling me a little bit about your background in terms of where you were raised, by whom, where you were raised and how you have identified throughout your life in terms of race, gender, sex, sexual orientation?
- 2) Could you talk about your experiences in choosing a college, and your campus involvement before sorority consideration?
- 3) Could you talk about your experiences in choosing a sorority, and your sorority involvement before transitioning?

- 4) Could you talk about your considerations in transitioning, the transition, and how your sorority members responded?

Through interviews, I gained information about the participant's respective backgrounds, schooling experiences, and notable people, places, or circumstances they believed influenced their views of NPHC and their NPHC sororities.

A typical interview lasted 45 to 120 minutes. In some cases, follow-up correspondence with the interviewee via phone, email, or in-person to clear ambiguities in audio muffling as well as terminology. Reasons for F-to-M transgender men's choices of college and factors perceived as critical to their retention in the sorority are discussed. As this qualitative study seeks to understand one's sorority participation decisions and the meanings attached to such experiences, the amount of time required for serious reflection and critical analysis of data will be great; thus, all interviews were audiotape recorded and I used automated transcription for subsequent analysis. Participants were offered to opportunity to edit their interviews. Miles et al (2014) suggests initial interviews be transcribed and reviewed, then melding follow up questions with a second interview. Due to the inaccuracies involved with voice and speech recognition technology, I went through each interview and made line-by-line corrections with the audio recording. I also invited participants to review their transcribed interview. Initial interviews were then coded, resulting in a computerized database. While Thomas (2016) concludes "there was little evidence that member checks improved research findings", he also notes that "member checks can be useful for obtaining participant approval for using quotations," and "in participatory or collaborative research, ongoing contact might include member checks" (p. 23). This work is both participative and collaborative and includes quotations from participants.

*Participants' Review of Other Transcripts.* Narratives influence relationships through a shared understanding; therefore, the narratives should speak to each other to emphasize credibility through triangulation. After reading all of the interview content, sections of the interviews were scrubbed for identifying content and experiences were paired, noting how they align and contrast with each other. I identified the primary themes which emerged from an initial analysis of the interview's pertinent themes, then completed another thematic analysis once my advisor and I converse over varied narrative sections.

Documents. Analyzing documents like non-academic articles, social media and blog posts, as well as digital comment sections of Greek transgender-related content, allow for me to establish trustworthiness. In addition, because we are studying established organizations, these organization websites contain data which is easily obtainable to denote how they define eligibility for membership.

Within the past five years there have been slight changes to the wording on public websites regarding the language sororities use for qualifications for membership. I review what the organizations' interest forms include and the details of their terms for gender and sex. I also review online forums where sorority members are discussing their views of transgender people in Greek-letter organizations, as well as who they believe should qualify for membership within these organizations.

In addition, I collected online articles and documents for instances the interviewees discussed throughout their interviews; online communities are spaces where identity can be performed by individuals (Aleman & Wartman, 2009); therefore, the presentation of self for both study participants and those interested in sharing their views of issues pertinent to NPHC organizations are present (Goffman, 1959). All of the participants reported using social networking sites (such as Facebook, Instagram, etc.). Instances of cyberbullying (insulting

someone on a website) were expressed in several of the participants' narratives (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012). Cyberbullying involves "sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using the Internet (e.g., instant messaging, e-mails, chat rooms, and social networking sites) or other digital communication devices" (Feinberg and Robey, 2009, p. 26). There are public social media posts that reference participants directly, or the topic of transgender membership using instances which refer to their life experiences (by people they know). Posts are referenced in the analysis of their stories; most of the particularities are removed. I used my existing Facebook profile to seek the information present in the current study.

Document analysis (Merriam, 1998) and narrative analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) were used to code and analyze the participants' interviews and online discussions; documents used for the purpose of triangulation were also coded utilizing this process. Analyzing narratives within the interviews will contain a description of the story, thick quotations from participants, and the themes that emerge from the stories.

### Limitations

A full list of assumptions, limitations, and delimitations will appear in Chapter Four, as is typical for this dissertation format. However, a primary limitation to consider is that the findings of this study cannot necessarily be generalized to all transgender members within the NPHC. Due to the problem identified and unique demographics of the participants, the group interviewed was relatively small. The interview participants were selected based on similar characteristics of being graduate-level transgender men or transmasculine nonbinary people who joined their organizations before transitioning; there are also members of fraternities who are transgender men. Transgender women will likely have a more nuanced experience, both as pre-transition members of NPHC fraternities, or as post-transition members of sororities. I have,

through this research experience, been able to meet members who identify within all of these contexts. Future research will surely cover these experiences. As I noted earlier, the stories of the participants of this study are vital to an understanding of sorority and Greek life within a contemporary perspective. The study is limited by the absence of cisgender women affiliated with NPHC sororities, though I justify this by noting this is but the only study insofar giving voice to transgender members of NPHC sororities, and research on cisgender NPHC sorority members regarding their views of queer membership does exist (Literte & Hodge, 2012).

### Ethical Considerations

The use of human subjects requires ethical consideration. The Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees compliance with the ethical treatment of human subjects, approved the study on March 28, 2019. Gaining permission required seeking permission from the major professor for support to pursue an IRB application post-proposal, creating a project description, developing an informed consent form, and review of the study (Creswell, 2012). The determination was based on adequate protection of the human subjects. Once approval was obtained, I informed my dissertation committee and the potential participants via email. Per the IRB, an informed consent form was read to each participant in the study before their interview. An explanation of their voluntary participation, as well as the level of confidentiality was shared. By responding and denoting a willingness and consent to be interviewed, participants provided approval to participate in the study. Participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time or to refuse to answer any particular question. All interviews were conducted according to IRB guidelines. Interview transcripts were kept on two computers: my personal desktop computer in my office at Louisiana State University; and my laptop, which is

consistently situated in my unshared apartment. Only one copy of the transcripts was printed and kept in my locked campus office.

There were no anticipated risks to participants in this research study nor were they compensated. While there was no direct benefit, participants were aware that the information that they provided could positively impact Greek students, student affairs professionals in higher education, the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), queer communities, and underrepresented racial communities in the United States of America. The identities of participants are kept confidential. Pseudonyms are used for each person so that legal names are not revealed, as well as the institutions they attended. Institutional names came from fictitious colleges and universities used in film and television (Kimble, 2013). However, the data may be used in its edited format, without names and identifying details, for expansive comparative studies in the future.

Measures to reduce risks to participants. As one of the driving principles, this study sought to provide a voice for transgender men who are members of NPHC organizations, yet not at the expense or detriment of those who are active members of their organizations, nor the organizations themselves. Carlson (2010) writes,

Researchers also provide very detailed descriptions of settings, participants, data collection, and analysis procedures as a way of making their accounts more credible – to show that they were diligent in their attempts to conduct respectable research (p. 1104).

With this in mind, it is important to realize the consequences and challenges of speaking out against oppression while occupying the space in which the injustice is being committed (Hahn Tapper, 2013). In addition, it is difficult to speak out against discrimination when the mission of these organizations is to eradicate or persist through certain types of oppression. There may be potential life-changing risks if the participants are discovered speaking out, including ridicule,



further harassment, or excommunication in the Greek community or their institutional communities. In addition to these possibilities, participants could experience negative psychological impact of engaging in this critical and reflective study while simultaneously occupying social and professional spaces in which such problematic and unhealthy ideologies flourish. My hope is the opposite will occur; this critical and reflective study can be empowering and aid in beginning an important discussion regarding NPHC's role in student persistence for all students – particularly the Melanin-Rich – and including out, queer students. Their participation is a refutation of the trigger warning mindset Halberstam (2014) cautions underrepresented peoples in partaking; reinforcing the stereotype of the *snowflake* imposes an infantile fragility, which instead of gaining empathy emboldens their aggressors to enact violence against the “endangered and precarious.” Taken from a line from the movie *Fight Club*, Halberstam “promotes a discourse of ‘finding yourself’ while simultaneously insisting ‘you are not a beautiful and unique snowflake’” (Greenwood, 2003).

Insider bias refers to unconsciously making assumptions about the research process based on the researcher's prior knowledge (DeLyser, 2001). In an attempt to minimize my biases, I enlisted the help of my faculty advisor and dissertation chair, Jacqueline Bach, to review my writing, discuss my intentions with including certain research and theory, and offer feedback via track changes and paper notes. Talking with both cisgender and transgender members of NPHC organizations who were not participants of the study, as well as non-members, helped to minimize the impact of bias on the study. Through these conversations I was reminded of all of the reasoning why people join *any* organizations, their expectations and fears, the concerns of changing demographics and new agendas, and their sense of belonging. Journaling these conversations also assisted in minimizing bias; writing

daily during the dissertation process aided in identifying my reactions and feelings towards those I conversed with, which helped me maintain a clear head during the interpretive process. The most important aid were my participants.

Member checks were accomplished by having the participants review transcripts for accuracy (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002). Carlson (2010) writes, “there are also plenty of studies in which transcript selections are acceptable and appropriate” (p. 1111). Carlson (2010) suggests, “Researchers should listen to the interview audiotapes in their entirety, but consider transcribing only the portions that will be used for analysis”, I have transcribed the interviews in their entirety using automated transcription services Rev and Temi (p. 1111). These services offer quick turnaround for audio transcription but are not exceedingly accurate, so combing through the presented transcripts was necessary for all interviews. Speaker information and clarification was added as necessary. Following the methods of Carlson (2010),

Consider sharing with [participants] parts of their contributions that will likely be quoted in the final research report. Offer participants the opportunity to see and approve their narrative contributions once they have been placed into the research report in rough draft and final draft form (p. 1112).

## Analysis

Transcribing every word, sentence fragment, false start, and “um” that was uttered was a delicate yet appreciated process for me. I also transcribed sections that were off-topic or that I knew would not help inform the study. However, it was important for me to denote these because they added to the comfort and free flow of the interview, which took place like a welcomed one-sided conversation.

This structure for analysis is based on Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) approach. In the three-dimensional space approach, interaction, continuity, and situation are the three aspect focused upon. The

initial coding process most closely resembled open coding (Creswell, 2007), where broad categories are determined. Saldaña (2009) writes:

A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. (p. 3)

Through these codes, the researcher notes patterns in language throughout individual and all interviews, as well as extant theories tied to the experiences discussed. One is also detailing information which directly ties back to the research questions. This is in itself an iterative process, as one may realize themes throughout multiple analyses. As Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) write, “Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the complex analysis process as reading and rereading through the field texts, considering interaction, continuity or temporality, and situation through personal practical knowledge and the professional knowledge landscape of the individual” (p. 342). Initial interview questions divulged participants’ experiences’ of gender performance fluidity as young children, then influences to behave within gender-strict roles at the onslaught of puberty. Each denoted a continuum of pressure by parents and family to pursue heterosexual, romantic relationships as young adults. Encounters in high school settings were also diverse, as some had experiences in which homophobia was apparent, and others had opportunities to engage with “out” LGB students. Note that transgender students and professionals are absent. A follow-up question throughout the interviews regarding what the participants would change about their undergraduate experiences if they could, drew in feedback regarding institutional support as well as the NPHC organizations. Arenas in college in which participants experienced prejudice and homophobia were addressed but will be re-emphasized in follow-up interviews.

## CHAPTER FOUR. FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the participants in my study and their life experiences around sex; gender; gender performativity; family, friendship, and intimate relationships; school; and organizations. These organizations and experiences include their consideration and participation in their respective sororities as well as relationships with sorority members. In this chapter, for each participant, I describe their characteristics, their reasons for becoming sorority members, their organizations, and their perceptions of themselves as members. Pseudonyms are given to family members, friends, and places, in an effort to protect the identities of those involved. Through interviews, I gained a sense of the members' a priori experiences, that is, their past experiences both educationally and socially, and how those experiences influenced their concepts of self-as-sorority member and self-as-man.

Before discussing participants' backgrounds, I will review the structure of the umbrella of the Greek letter organizations within the National Pan-Hellenic Council, and policies regarding sex and gender language within single-sex institutions. This will situate how these terms are used and explore if they are inclusive or exclusive of transgender and nonbinary individuals.

### Membership Requirements

The National Pan-Hellenic Council – the umbrella organization of the Divine Nine organizations – oversees the shared interests of these racially-inclusive service groups. In describing the NPHC, Taylor-Johnson (2018) explains its genesis,

Founded as a council [in] 1930, NPHC's purpose was to create a supportive environment for all of the Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOS) to assist each organization in fulfilling their own missions. Although these organizations are traditionally populated by and created for [Melanin-Rich] students, membership was not restricted to [Melanin-Rich] Americans (p. 2).

While their collective missions seek to provide to community, leadership development, and networking opportunities for racially underrepresented scholars where Anglo organizations prohibited them, there are still restrictions on membership. Hughey (2007) writes, “When categorical boundaries are strong, as in the case of the raced Greek system in our contemporary moment—boundary transgression is rare” (p. 57). One of these boundaries is gender; much as the racially exclusive fraternities barred non-Anglo membership for men, once women were inserted into the collegiate landscape, they too were steered to develop their own organizations (Giddings, 1988). Smart (2014) affirms the separatism inherent in colleges, presuming this gender boundary would quell romantic exchanges. The assumption that women were solely attracted to men and men were solely attracted to women, and their causal coupling would interrupt their studies, justified such segregation. Their eventual paring in marriage, then, would be bolstered by their separate, guided development outside of the classroom. The groups espoused a dedication to shared values, which is why most “National Interfraternity Council (NIC) and NPC [PHC, the predominantly Anglo organizations] have or another had clauses within their charters that banned the membership of non-White and non-Christian members” (Wilson, 2002, para. 3).

Class mobility was another intention of fraternities. Fraternities gave students benefiting from generational wealth and ties to the university the opportunity to recreate the experiences of their fathers, and provided universities with a near-guaranteed ties to revenue. Sororities then provided women with opportunities to collect socially outside of the classroom and acquire the essence of marriageability. They also offered them supervised events where eligible men could court them. Fraternities, in turn, allowed for men from working- and middle-class families to

develop close ties with elite families through their sons, gaining effective networks for academic guidance, professional development and high-income careers post-graduation.

Later on, the fraternities themselves will help prepare their members intensively for adult social life [...] Forty young men in late adolescence living together for four years can greatly influence each other's values and character. College fraternities represent a powerful agency of near-adult socialization [...] (p. 399)

With these benefits came the conservative ideologies of the elite. Levine and Sussmann write (1960):

In order to be successful in the climb, they have had to unlearn working-class values and to acquire the values of the class they aim at. An unfortunate concomitant of the ascent has often been the rejection of parents and of non-mobile siblings who stand for a way of life that has been abandoned (p. 399)

Creating discriminating guidelines within NPHC, then, are argued to align with the inclusion of cultural elite only, fulfilling a social desire to appear 'authentic' to the clubs which excluded them (Hughley, 2007). In addition to values of Anglo manhood, racial and gender separation of social clubs aligned with the housing standards of the first residential campuses. De Los Reyes and Rich (2003) explain,

American higher education expanded more rapidly than did its ability to provide accommodation to increasing number of students, and fraternities were glad to fill the gap. They offered a freedom that college-run dormitories did not have, along with a solidarity enforced by handshakes and passwords (p. 121).

This housing copied the gender-separate housing available to men at PWIs, which progressed to sororities creating sorority houses; early 20<sup>th</sup> century racial segregation emboldened Anglo sororities to maintain this status quo, excluding non-Anglo women. Many NPHC organizations offered member housing for students at PWISs who were prohibited from campus housing (Giddings, 1988). Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. is one of three NPHC organizations founded

at PWIs. As the history of Kappa Alpha Psi (n/d) notes, the social and academic opportunities at these campuses were highly restrictive:

The campus of Indiana University at that time did not encourage the assimilation of Blacks. The administration maintained an attitude of indifference, as Blacks slowly matriculated and were likewise swiftly forgotten. The percentage of Blacks on campus was less than 1%. Blacks could go weeks without seeing one another on campus. Blacks were not allowed to reside in on-campus dormitories, were not afforded off-campus accommodations, and they were also denied the use of all other university facilities, and were barred from participating in contact sports (Kappa Alpha Psi, “A Brief History”, para. 2).

This housing was separated by gender as well. Smart (2014) attests that this enforces gender rigidity:

The gender assumption leaves no room for those who do not identify as either male men or female women, marginalizing all who do not fit within that model: individuals who are intersex, transgender, or gender non-conforming. The binary of sexuality excludes those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, or asexual (p. 9).

As campuses become co-ed, universities pushed for the dismantling of the Greek system. Men’s only housing brought about a culture of violence that was lessened when in closer contact with women. The increasing racial, national, and religious diversity of the campus environment dissuaded students from joining organizations in which were seen as antithetical to their academic and professional development (Conroe, 1999). As universities sought to limit Greek representation, Anglo fraternities fought back against disestablishment in the 1990s, by offering residential comforts less attainable in university-owned residence halls at the time: “To attract students, the Greeks have struck back with high-speed Internet access, gourmet meals cooked by chefs, and beach volleyball” (p. 122).

Histories of exclusions, separation, and selectivity may explain why, short of the dedication to service and initiative focused on racial uplift, NPHC’s values remain bounded by

strong categories of gender fit. Federal law allows same-sex organizations to remain as such, which includes but is not limited to fraternities and sororities, and same-sex colleges. As of 2019, National Pan-Hellenic Council organizations have no official policy on transgender membership, which means that those who fill out their membership application form as the normative sex of the most of the organizations – male for fraternities, female for sororities – receive no questioning from organization’s headquarters when processing applications. This questioning may occur de facto on the campuses in which interested students are enrolled, before they are extended an invitation to interview.

In my examination of all nine membership processes, two organizations had digitized online application portals in which the aspirant had to register in order to complete; I did not complete this process, out of respect to the efforts of maintaining productive labor to those focused on application processing at these organizations. Information on membership inquiry forms is collected in Table 1.

The membership inquiry forms were observed to see if there were any direct restrictions based on sexes and/or genders for the organizations. The forms observed on national websites for several organizations did not ask for sex or gender; those forms asked for the interest’s [NPHC’s term for an applicant or potential member] name, email address, phone number, and many offered a section for open communication via comments.

*Sex and Gender on Applications.* The researcher searched the organizations national and international websites under membership, in search for membership inquiry forms and applications for membership. I then searched the keywords “[name of organization] interest form”. The researcher looked for sex and gender terms and the following analysis will include a search for male, man, cisgender, gender, and sex for fraternities, and female, women, girl, ladies,



cisgender, gender, and sex for sororities. The order of the search was by researcher's privilege and is not in order of the founding dates or names of the organizations in alphabetical order.

Epsilon offered a membership inquiry form but only asked for the interest's name, email address, phone number, and hosted a section for open communication via comments. A Google search resulted in two PDFs: one which read as a sorority FAQ brochure, and an official membership application. The brochure mentioned that the sorority was for "women", but the application did not request sex or gender. While there was a contact section under membership requirements, Omicron's form hosted a section for name, email address, phone number, and a message. All of these sections were required in order to submit the form. Lambda has a contact section which did not offer a section specifically for membership; however, on a Google search for an interest form, a PDF application for membership was found for the organization from less than five years ago, which asked if the applicant identified as either a woman or female.

Pi required an interest to contact a regional recruitment chair for more information regarding membership. Chi has the most extensive online interest form linked from the international fraternity website; assessable through a Google Form, the interest form asks for the interest's name, birthdate, address, phone number, email address, as well as educational institutional information, military service, and two interest questions. Though all questions must be answered in order to submit the form, it does not ask for gender or sex information. Mu has an online application available as a PDF, which does not ask for gender or sex, but does ask about previously held legal names, which could denote an individual's gender.

Xi has the most extensive online interest information regarding details of membership, but did not offer an interest form. Xi has an online portal to which an interest must create an online profile to fill out the membership form. Upsilon also offers an online form which requires

a login; the membership link preceding the online form mentions “men” and “man” several times, but does not state that one must be male. The header of the membership section also referenced a Biblical quote. An online search for an interest form resulted in a Word document from within the past five years, which asked for the most background information of the interest out of all of the organizations. This inquiry included familial makeup (i.e. parents’ educational backgrounds and employment fields, information regarding siblings, family members involved in Greek organizations, etc.), a request of recommenders’ contact information, and several writing prompts related to the fraternity’s history. A medical form requiring a physician’s signature is a part of the packet, as well as a form regarding military service. These may divulge a person’s sex, but neither sex nor gender was denoted as necessary within the packet’s contents.

*Sorority Requirements for Membership.* Because the focus of the study is the experiences of transgender men and masculine-identified nonbinary persons who are members of sororities, this section will document the membership requirements of the four NPHC sororities, as denoted on their websites. The information given is from each of the NPHC sororities. However, the true sorority affiliation of the member-participants is not tied to the organization information as listed.

Epsilon Epsilon Epsilon’s (known as Epsilon) membership requirements state that, “any female student currently enrolled at a college or university” or where a city chapter is active may apply for membership. As long as the school is accredited, they are working on a bachelor’s level degree, have a certain amount of hours completed and a certain GPA, and are not a member of any organization within the NPHC or PHC, the interest may apply for consideration.

Lambda Lambda Lambda’s (known as Lambda) membership requirements state that the organization wants, “interested women with a track record of community service and currently

pursuing a baccalaureate degree”. Other requirements include that the institution attending is accredited, they have a certain amount of hours completed and a certain GPA.

Mu Mu Mu’s (known as Mu) membership requirements state that, “A woman may be admitted for membership” as an undergraduate at a four-year college, or at a junior or community college once their intention to enter a four-year college is submitted. Other requirements include that the institution attending is accredited, they have a certain amount of hours completed and a certain GPA.

Tau Tau Tau’s (known as Tau) are the most direct and restrictive towards gender identities. Tau Tau Tau’s membership requirements state that the organization “does not discriminate in its membership selection practices on the basis of race, color, age, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, creed, marital status or disability”, but “recognizes the right of college social fraternities and sororities to maintain single sex membership policies.” Henceforth, the sorority notes it, “is a women’s organization and membership is open to women”. The details of the search for this information are below.

Table 1. Online Membership Inquiry and Application Documents

Organization	Gender/Sex Information Requested	If requested, was it required to submit the application
Epsilon Sorority	No	N/A
Omicron Fraternity	No	N/A
Pi Fraternity	N/A	N/A
Lambda Sorority	Yes	N/A
Chi Fraternity	No	N/A
Mu Sorority	No	N/A
Xi Fraternity	N/A	N/A
Upsilon	No	N/A
Tau Sorority	N/A	N/A

*Issues concerning identity shifts post-membership.* None of the organizations offer any information on their websites utilizing the terms cisgender or transgender. However, three of the four sororities use the gender marker *woman* in their literature consistently. This begs the question as to whether transgender women are invited to apply for membership. According to literature drafted by Washington State University for NPHC organizations (2018):

Organizations with no national policy may accept transgender people as potential new members on a campus-to-campus basis. For example, Kappa Sigma at Oklahoma State University openly accepts transgender members; however, Kappa Sigma has no existing national policy on the subject.

This does not account for sorority status if a member transitions. Epsilon Epsilon Epsilon's usage of the term *female* in regards to membership eligibility would align with a support of female-designated persons to continuously participate, as sex does not change with transitioning. However, issues may arise from identification once a member transitions. Levitt and Ippolito (2014) note, "because legal documents are marked with one's birth sex, transgender people can be unwillingly 'outed' and thus are vulnerable to discrimination in situations where they must present identification" (p. 47). Renewal and dues payment does not require identification if the name of the member does not change from what their name was during membership intake; post-sorority transitioned men who still encompass vital records denoting female born sex should have no issues renewing their membership. This may become an issue, however, if they change their identification to the male sex, and change their legal name. In addition, a dearth of sorority-related public profile photos or photos that show a masculine figure will likely draw questioning, as members often gauge member legitimacy through social media. While there are portals for member checking via national websites, the use of aliases on social media make these unreliable for assuring membership; in additions, inactive (non-financial) members may not have access to these portals. They may face questioning at conferences and organizational meeting where the

bulk of the members will present as feminine. This inquiry is not necessarily transphobic, but highlights a penchant for gatekeeping and an ignorance of the presence of ambiguous- and masculine-presenting women within sorority membership.

Indirect but leaning towards prohibition of transgender women is the statement by Tau Tau Tau, of which federal law is cited (“Federal law recognizes the right of college social fraternities and sororities to maintain single sex membership policies”; see Washington State University, 2018). While organizations and literature have failed to clarify whether their use of *woman* includes both transgender and cisgender women, there is also likely no way to confirm otherwise.

The organizations’ citation of the privilege to be discriminant regarding membership by way of sex and the inclusion of a background check release on their application alludes to the need to an official sex change on all vital records before permitting such a review. As noted above, only one organization had a statement on any page with their organization name which attended to both the gender and sex designation of individuals. This is an inclusion-focused initiative which has yet to be noted poignantly in any of the research reviewed. This has been overshadowed by the well-noted changes in the policies at same-sex institutions Spelman and Morehouse Colleges.

Same-Sex Colleges and Trans\* Students. In April 2019, the men’s institution Morehouse approved a transgender enrollment policy. This addition allows for female-designated men to seek scholarship at one of the few institutions for single-gender education for men in the United States. This policy is relevant to the study because it includes institutions that come from similar foundations as the Divine Nine; HBCUs and BGLOs were both founded to support scholars who were denied admission to Anglo universities due to racial discrimination. These scholars then

faced segregation once permitted to attend Anglo schools. Founded with support of religious groups, HBCUs historically espouse contention with ideologies falling outside of the cisnormative, heteronormative, and patriarchal structure. Standards of respectability, engrained into the strategies of surviving Jim Crow era violence, still permeate these arenas. Therefore, the policies for trans\* students are maverick but still fit the binary standards of presentation and etiquette. Transgender men are expected to dress and socialize as cisgender, heterosexual men. Drezner (2006) writes that LGBT students on HBCU campuses face institutional othering when they do not align to cis-het norms; “student survey respondents reported witnessing faculty members treating students differently due to their actual or perceived sexual orientations, specifically discriminating against gay male students” (Harper & Gasman, 2008, p. 338). Morehouse’s policy is an example of such, as there is a caveat for transitioning male-designated students: “Morehouse’s policy requires all students to self-identify as men. If a student transitions from a man to a woman, that student will no longer be eligible to study at Morehouse” (Morehouse College, 2019). This means that their enforcement will likely tie to the expulsion of Morehouse undergraduates who are reported by students, faculty, and staff. The conditions this could create for students considering a transition, or are misconstrued as feminine – or more nonbinary than masculine – are disposed for undue stress of queer and queer-perceived students. McCune Jr (2014) discusses the politics of passing as masculine enough for normative queer-phobic environs and denotes how queer men, through dress, mannerisms, dating, and organizational affiliation must perform between legible social identities. Harris (2015) details the anxiety of this act within Greek life, giving a like circumstance for men at a men’s college:

You see, concealing your identity was something you got good at; you had to hide from your family for nearly 12 years of your life, but hiding from a group of hormonal, judgmental, and often times offensive young Black men was gonna be a lil difficult” (p. 9).

This could also become the foundation for the dismissal of students who already exist on Morehouse's campus as feminine of center, but still readily identify as cisgender; transgender women who are present would be the immediate target of this policy.

How, then, should these guidelines be interpreted for NPHC organizations, of which boast themselves as same-sex? The differences, of course, are that Morehouse has a much smaller population to survey than the population of both undergraduate and graduate-level NPHC members who, upon initiation, are considered lifetime members to their respective organizations. Only a handful of violations, a bulk of which are tied to hazing and other forms of misconduct, can render a person formally excommunicated from their letters. This leaves transgender men in sororities at a crossroads; if they are distant and inactive (whether financial or nonfinancial), the concern of their discrimination stays indirect. If they become financial and active, there are significantly more chances for their acts to be deciphered as harmful to the functions of the sorority.

Cisgender women's concerns regarding queer identities in sorority functions spawn from having very few other spaces to collect as underrepresented women on college campuses. NPHC sororities fulfill their desire to lead change together, while also teaching and enforcing culturally devised strategies for gender respectability. Both transgender men and women are seen as a threat to such safe spaces because they are presumed to have male privilege. King notes (1988),

It is precisely those differences between blacks and women, between black men and black women, between black women and white women that are crucial to understanding the nature of black womanhood (p. 45-46).

Melanin-Rich women are the dominant population in NPHC organizations. Literte and Hodge (2012) is the only study found on the subject of NPHC sorority members' views of LGBTQ members, and focuses solely on the knowledge of their lesbian and bisexual members. Cisgender

women presume lesbians will utilize the sorority for sexual intimacy and disrupt the focus of the sisterhood. Sisterhood is supposed to be familial. Lesbian members are more likely to be accepted if they present as feminine, as to align with the social perception of sorority women as refined, marriageable women (Graham, 1999). Collins' (1991) work regarding women in college denotes how their upbringing presses independence and resourcefulness, yet partnership is seen as a stream of social responsibilities focused on bettering their communities (Berkowitz, & Padavic, 1999). These documents, policies, and studies all confirm that gender and sex are lesser emphasized yet essentialized facets of uplift and educational organizations for racially-underrepresented communities. In the next sections, I will outline how my participants feel their unique identities were shaped by the tenets of their family structure, social environment, and sorority. I will follow up with the themes I have found which culminate the whole of their development within these communities.

## Participants

The first story describes Jalen (they/them), Trans-Masculine/GNC (gender non-conforming) queer person. The second story depicts Elijah (he/him), a pansexual transgender man. The third story depicts Treyvon (they/them), a nonbinary queer person. The final story portrays Alton (he/him/ they/them), a trans\* queer person. The participants denoted their pronouns via a short pre-interview survey, as to address them appropriately during their interviews. Names of universities were changed and reflect popular fictional schools from movies and TV series. Two participants chose their own pseudonyms; two participants' pseudonyms were chosen by the researcher and reflect names which likely exist on the member roster of an NPHC fraternity. Names of family members, friends, and third parties have been changed to researcher's family members. In the next section, participants are introduced.



Jalen. Jalen is a 30something year old healthcare worker. They completed their undergraduate career at a large research institution in the Southeast, and holds a post-graduate level degree. They are single with no children. A petite, brown-skinned person with a short, thickset frame, they don a short-cut hairstyle with natural, dark brown hair and a shape up (a hairstyle that involves cutting along the natural hairline to make it a straight line across the forehead). They have dark eyes and wear glasses. Jalen lives a large metropolitan area on the East Coast. Jalen is a first generation college graduate. As a member of Epsilon Epsilon Epsilon Sorority, Inc., Jalen was active in their undergraduate chapter for three years before graduating and did not begin their transition until after their undergraduate experience.

*Upbringing.* Connolly and Clandinin (1988) denote that “personal practical knowledge” is a “particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions for the future to deal with the exigencies of a present solution” (p. 25). Our interview began with a question regarding upbringing. Participants were asked to discuss their background in terms of where who raised them, and how they have identified throughout their lives in terms of race, gender, sex, and sexual orientation.

Jalen expressed an upbringing marked by relocation:

So I was originally born in New York, New York, um, up to my first few years after, so I was about six and living in different parts. And then, um, when I turned six, my mom and I, we moved to Nashville, Tennessee and [stayed] there to about, I was in the second grade; then we [moved] to Maryland [...] Then we moved back to New York. And while I was in New York, we actually lived in dual states.

He describes being raised as an only child, due to the age gap between their younger sibling and themselves:

[...] when [they were] younger, I went away to college. So it was just [them] in the house by [them]self. So yeah, a lot of my time was raised by my mom and a significant amount of time with my grandparents.

Jalen realized as a youth they were interested in girls, and did not wish to dress like the young girls around them.

Um, I knew that I was masculine and I always grew up even from like a little, little girl. I would, I was tomboyish. I never liked dresses. I never liked dressing. So I really have always been masculine in that sense. However, I tried to become more feminine. Um, at the helm was my mom saying, “well maybe you should try a dress, maybe you should try make up, things like that.”

In terms of sexual orientation. So *I* realized that something was different about me when I was in the second grade. It was this girl in my class who, I just loved smelling her hair. Like she had the most, it smelled like beautiful roses, flowers. It was just so fruity. And so at recess, I would just ask her like, *can I smell your hair?* And I would get like these feelings, like I would be so happy I’d get a little tingle, like I didn’t understand what that was as a young person, but I was just like, wow.

Like I really have a crush on this girl. However, that kind of changed, you know, when I was in elementary school, um, and middle school too, I started to want to, I liked guys I crushed on guys. Um, but then when I got to like middle schools, I, my cousin, one of my closest cousins, he came out to me as gay and I was like, Oh my God, I’m gay, too. Like there’s something different about me, too. Um, so I kind of went back and forth a little bit in terms of dating guys, girls, um, but not in a significant way. Um, I had my first girlfriend when I was in like the eighth grade. She was actually in high school, so I was pulling them young. Um (laughs) but, um, I still kind of like dated boys as well cause I’m trying to figure out my sexuality and what that meant for me.

In high school, Jalen recalls being popular and dating a boy who was a year ahead of them:

Everyone at the school knew James and Kelly [Jalen’s name before transitioning]; we were the power high school couple per se. Um, and then when he went up to college after my prom, he’s a year older than me. He just kind of like broke things off. That hurt me to a deep state to where throughout college I didn’t date anyone.

Elijah. Elijah is a 20something year old hospitality worker. He completed his undergraduate career at a large research institution in the Southeast, and holds a post-graduate level degree. He is single with no children. A brown-skinned person of average male height in

the United States, with a heavy frame, they don natural, dark brown hair in a burst fade Mohawk (a hairstyle with short tapered sides and rear with long top hair from the front to the middle of the head) with a shape up. They have dark eyes, thick eyebrows, long sideburns, a light beard and a goatee. Elijah lives a large metropolitan area in the Southeast. Elijah is a first generation college graduate. As a member of Lambda Lambda Lambda Sorority, Inc., Elijah was active in their undergraduate chapter for four years before graduating. He began to transition during his undergraduate experience.

*Upbringing.* Elijah describes his upbringing as follows:

My family didn't, not never talked about sexual orientation or sex, really. It was more like you don't do it until you're married. And that's that, it was no conversation around really sex. Um, my mom was the most open one about it. Like if I came to her with questions about, you know, um, I saw something on TV or this happened with a friend, we were talking about it. But unless I brought it up, it wasn't something that was openly discussed in our family. So if I knew I couldn't talk about like my own interpersonal relationships, I knew I couldn't have a conversation about like me not identifying it as heterosexual or identifying as a woman.

Well my moms kind of found a note of me talking to another girl and asked me about it and I said, "yeah, this is me." Like I did, like I liked her. And so, so she asked me, "so do you like girls?" And I said yes. And that's kind of where that ended and began. So they were aware that I had been in relationships, at least she was well aware of it. But the rest of my family, I don't think they knew. I never told them outright that I was lesbian.

Treyvon. Treyvon is a 30something year old corporate business worker. They completed their undergraduate career at a large research institution in the Midwest, and holds a post-graduate level degree. They are partnered with no children. A brown-skinned person with a short, slim, muscular frame, they don a short-cut hairstyle with natural, dark brown hair and a shape up (a hairstyle that involves cutting along the natural hairline to make it a straight line across the forehead). They have dark eyes and wear glasses, and have minimal facial hair.

Treyvon lives a mid-sized urban area in the West. Treyvon is a first generation college graduate. As a member of Mu Mu Mu Sorority, Inc., Treyvon was active in their undergraduate chapter for one year before graduating and did not begin their transition until after their undergraduate experience.

*Upbringing.* Treyvon describes their upbringing as follows:

I had a very Judeo-Christian understanding. Um, and from that understanding, it was absolutely male and female. Um, God created men and women to procreate. [...] And so [to Dad, that] means that he's gonna have a whole bunch of grandchildren. And that's kind of how my dad lived and does believe, even now. Um, so my, uh, upbringing was definitely very much shaped by that in the binary that I lived in [...]

I was about 15. I looked very much like a little boy. Um, stereotypically, chest had not developed, nothing. I was very broad. My face was my, my jaw line was really sharp. Um, and so by all accounts, I looked like a guy.

My dad, um, stated that I had to be a girl because I was, um, doing too much masculine presenting things and people were asking him questions. *I thought you had a daughter, you have a son.* I didn't apparently look very [feminine] growing up. So, um, my dad was more embarrassed than anything [...] because I just, I didn't look like everybody else. My build, was not like every woman. Um, the, the way I carried myself, I couldn't exist. Feminizing it, it just, it just didn't work for me. Um, I guess that that was a lot that I had to kind of grapple with.

Alton. Alton is a 30something year old nonprofit leader. He completed his undergraduate career at a large research institution in the Southeast, and holds a post-graduate level degree. He is partnered with one child. A brown-skinned person of average male height in the United States, with a heavy frame; he dons natural, very short dark brown hair. He has dark eyes, thick eyebrows, long sideburns, a thick beard and a goatee. Alton lives a large metropolitan area in the Southeast. Alton is a first generation college graduate. As a member of Tau Tau Tau Sorority, Inc., Alton was active in their undergraduate chapter for three years before graduating. He did not begin his transition until after his undergraduate experience.

*Upbringing.* Alton grew up with younger parents:

So my parents, um, met very young. Uh, they had me pretty young, um, around 19. Um, and so I always describe my relationship with my parents as in I grew up with them. And so I think a lot of the happenings of my youth were really with like, it's like youth raising youth, which is really interesting.

I would say like around gender, I was allowed to be pretty fluid in my gender expression. Um, as a young child, uh, I played with, uh, I dressed in boys' clothes. I played with boys' toys. Um, and it wasn't really until, um, puberty hit that things began to shift in my household around kind of more language of being a girl, being a woman, you know, puberty can do that. And I think the biggest thing was from my father's perspective is that this is the opportunity now I can get pregnant. And I think one of his biggest fears, particularly from his, you know, at the time, you know, his [...] girl was teen pregnancy. And so my parents became highly involved in the church, um, [...] when I was around 10, after being in a really tumultuous, um, I would say equally abusive physical relationship with one another.

Um, and so, you know, the [...] churches are incredibly gendered, um, especially around like what women and what men can do and what they can wear. So women aren't allowed to speak and hold office. Um, they are not allowed to show any type of like skin from below the knee. So it was just a very difficult, um, kind of shift for me, um, with being in kind of this free welding child where I could do pretty much whatever I wanted in terms of like my own gender expression and being allowed to play with boys and being, I was the only quote unquote girl on our, um, you know, our rec centers, basketball team, which was all guys. So like I was just allowed to just really do whatever I wanted in terms of gender. And I think, you know, once my dad was realized, you know, well that's a wrap, you know, in terms of, um, my own, uh, like kind of ability to make choices for myself.

Like he kinda wrapped that up because now I could potentially succumb to temptation from men, which is hilarious to me 'cause I wasn't even interested in men. I've always been kind of academically gifted, but I definitely struggled with gender identity and sexuality. And not really having language to name those things, really until college. Um, you know, I didn't use words like trans\* or lesbian or anything like that to describe myself. Um, but I definitely was attracted to women and you know, I was a writer at the time, so I would, you know, write these really elaborate poems. And my gym teacher found one of the poems and called a parent teacher conference. Um, and which my, both my parents became enraged. Um, my mom left me with my dad and he basically like beat me until I bled and they both kicked me out of the home [...]

## College Considerations

Only two of the participants discussed a college choice process. Choosing a college to attend did not include a search for queer-friendly institutions for these interviewees. All of the participants attended institutions in the United States, in the Midwestern and Southeastern regions. These areas are notably anti-LGBT, as documented by the plethora of lawsuits regarding rights for same-sex couples and transgender people (Bruni, 2017). As Alton explains regarding their college choice process:

Um, the counselor who actually told me about my Undergrad, um, she's an [sorority member]. Um, and told me, you know, my, "I have a soror," which I didn't even know what that meant at the time [...] "I have a soror who, you know, [who] works at a school, university and you know, I know you probably never heard about it." 'Cause I was going to go to school, I was looking at schools, if I wasn't going to go to Ailey University for performing arts and I was just gonna stay in [state]. Like I was just like, I'll go to, you know, um, Hillman College or one of the HBCUs or [large PWI]. And so, um, you know, I just remember kind of being like the options from a, from young, my mom always said, "well, you all got two options: either the military or college."

For Treyvon, college was an afterthought. They were primarily interested in joining the Army:

I was skipping a class 'cause I didn't want to go and I either had detention or to go and hear a presentation about this school and how they were doing on-site admission. So I said, I guess I'll go to that. Um, they pulled my grades and realized, "Oh, you're actually smart, so do you want to come to our school on a full scholarship?" And I was like, "okay." Like there was no joy or anything. I didn't want to go to college. I wanted to go to the military and it didn't end up happening [...] college was my second choice. Probably more like my third or fourth choice. I probably would [have] chose to do something else with my life.

## College Pre-Sorority

This section will discuss college life for all participants before they joined their respective sororities. As noted in their college choice process, Alton explains that their

knowledge of Greek life came from high school counselors, who were eagerly connecting them to college opportunities throughout the country through their sorority members:

I'm a first generation college student, so you know, my perceptions around Greek life, I didn't really, you know, it's like a different world, right? Like I really didn't know much about it. I didn't have Greeks in my family and so, [...] I didn't even know that Black people [...] for real like, did that, right. In high school, my 11th and 12th grade, some of the most impactful instructors I had were Xi, um, I think one of them was a Lambda, but the most of them were Mu and I think we had a couple of Taus. Um, but Mu Mu Mu was really prevalent at my, um, high school [...]

Um, and [the dean] at the time, Dr. Quinneke King was a Tau coming from Fredrick Douglass University. She was also the Director of the sorority's Communications Department and came and became our president and also was a very extraordinary woman. Happened to be a queer woman. She was the first [melanated] queer woman I had ever seen [...] Um, she literally was like, she was awesome. Um, very refined, [...] person.

Alton explains that their interest in Greek life came from a member of a fraternity during their freshman year:

So my RA [resident assistant] was a Xi and he, I felt like he was about getting all the Black babies to consider like Greek life in some way. [...] he was like, have you thought about going Greek? And I was like, wow, I don't know anything about that. And he is like, "you know, well, you go to an informational, so you find out." Right? [...] Um, and I was like, okay, you know, um, I would, I would consider that for sure.

Alton did not enjoy the way he was treated by members at the first informational meeting:

And there were also a lot of people at the time in my class were interested in Lambda. And so I remember my friends being like, "we're all going to this Lambda informational, do you want to go?" And I was like, eh okay. You know, like sure. 'Cause once again, I didn't have a lot of exposure to Greek life. So I went and I hated it. I felt, I felt very um, dismissed [...] people weren't making eye contact with me. 'Cause once again, I didn't change my look for anybody. So I showed up, you know, highly masculine, [...] you know, I was dressed up, but I still had on [men's clothing]. So there wasn't a lot of eye contact. Like I could tell that they was just interested in other women. Um, and so I was like, that was whack. I didn't enjoy that.

With one organization off of the list, Alton appreciated the directness involved in his invitation to the next interest meeting. An alumni campus leader's persistent voice on campus motivated him to look into the organization he eventually joined:

[A]t the time, like I had already been getting involved. I was a part of First-Generation College Student Collective and the African Student Union, and I didn't know this until later, but somebody put a bug in Natasha's ear to come holler at me and she was like, um, you know, Tau Tau Tau is having an informational on campus and I'd like for you to come. Um, and I was like, oh, okay. And like the thing about Tasha was she looked me in my eye, she was genuine about being like, "Yo, we would like for you to come to this informational."

Unlike his experience with Lambda, the ladies of Tau were accepting of Alton's masculine presentation:

They weren't phased at all how I looked, they actually complimented me like, "Dang, that's a really nice [outfit], stuff like that where I was like, "ah, cool." You know, and so, and Tasha would just hype me up. Like, you know, "I see you," you know, um, you know, I was trying to get involved with [...] all this stuff.

As Elijah discusses his membership intake process, he reflects on coming out as a lesbian to his dean (the lead educator of the intake group) and their line sisters (the group of potential members) regarding their attraction to women in a casual conversation:

Yeah, I came out as a lesbian first. Um, and I told, um, my dean when I was crossing [going through the Membership Intake Process], 'cause she would just have conversations throughout our process about things. Um, like they would ask like, "have you had boyfriends? Have you had, have you had a girlfriend, are you dating someone?" And things like that. So in that moment I told, you know, my line sisters and my dean that I was a lesbian, but that I wasn't really sure all the way. I just knew that I liked girls, but I just for, like the comfort of other people, I just said it was lesbian, if that makes sense.

By dean, Elijah is addressing the sorority member who is responsible for teaching the aspirants a bulk of the member expectations and organization history during the membership intake process (MIP, or casually known as being "on line" and "crossing"); one's line sisters or brothers are those pursuing membership during the same intake period.



## College Post-Membership

This section discusses participants' lives after joining their respective sororities. After joining the organization, Alton acted as typical for a new initiate, or neo: he was highly involved with the organization and was quite visible with his representation through clothing:

So after, after the initiation process, um, I was that neo, I wore my [organization] letters everywhere. Um, so the funny thing is that people began to know me as the gay Tau, which, you know, I don't know. Like, now that I think about it [...] I didn't care.

However, there were times in which Alton's display was in contrast with the standard dress of the sorority:

I was different 'cause I wasn't like- the only time that I had wore a dress was for special rituals and that was, and I had to borrow that dress or [...] that was one of my spec's [close sorority sister] dresses. So, you know, everybody knew that I wasn't going to compromise my look for nobody.

*Relationships.* Participants held different views on dating in college. When asked if they were out as lesbians as a college student, Elijah affirmed that he was out as a lesbian, and told his sorority sisters and dean while he was going through membership intake. During college, Jalen did not date anyone. Much like Treyvon – who resisted dating in high school out of concern for discrimination – Jalen turned to platonic relationships with women to fulfill social desirability needs. After joining the sorority, Jalen maintained close friendships with other Greek women:

Yeah, I like I'm always had a thing for Mu women so I was the one Epsilon on campus that was friends with all the Mus 'cause I had crushes on all of them. So, yeah. (laughter) They'd be like, "Kelly [Jalen's name before transitioning], why are you always at the Mus' House?" I hung with them, because I get to spend time with all of these beautiful ass women but I never acted on it, you know, or anything like that.

There was no intimacy between any of the Mus. However, Jalen often contributed to the chastising of LGBTQ people with their sorors:

I was going through this world really struggling with my sexuality. So I was pretty mean to them. [...] I remember there was an out, trans\* student who I was really mean to as well because I was like, you know, you're not a trans\*, you're a man. You're a he-she, like because I was, I was holding on to that, that hatred, within myself.

Jalen's actions reflect not only an insistence on passing as straight but also fulfilling a desire to continue a path set by their popularity in high school, despite their sexual orientation (Pfeffer, 2014). In understanding the social requirements of their religious high school friends, however, and relocating to a conservative region and collegiate environment, their desire to achieve a sense of belonging compelled them to act antithetical to their nature (Astin, 1982; Strayhorn, 2008). Brown (2005) writes that to establish safety in conservative and often violent queer-phobic realms, LGBTQ people must "adorn their mask that grins and lies because a history of racism and homophobia has robbed them of the possibility of self-esteem and self-love; thus, a mask perfectly accessorizes their self-hatred" (p. 25).

"And so I really didn't come out as gay until [...] I was back at home," Jalen remarked, in discussing their sexuality. College would neither be the place they would delve into their sexuality as a cisgender lesbian nor as a transmasculine person.

Alton, however, had been dedicated to their masculine appearance since their teenage years, throughout parental abandonment and homelessness. While a sense of comfort for the yet-to-transition Alton, the insistence on wearing the clothes aligned to one's personal comfort (vs. socially-acceptable dress) is one of historical political and spiritual importance for queer community members (Cressy; 1996; Davis & Simmons, 2008). This dates back to the pre-colonial period. As Cressy (1996) sets forth,

[L]iterary scholars often argue that cross-gender clothing signaled subversion, resistance, and transgression and that the sex-gender system of early modern England was in a state of flux. Cross-dressing, we are told, upset patriarchal

values, assaulted cultural boundaries, and unraveled the sexual separators of ambivalence, androgyny, and eroticism (p. 439).

Davis and Simmons (2008) note that one a lesbian participant attending an HBCU faced social challenges from dressing “like a boy” (p. 203). While the adherence within the sorority dynamic is socially policed, both social and formal policing have enacted and supported the violence of queer people throughout the modern era. As Mogul et al. (2011) writes, “the policing of queer sexualities has been arguably the most visible and recognized point of contact between LGBT people and the criminal legal system” (p. 47). Stotzer (2014) specifies further,

Contact between LGBT people and [law enforcement and criminal justice] personnel is often dictated by a systematic need to reinforce what is normative, such as in police raids of gay bars, prosecuting same-sex public sexual contact while dismissing heterosexual public sexual contact, illegal stops of people who are “deceiving” others by wearing clothes different than their natal sex would indicate is appropriate, etc. (p. 264).

One of the 32 privileges of cisgenderism – living in alignment with the social expectations of one’s designated birth sex – noted by Killermann (2014) is “being able to purchase clothes that match your gender identity without being refused service/mockled by staff or questioned on your genitals” (point 20). Because Alton already dressed masculine, they were presumed gay:

Here I am seemingly like, like, like in people's eyes, a woman wearing men's clothes, therefore you're likely gay. \*laughs\* So, you know, I'd never, I never really had to describe it. Like people knew I liked women, people knew I showed up in varsity jackets and Tims [boots] and you know, jeans and whatever.

Elijah’s transition came with new clothing and casually ignoring their sorority’s dress code:

Um, when it came to like going to like our area meetings and things like that. I brought a skirt to wear, but I did not wear it to any of the meetings and events that we had, for area [meetings]. Um, and that was kind of me like a test to see if I would be like, if anyone would say anything to me, if anything would happen. Um, so nothing was said. There were definitely other women that were there wearing pants. And things like that. Um, and so from that moment on, for, for every event that happened, um, after area, I would let them know like, I'm not

going to be wearing, you know, a dress, a skirt, this is what I'm going to be wearing. Um, it'll be in the same color scheme.

Snorton (2017) writes of a trans\* man – Jim McHarris – who was featured in a fashion spread within a 1954 Ebony Magazine spread, donning what is captioned as a pose in “typical masculine gesture” (p. 168). Dress is a political act which may be rescinded from trans\* and nonconforming people through policy and law, impacting their ability to actualize their gender identity even in death. In a study by Stirrups (2018), he found that multiple funeral homes refused to accept the body of transgender activist Andy Cray, without aligning the body to heteronormative standards:

Even after Andy's death, the fear of prejudice loomed: funeral homes often “de-transition” transgender people by using the wrong names, pronouns, and clothes, and it required “some research and detective work” to find a funeral home that would respect Andy's gender identity [...] (p. 443).

In circumstances in which a consumer is paying for services – be they organizational or business-related – the question looms over whether one should, by virtue of affiliation, align with the views and mores of the group, or if one’s presence should be enough to adjust policies and benefits to acknowledge their presence. Adjustments may or may not allow their presence to continue, which was a fear for Jalen and Alton. Historical data notes that trans\* citizens whose freedoms are blocked are willing to go desperate lengths to circumvent social and formal policing, as was the case in the 1957 of trans\* woman Ava Betty Brown (Snorton, 2017):

Brown was arrested for wearing women’s clothes on Chicago’s West Side that day, taken to a police precinct, and “undressed and found to be physically a man.” She was charged with female impersonation. Less than a month later, Ava Betty Brown testified in court that she was “double-sexed,” announcing plans to go to Denmark for an operation to correct her condition (p. 162).

Such policing can occur because of a lack of complete transitioning and also impact the ability to fully transition. In January 2020, legislation in Colorado, Florida, Missouri, Oklahoma, South

Carolina and South Dakota is pending which will restrict or prohibit “doctors from providing [transgender youth] certain gender-related medical treatment. Whitehurst and Crary report (2020):

The bill recently introduced in South Dakota would make it a felony for medical providers to perform operations or administer hormone therapy to help minors change their gender. The Missouri bill would subject doctors to revocation of their license if they administered gender-reassignment treatment, and parents who consented to such treatment would be reported to child-welfare officials for child abuse (para. 6).

Laws which restrict trans\* agency jeopardize the social acceptability of trans\* people in all realms, including criminal justice, counseling, and education.

#### Reaction from Organization Members

In this section, the views and mores of the organizations the participants joined are emphasized by the reactions given by cisgender members towards the participants’ changes in identity. None of the organizations has directly communicated with the participants regarding their transitions, though social factors – particularly their treatment from cisgender members of their respective sororities – play into all of the participants’ current inactivity. Elijah was close with their intake group, the young cisgender women in which they were initiated. Members who join together are called one’s line sisters or line brothers. Their reaction to their trans\* identity was supportive:

They kind of were just like, “well, are you still going to be a member or does this mean that you’re, you know, renouncing the org.” And I said, “I’m not doing that. I still want to be a part.”

Because of the elongated and rigorous intake process, line sisters and brothers tend to be the most loyal and dedicated to each other, remaining active throughout the lifecycle regardless of

spatial changes. Reactions from men in fraternities was also positive, but pushback came from within the sorority's elder members:

Um, and they [fraternity members] were already going ahead and adjusting [to calling Elijah] "bro" and things like that. Um, and then like, uh, members of some of the other Panhellenic and like IFC, and multicultural Greek organizations, were also very supportive. Um, it was mostly just the older women in my org that were just, they didn't know how to approach or what to do with me.

Pushback from graduate-level sorority members came from queerness, not solely transitioning. Upon coming out as a lesbian, Treyvon's elder sorors immediately began finding ways to present them as straight:

Grad chapter, it was this image that they wanted and the image was, "if you're going to be a lesbian, then you need to be a feminist presenting lesbian because you can, we can hide you. We don't have to explain anything. Even if you come with a woman, why can't she be your sister?" Like they had already rationalized that part of me.

After their transition, they ran into a soror in public; the woman denied they knew Treyvon:

So, um, we're walking away from the gala and I see a soror that I know, um, like she was at my, um, initiation. She was, she was there when I got pinned. Like I know this woman. So when I walked up to her I said, hey soror, do you remember me? And she looked at me like, "nope".

These instances caused the participants to question if their lifelong bond was conditional on their cisnormative, heteronormative, or feminine-performative passing.

In the next section, the themes of the four interviews will be discussed.

## Themes

After all interviews were completed, they were transcribed using an electronic transcription service and then reviewed for accuracy. Transcripts were then read for key terms regarding experiences. Repetition was used to identify key terms as well as the amount of time a participant spoke on a topic. The first analysis resulted in all key terms, approximately, 50 were

condensed into 44 as a result of synonyms. Ten categories (presented in bold in Table 2) were then condensed because of overlapping ideas within participants' interviews.

Table 2. Interview Concepts

Medical issues/interventions	Intersex	Questioning identity	Affirming trans identity
Intersex	Presenting as masculine as a youth	Family	Siblings
Expectations of womanhood	Cisgender/heterosexual expectation	Self-loathing	Hair
Restrictions at puberty	Learning to become a woman	Presentation	Questioning identity
Learning about Greeks	Benefits of membership	Masculinity	Affirming queer identity
Coming out	Selective divulging	Violence	Romance
Language	History	Reactions to coming out	Close members accepting
Graduate and distant members unsupportive	Exclusion	Chosen family	Education
Discovering other queer members	Relocation	Secrecy	Supremacy
Social media	Attempting to fit in within the LGBT community	Passing	Reputation
Queer member self-distancing	Singling out	Mental Health	Excommunication

Those key terms were then sorted into themes based on the relation to one another. For example, presentation and appearance became part of dedication. These three categories were then analyzed for subcategories. Finally, throughout this process I reviewed and refined categories with Jacqueline Bach, the major professor.

As explained within the *Methodology*, temporality, sociality, and place are the three facets of narrative inquiry. Through these aspects, the participants denote their world, and set the

place, time, and events involved in their pre-college, college, and post-college lives. Without much prompting, the interviewees were able to create a clear understanding of their feelings, thoughts, and reactions to the circumstances and players within their unique phases.

Discovery. Discovery is defined as “the act of finding or learning something for the first time” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In this section, the participants explain how they learned of the queerness, language surrounding queerness, queer communities, and the bias associated with identifying as a lesbian, then as trans\*.

*Discovery of queerness.* The participants discussed learning about their queerness through interactions with family before college. Treyvon’s understanding of sex and gender was pressed through their father, whose explanations were inherently religious:

I had a very Judeo-Christian understanding. Um, and from that understanding, it was absolutely male and female. Um, God created men and women to procreate. [...] And so [to Dad, that] means that he's gonna have a whole bunch of grandchildren. And that's kind of how my dad lived and does believe, even now. Um, so my, uh, upbringing was definitely very much shaped by that in the binary that I lived in, in the boundaries that I lived in were very much shaped by that. So I knew that even though I felt that something was different, um, I could never express that [...]

This was similar to the response given by Elijah, whose first utterances in their interview noted their religious background. Elijah responded:

Everything I was ever told was, you know, you get in, you get married, you have children and natural family, man, woman, anything outside of that is an abomination, you go to hell. And that was kind of like, point-blank-period.

Many of the participants began to discuss the discovery of their orientation during their pre-teen years. Jalen explains:

So I realized that something was different about me when I was in the second grade. It was this girl in my class who, I just loved smelling her hair. Like she had the most, it smelled like beautiful roses, flowers. It was just so fruity. And so at recess, I would just ask her like, *can I smell your hair?* And I would get like these



feelings, like I would be so happy [and] get a little tingle, like I didn't understand what that was as a young person, but I was just like, wow.

Like I really have a crush on this girl. However, that kind of changed, you know, when I was in elementary school, um, and middle school too, I started to want to, I liked guys I crushed on guys.

As children, another family member divulging their attraction to the same gender struck a chord with naming their queerness:

Um, but then when I got to like middle school, I, my cousin, one of my closest cousins, he came out to me as gay and I was like, Oh my God, I'm gay, too. Like there's something different about me, too. Um, so I kind of went back and forth a little bit in terms of dating guys, girls, um, but not in a significant way. Um, I had my first girlfriend when I was in like the eighth grade. She was actually in high school, so I was pulling them young. Um (laughs) but, um, I still kind of like, dated boys as well 'cause I'm trying to figure out my sexuality and what that meant for me.

Jalen's story is unique in it was the sole response that did not begin with a religious foundation; their first instances of sex and gender, as well as orientation, do not appear until their teenager years. Still, this instance is tied to religiosity. Therefore, Jalen's experiences will be explored more in the Distancing themes section under religion.

In two instances, when women within the family discovered their queerness they were supportive, but warned against sharing with other family members. Elijah's mother found out before they left for college:

Well my moms kind of found a note of me talking to another girl and asked me about it and I said, yeah, this is me. Like I did, like I liked her. And so, so she asked me, so do you like girls? And I said yes. And that's kind of where that ended and began. So they were aware that I had been in relationships, at least she was well aware of it. But the rest of my family, I don't think they knew. I never told them outright that I was lesbian.

For Jalen, a casual conversation with their mother from their childhood made their adulthood announcement less surprising:

I told my mom, she understood and she was like well, we talked about this before when you were about 13. I thought things had changed and I see that they didn't, but she just accepted me.

With the discovery of their queerness came a change in presentation. However, not all instances of masculinity were delayed until their divulgence. Treyvon denotes that on top of not feeling very feminine, they were also less feminine in build than others were at their age:

My dad, um, stated that I had to be a girl because I was, um, doing too much masculine presenting things and people were asking him questions. *I thought you had a daughter, you have a son.* I didn't apparently look very [female] growing up. So, um, my dad was more embarrassed than anything [...] because I just, I didn't look like everybody else. My build, was not like every woman. Um, the, the way I carried myself, I couldn't exist. Feminizing it, it just, it just didn't work for me. Um, I guess that that was a lot that I had to kind of grapple with.

While Treyvon's father insisted upon father-daughter distance and instead coerced Treyvon to socialize and bond with the women in the family, Alton's parents turned to physical violence upon discovering their queerness:

I was a writer at the time, so I would, you know, I'd write these really elaborate poems. And my gym teacher found one of the poems and called a parent-teacher conference. Um, in which my, both my parents became enraged. Um, my mom left me with my dad and he basically like beat me until I bled and they both kicked me out of the home at 14.

Alton's excommunication by the family is unique to the group in the study, but not to the experiences of queer youth. As Chloe Jordan reported in her interview with *The Guardian*, "chronic homelessness" greatly impacts Melanin-Rich LGBT individuals (Worthy, 2018, para. 3). In addition to mental health issues like depression and anxiety, studies have also found similarly disproportionate numbers of lesbian and bisexual-identified girls end up in juvenile detention (Belknap et al, 2012; Buttar et al, 2013). While instances with the criminal justice system did not appear in any of the interviews, mental health concerns were thematic in three of

the participant interviews. This will be discussed in a later section. As children, participants noted a range of experiences. High school was isolating for Treyvon, due to their sexuality:

Um, my circle existed of me as I think, [...] I kinda kept myself away from people, um, because I didn't want women to get that, hmm, something's just not right bout yeah. Um, and um, I just wasn't comfortable around being with men. Um, it, it just didn't suit me.

Treyvon continues to reflect on ways in which they knew they were queered in comparison to the behaviors of young women around them:

I really submerged myself in church and school. If I wasn't at one of those, I wasn't nowhere else. Um, so I didn't, I didn't do anything as it related to being a part of, um, heteronormative behavior for a typical high school girl. [...] Um, people asked questions, people questioned me a lot, especially at church. But, uh, if you were, if you were studying theology and possibly going into ministry, it was a little bit different. You didn't have to answer as many questions. And so I did that. I got very, very heavily involved in youth ministry in my church and youth choir. Um, and so I didn't have to answer a lot of questions 'cause I had practice and I had to do, we were doing stuff [...] the key is I always had something to do so people don't ask me a lot of questions because I was so involved in ministry.

I basically was betrothed through my father to um, one of the bishop's nephews, and him and I had the date and it was like the most irked experience of my life 'cause it was literally like, do we, we not 'bout to do nothing. You don't like me; I don't like you. Only reason we doing anything is because of our parents.

This confusion over sexuality and sexual identity is highlighted in other interviews due to the narrow classifications and definitions given to them by parents and guardians. Treyvon stated that they believed their orientation was fixed, due to the familial insistence on their responsibility to reproduce:

Um, so my, uh, upbringing was definitely very much shaped by that in the binary that I lived in, in the boundaries that I lived in were very much shaped by that. So I knew that even though I felt that something was different, um, I could never express that so much so that I dated, um, was in heterosexual relationships, hated it, hated the very thought of it. However, there was a role that needs to be played.

*Discovering language.* The participants discussed denying the term lesbian as presented to them from others. While their friends and family realized they liked girls and women, the participants and their loved ones usually did not have an understanding of gender identities outside of the binaries of cisgender women and men. It was not until they met people within the LGBTQ community that they found language that aligned with their self-perception. Much like racial and ethnic identities, dominant ideologies (European vs. hued people; and straight vs. queer people) often create and impress terms on underrepresented people that are inaccurate; without structures of representation to combat impreciseness, underrepresented people are generalized and made invisible. In Chapter One, a defense of using alternative racial language is given. Springate (2016) explains,

Unlike that of Native peoples, whose colonial-era identities and relationships we understand largely based on the descriptions left by European explorers and colonists, the identity and culture of white colonists have been to a large degree understood through their own written words (p. 03-8).

The case of heterosexual and cisgender “colonists” describing and creating understanding for queer identities has resulted in similarly deleterious effects, limiting and erasing the language necessary for gender- and sexual orientation-variant people to understand themselves and their history. Writing queerness as pathology relegated individuals to medical journals and news on police interventions, shadowing the search for community and slowing the development of needed resources (Billard, 2019). Within Chapter Two under *Failure to Succumb to Assimilation*, I apply Halberstam’s definition of success as those “who excel at accruing money, privileged and high titles, and reproduction. The antithesis is seen as queer, like ‘nonconformity and non-reproductive lifestyles’” (see p. 69). Continuing this passage, “failure is defined as not being a man, European-American, or Christian; but also encompasses failing to perform as

instructed by society based on one's perceived statuses (i.e. race, class, gender)". Mocking the cisgender and heterosexual expectation and this definition of success, Stryker (2006) writes,

I want to lay claim to the dark power of my monstrous identity without using it as a weapon against others or being wounded by it myself. I will say this as bluntly as I know how: I am a transsexual, and therefore I am a monster (p. 246).

The association with queerness as failure explains why the participants were not introduced to the language of the queer community until they were observed acting out queer acts, where they were addressed and deemed problematic. As a middle-school student, Alton was informed of language associated with their attraction to women:

My mother was like, well, you're a lesbian, you know, and I never, I remember when they confronted me about it and I remember just crying and saying, no, I'm not. And I didn't know how to really describe what, what I was feeling, but it was never really like, "yes, I'm attracted to women", but this body, I don't know how to provide language to you all to describe what's going on with my gender.

Elijah's understanding of trans\* came from a student colleague introducing him to trans\* students after participating in a student development leader training. Upon meeting another melanated transgender person, they became more settled and confident in identifying publicly:

Like this is an actual identity, and this is the missing piece that I've been trying to articulate, but I couldn't because I couldn't find something else that I could point to someone else and say, well, it's not just me. So and so also feels this way.

As noted in *Discovery of queerness*, Jalen learned the term "gay" from a cousin who identified as such. The discovery of more language in college occurred through witnessing their fellow sorors experiment with women (learning "bi-curiosity") and meeting a transgender person (who they slurred as a "he-she" while reconciling their own identity). Bi-curiosity refers to people who are interested in having phasic same-gender sexual experiences. While their justification for maintaining a cis-het presentation in college leaned on religiosity, Jalen was able to further

express the intricacies of their gender identity and sexual orientation after leaving the military and coming out as a lesbian:

And that was masculine-centered for a very long time until I realized that I'm not necessarily a girl, but I'm also not necessarily a boy. And so that's when I started to identify on the trans\* spectrum, um, and here I am today. I identify as non-binary, um, and as trans masculine. [...] I didn't start identifying as trans until maybe about four or five years ago. [...] And I think because I identify as trans masculine, my sexual orientation label per se has changed. So where now I identify as queer because I tend to think to myself I'm like, well if I'm a trans masculine I'm not necessarily gay, identify as lesbian because I no longer identify as a woman who exclusively dates women, so I've opened it up, now I identify as queer.

*Discovering community.* Communities can be as small as a few informally tied friends sharing like experiences or interests, to entire neighborhoods or organizations with similar intentions (Austin et al, 2014). As trans\* sorority members, the participants found that their identities altered the time and tone of receptivity in differing environments. Online outlets provided safe spaces for the participants to escape tension felt in the cisgender, heteronormative arena of Greek life.

Social media outlets also helped participants to find intimate partnership when partners were hard to find where they were living; several studies highlight this as a strategy for building a supportive queer community, particularly in small, conservative arenas (Drushel, 2010; Duguay, 2016; Fox & Ralston, 2016; Fox & Warber, 2015). Alton was in a small college with a limited dating pool, which inspired to find community online. He still identified as a woman while in college, yet was masculine-presenting:

Um, so dating was, I've found like I definitely was an internet-connecting person. Like I was on black planet [a social media site for those seeking hued partners]. I was on this thing called downlink [a social media site for those seeking queer partners]. Um, and so I was meeting women that way because it wasn't like there were kind of options at Camden College, right? Like, goodness, it was still a small school.

Alton continues the exchanges with queer people, in which he was culled into defining himself into more detailed terms to describe their queerness. While he appreciated learning more language to describe the identities within the LGBTQ landscape, he also found them to be limiting:

And going on pages and seeing, and I saw people who looked like me who are masculine and I was like, well I guess I'm just stud. Right? Like, this is the closest thing that I could do. So in chat rooms, I would say I was a stud, but like when people would ask me, I would just tell them I like women, right? Like I'd never gave a straight answer, if that makes sense? Like, and I found that people would get annoyed with me, like, why don't you just, you know, you're a lesbian and that word never felt good for me. I always was like, uh, um, and I guess there, because there's just like, you know, even when I think about like other masculine of center people that I looked up to in the media at that time, right? Like the, uh, Queen Latifahs and the Missys and Da Brats [three women music artists] and folks like that, like they never named their identity.

According to ButchVoices.com (grassroots organization), “masculine of center” was coined by B. Cole, founder of the Brown Boi Project, a coalition of queered people dedicated to eradicating race and gender violence and inequality. Jourian (2017) adds, “BBP is an organization for masculine of center people of color across gender identities who seek and embody non-oppressive masculinities” (p. 8). The term recognizes the breadth and depth of identity for those “who tilt toward the masculine side of the gender scale and includes a wide range of identities such as butch, stud, aggressive/AG, dom, macha, tomboi, trans-masculine, etc.” (ButchVoices.com, n/d). The credit is emphasized in Rand (2017) and the definition is affirmed by Jourian (2017).

Social media was one of the ways he found intimacy in college:

Um, because the school was so small, it's only 2,400 students at the school, entirely and a hundred black people. Right. And so, you know, it's not a lot of us. Um, and so, you know, I dated a woman I found, met a woman online. Um, we dated for a little bit. Um, she was in Chicago. Uh, so I would drive the day in and meet up with her.

Much like blackplanet and downlink, Facebook aided in Treyvon's discovery of their wife:

I met my, my wife, um, during we met online, but, um, over Facebook messenger. Um, I'm also a part of a, uh, uh, LGBTQ fraternity, which again, I think it allowed me to be even more out and open and realize, hey, um, this is also something that's needed. Um, they also allow me to be, um, fraternity bound to [the wife's organization]. I was introduced to her and we bonded as lesbians, Black women. And, um, when it was time for me to, when I started changing my transition became something that I couldn't keep to myself.

Years into their relationship, Treyvon took to the application to tell the world of their trans\* identity:

I didn't tell her. I think I told Facebook first [...] that my pronouns had changed [...] I feel like it's easier to tell the world before it is to tell people that you love dearly.

This announcement was used as the gateway to their discussion with their partner, who they believed was intolerant of trans\* people.

[S]he had talked about how she didn't understand trans\*-identified folks. So I knew me coming out as a trans\*-identified person, "you won't get it. You literally have told me that you don't get it." And for her it was like, "I didn't get it, but I never said that I wouldn't get it."

Alton found community after their relocation from the West to East Coast through a dating application:

I don't need, like when I say community, like I don't need a ton of people. Like I'm good with just a few folks. So when I moved to [a large city] very small black queer community, I remember, a black, uh, queer masculine of center person hit me up on OkCupid, not on some like "I'm trying to holler" but like, "who are you, where did you come from? I don't see other black masculine of center people; can we have coffee?"

*Reaction from the Family.* As stated in the section on upbringing, Treyvon pointed out that their father speculated about their gender, but insisted they adjusted their performativity to be more feminine. While this instance was a reflection of the possible trans\* self early in life, few families encompass the language to identify a child as such, often questioning their sexuality



over their gender identity. This results in transgender men often executing a two-tier coming-out process with family members, coming out first as a lesbian. Elijah discussed while taking classes for the student leadership development group, he met a non-Anglo transgender person for the first time:

For the first time I met, um, a mixed race person who was trans\*. So he was mixed, um, black and white, you know, identified as trans\*. And that was the first time that I probably saw someone that kind of looked like me. Like, okay, this is not like, as my uncle would say, like a white person thing that you know, being gay is what white people do, or being trans is what just what white people do. There's someone that is similar to me, has a similar background that I can start to identify with and now understand that I'm not, this is not like a figment of my imagination or something that I'm making it up.

Elijah's position is reflected in an interview by Jourian (2017) about the impact of the Brown Boi Project, a California-based organization uniting persons who identify as masculine of center:

We all identified as masculine of center. We were all people of color. I think seeing the spectrum in which you can be within that which is so vast, it was really like, oh my God I think this person that I'm seeing in front of me is like a physical manifestation of all of the feelings that I have and I just didn't know it was possible. So it was such a powerful thing (p. 9).

In an earlier section, Elijah denotes how his mother received him coming out as a lesbian, saying, "she took it amazingly, but told me not to share that with any other family members, because that she wasn't sure how their responses were going to be." He then tells us that his uncle found out sometime before they reached college, insisting that being a lesbian or gay was "what white people do." After finding a person who was not solely Anglo who was trans\*, Elijah was empowered to tell their mother they were not a lesbian, but a transgender man:

That same day, well, that night, I called my mom and I was like, can tell you something, like, I'm like on the phone in tears. And then she's like, okay, just tell me like, what's wrong? And I'm like, I'm trans. She's like, "okay, I don't know what that means, but we'll get through this." So she's like, "just give me a second." So she went and like did some research and looked up some things. Um, got me in contact with like, you know, um, some other, uh, support groups outside of campus. And she said, "okay, when we come back from for like holiday break,

we'll go talk to like some folks here, so like we can be on the same page and things like that.”

Unlike cisgender LGB people, Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, and Tubbs (2005) note that the coming out process for transgender individuals, who may have been out to family and friends as LGB before expressing their transgender identity, changes how the world works for them. As LBG, masculine-presenting women still have identification which affirms their sex; trans\* individuals who wish to change their paperwork to reflect a neutral or male status – a process offered in limited states – may face issues in college with usage of gendered facilities:

While sharing many of the same developmental concerns as their peers, transgender students may also face culturally specific issues related to their gender-identity development, including coming out to themselves and to family and friends, negotiating gendered environments (such as residence halls and restrooms), deciding whether or not to transition physically to the “opposite” sex, negotiating intimate relationships outside of traditional male and female identities, accessing health care services supportive of transgender people, adjusting to a new social identity, and surviving discrimination and harassment (p. 56).

LGBTQ people are more likely to challenge such institutional barriers if their family is supportive of their queerness. Acceptance from family helped Treyvon become comfortable exploring their identity.

But then once I came out as gay to my family and friends then I knew that I was going to be accepting of it. I started to dress more comfortably on how I felt. And that was masculine-centered for a very long time until I realized that I'm not necessarily a girl, but I'm also not necessarily a boy. And so that's when I started to identify on the trans\* spectrum, um, and here I am today. I identify as non-binary, um, and as trans masculine.

However, explaining the transgender aspect has been a daunting challenge. Jalen identifies as trans-masculine with friends, but as gay to many of their family members.

So a lot of people in my family, still use she/hers pronouns because I feel like that's a harder bridge to cross as it relates to gaining acceptance. All of my friends know that I identify as trans-masculine, and they utilize my pronouns appropriately. But for my family things are a little bit different. And I think

because I identify as trans-masculine that my sexual orientation label, per se, has changed.

This hesitation comes even after Jalen's grandmother discussed her close friendship with a transgender woman during her early adult life:

And she even told me about how when she was young, there was a transgender woman named Sandra that her and her friends would support. They would go into the women's bathroom with her and make sure that [she was] okay while they helped her with her makeup and her wig [...]

What, then, is liberation that is inherently limited by the need to maintain familial support, particularly without other socially-supportive units? The second coming out process is not a delving further into the queer community, but a disassociation from one identity – being a cisgender woman who likes women, for the participants – to another – being a transgender man (or transmasculine nonbinary person) who likes women. Butler (1985) notes:

Becoming a gender is an impulsive yet mindful process of interpreting a cultural reality laden with sanctions, taboos, and prescriptions. The choice to assume a certain kind of body, to live or wear one's body a certain way, implies a world of already established corporeal styles. To choose a gender is to interpret received gender norms in a way that organizes them anew (p. 508).

The transition can mean breaking ties with intimate partners who opt for leaving the relationship rather than redefine their sexuality. Treyvon was scared their wife would react negatively to their transition:

I remember our conversation that she said, if, you know, "I can't, I can't be with a trans man." And I was like, "well, why not?" She said, "cause I don't date men." So at one part I was like, "aw, you see transmen as men, because that's what they are," and, "aw, I identify as a trans man; I can't be married anymore." Um, I always kind of like was like, "Woo, I don't actually identify as a trans man." That doesn't mean that other people don't identify me as a trans man.

For Alton, the impending transition ended their relationship with a long-term partner who identified as a lesbian:

And I remember telling her how excited I was and she was just like, “I’m not moving [...] and I don’t want to be with a man.” Right. And so that for me was super heartbreaking because one, I was like, oh, what’s the point of marriage? But I thought that was like, death do us part. You’re gonna be there no matter what. Don’t you just love me as a person? And... She just couldn’t get with it. She was like, “I’m not doing it, I’m not moving [...] and I can’t be... I’m a lesbian. And so if you transition, we can’t be together.”

And she, and I told her, I was like, you know, when I get to Cyprus-Rhodes University, like my health insurance was off the chain, like I’m going to do this. Um, and she just couldn’t support it. And so I think that, that was my first time realizing as a trans person that it is incredibly hard to date. And so, you know, and understanding kind of the nuances of like, people who identify as lesbian, because that was the community I came from, right? Like, these are the people that I club with, the people that have found safe spaces with. And now all of a sudden I wasn’t a part of that community anymore. And I couldn’t have easy access in a sense of like potentially finding somebody that I could be with.

*Discovering masculinity and manhood.* At many moments within these interviews, participants expressed an irritability or intolerance being identified as a lesbian, once the participants realized there were others living as transgender. Two ways in which they expressed irritation or lack of fulfillment of being called a lesbian were that they never felt like performance as a girl was comfortable, and they were uncomfortable with the functions of the female body.

*Always felt like less of a girl as an indicator of queerness.* Though all participants denoted identifying as a transgender man or trans-masculine person was a two-step process (reconciling sexuality, then reconciling gender identity), it is important to note that all of them expressed a discomfort with presenting as feminine.

Jalen describes never liking dresses:

Um, I knew that I was masculine and I always grew up even from like a little, little girl. I would, I was tomboyish. I never liked dresses. I never liked dressing. So I really have always been masculine in that sense. However, I tried to become more feminine. Um, at the helm was my mom saying, “well maybe you should try a dress, maybe you should try make up, things like that.”

Elijah realized the lack of discussion around sex made it difficult to discuss gender identity:

[I]t wasn't something that was openly discussed in our family. So if I knew I couldn't talk about like my own interpersonal relationships, I knew I couldn't have a conversation about like me not identifying it as heterosexual or identifying as a woman.

Alton describes the stress of transitioning from a socially acceptable childhood to a restrictive adolescence:

I would say like around gender, I was allowed to be pretty fluid in my gender expression. Um, as a young child, uh, I played with, uh, I dressed in boys' clothes. I played with boys' toys. Um, and it wasn't really until, um, puberty hit that things began to shift in my household around kind of more language of being a girl, being a woman, you know, puberty can do that.

Religious practice guided the restrictions Alton has in dress and community, justified by his parents through his maturation into a young woman:

Um, and so, you know, the [...] churches are incredibly gendered, um, especially around like what women and what men can do and what they can wear. So women aren't allowed to speak and hold office. Um, they are not allowed to show any type of like skin from below the knee. So it was just a very difficult, um, kind of shift for me, um, with being in kind of this free wedding child where I could do pretty much whatever I wanted in terms of like my own gender expression and being allowed to play with boys and being, I was the only quote unquote girl on our, um, you know, our rec centers, basketball team, which was all guys. So like I was just allowed to just really do whatever I wanted in terms of gender. And I think, you know, once my dad was realized, you know, well that's a wrap, you know, in terms of, um, my own, uh, like kind of ability to make choices for myself.

For Treyvon, feeling like less of a girl was accompanied by discomfort from family members about how they looked.

I really stayed under my dad up until I was probably about seven. And then my dad, um, stated that I had to be a girl because I was, um, doing too much masculine presenting things and people were asking him questions. I thought you had a daughter, you have a son. I didn't apparently look very girly growing up. So, um, my dad was more embarrassed than anything. And I think that's another reason why he really pushed me to, um, feminize as much as possible.

*Discomfort with one's female body.* In addition to not looking very much like a girl, they did not bode well with the functions of the female body; going through puberty, Treyvon had a slew of medical problems:

When, um, my menstruation happened, it just was really bad for me. I was extremely sick. I was very sick. We, I probably went to the, to the hospital once a month from just, I was losing too much blood.

These maladies were found to be a result of an incorrect sex assignment at birth.

We did the genetic tests and the, um, they came back and my sister didn't have what they thought she had, but they said, one of your children has something. And my mom was like, who? And I said, it was me. And they said, it was me. They said, it's very rare. Um, but apparently, um, my chromosomes are not absolutely X and X, but they're not X, Y, uh, one of my Xs is broken. Um, and they would basically have to see as I got older, when I hit puberty, what my body was going to do, 'cause they didn't know.

They attest that the reason for a delay in address was a parental concern for discovering Treyvon would not be able to attract a cisgender, male partner to fulfill their Biblical requirements as wife and mother:

And again, nobody ever wanted to check because you have to have a baby. So let's give you some birth control. Let's do something else that's gonna keep you with the appearance of being able to have children.

Elijah's familial expectation was similar:

Then really seeing how, like that was a moment when I realized like my Christianity, um, was kind of in conflict with, uh, how I identified gender-wise because everything I was ever told was, you know, you get, you get married, you have children and natural family, man, woman, anything outside of that is an abomination, you go to hell. And that was kind of like point blank period.

Religion will be discussed in the distancing section later in the chapter.

While Jalen's attraction towards women was realized during adolescence, their knowledge of transgender persons did not occur until college, at a juncture in which they did not believe they could socially transition. They were also uncomfortable with identifying as a lesbian. This tension, or closeting, became the motivation for discriminating on queer people who were confident enough to live outside of the closet, which was the status of Elijah and Alton during their undergraduate careers.

The incomplete feeling of settling one's identity as a lesbian resulted in mental health issues. Elijah and Alton identified as masculine-presenting people who liked women, but both expressed their hesitation with affirming themselves as lesbians. This was a category impressed upon them by both cisgender people, both straight and LBG, as a result of their appearance. Without the presence or understanding of trans\* people during undergrad, Treyvon and Alton did not consider transitioning. Alton reflects on their time in graduate school as the breaking point of their gender irritability:

I was having - this is where gender identity and sexuality and all of these things started to really kind of, kind of compressing on me - Um, and I contemplated suicide, um, and got put into, um, an inpatient program at Harrison University, because I didn't wanna live anymore. I just didn't know how to like cope with the body that I was in.

Suicide ideation is a common experience amongst queer youth and young adults, particularly when they are without support systems (Cover, 2012; Nahata 2017). Elijah transitioned during his undergraduate experience, thus providing a unique view of how undergraduate members of Greek life react to transgender people. Before coming out as trans\* on campus, they sought counseling:

So I started seeing the therapist on campus, trying to get an idea of like, okay, why's this keep coming back in my mind. And I don't know what to do about it,

but I have to address it some kind of way because it's gnawing at me again, kind of wearing this mask that I'm tired of wearing.

Elijah was motivated by their counselor to begin living as they would as a man. Changing style over time aided in the process of individuals coping with the news:

Yeah, so that was interesting. Um, I think it also had a part of, of the fact that I had been a part of the leadership for NPHC, had already presented as masculine and um, I guess the confidence that I had from one person, they told me that like once I came out the way I walked about on campus was different. My energy was different. Um, so people received me differently.

Accounts by Harris (2015) and Khoury (2013) denote some of the struggles cisgender heterosexual men have in Greek life, which suggest men within these organizations espouse gender rigidity which often prohibits and silences the existence of LGB members. As Harris writes, even within his intake process, allusions to cisgender normativity and undeviating heteronormativity were enforced. This norm was impressed upon aspirants even when members suggested their sexuality fell outside of the expectation. Here, Harris (2015) explains an informal portion of his membership process, where he is compelled to affirm a desire for sex with women:

“I’m A Virgin, Big Brother Dean, Sir, can you help me find the pussy?” I yelled 3 times in a row. Although I wanted to reluctantly yell, or not even acknowledge it, I had no choice in the matter, so I proclaimed it among eerie laughs, pointing fingers, and suspicious questions about my sexuality that I later found out were a frequent topic of conversation among my chapter brothers.

Harris affirms, “Revealing my questioning identity would have had serious repercussions due to existing levels of homophobia and patriarchy prevalent among fraternal” organizations (p. 15). However, transgender members interviewed consistently noted that fraternity men were most supportive of them after their transitions. One of the benefits of coming out as trans\* for one member was the level of respect they received from men in fraternities. As Elijah expressed,



their roles as a transgender man in their organization became one of a conduit – a wingman – for fraternity men who were interested in dating or pursuing intimate relations with their sorors:

A lot of the guys in the fraternity who would come to me asking me like, oh, what's up with like your LS [line sister, members who were inducted at the time on a campus] or what's up with your prophytes [a member who has been in the sorority longer than the member]? What's up with your neo [a member who has been in the sorority less time than the member]? Is she seeing anybody? Do you want to host this party together, what do you think the best venue would be? Or things like that. And more in like, "can you get me in with your girls?" And not more of like, "I see you as also one of," you know, "the members of this organization."

*Manhood as Excommunication from Sorority by Outsiders.* While discovering manhood, the trans\* members discovered acceptance from fraternity members. An unintended consequence was distancing from their identity as sorority members. In this excerpt, Elijah expresses the perception of being a third party, and not being a member of the sorority. Though members are tasked with looking out for each other's welfare, the fraternity men who approached Elijah were keeping good relations with him for the sake of their sexual and intimate activities, not as a friend.

So it kind of like they were trying to see as a matchmaker 'cause now I'm one of them, quote-unquote. Um, so that was a really interesting turn, but also it was at, at parties, it wasn't a different respect because when we would stroll, um, instead of having, you know, a lot of like a, of a certain type of fraternity come up and do inappropriate things to other members of my chapter while they're strolling, If I was there and they saw me, they would back away or just be, be more respectful in how they would approach people within my chapter.

This relationship between the fraternities and Treyvon did benefit the women sorority members, however, as Treyvon's presence cultivated respect for the sorors in public arenas:

I had a lot of my sorority sisters also tell me that when I didn't go to certain events that like certain people would come up to them and talk to them in any type of way. Um, but when I was there, that energy was different.

This section of the excerpt calls upon historic foundation of formal and informal ties of men to sororities. One in particular is the informal relationship of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc. While the majority of the fraternities and sororities were founded at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, four are unique in their founding locations being outside of Washington, DC (five were founded at Howard University), and three were founded at historically-exclusive campuses. Of the three, two were founded in Indiana – Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. These organizations held a unique challenge in starting an organization for the advancement of hued people in a state where one of the largest European-American hate groups held a stronghold. Taylor-Johnson writes (2018), “Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Incorporated, is the only sorority founded at a PWI, Butler University, in very close proximity to the Ku Klux Klan” (p. 8). As Steinson (1994) describes:

The incredible popularity of the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana in the first half of the 1920s is often cited as an example of racism and nativism in the state. Two significant recent studies on the KKK in Indiana reach different conclusions about the importance of racial and religious intolerance as factors that motivated white, Protestant Hoosier men and women to join the KKK. Both, however, found strong support for the KKK in urban and rural areas, thus making it clear that the KKK in Indiana was not symptomatic of urban-rural tensions (p. 248).

The Sorority was founded during an era where the Klux Klan Grand Dragon lived near the Butler University campus, and there were times when the members of Kappa Alpha Psi supported these sorority members in their activism, providing protection and moral support.

In this way, other likenesses of shared location, founding dates, colors, organizational letters, and historical intimacies establish parings between sorority and fraternity members. Women in sororities are often symbolically betrothed to members of fraternities, with many

having formal and informal bonds between each other. As previous noted, Kappa Alpha Psi and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority were the only organizations founded in Indiana; as such, members refer to each other's close relation as "Indiana Love". Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority refer to each other as "First Family", denoting their status as the first Melanin-Rich collegiate Greek-letter organizations. A founder of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity (Frank Coleman) married a founder of Delta Sigma Theta (Edna Brown). Two other founders of the respective organizations – Omega founder Edgar A. Love and Delta founder Edith Young – dated as students while attending Howard University. These relationships established a bond colloquially known as "Coleman Love". The only formal bond, however, between NPHC organizations exists between Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority (Hughey, 2008); the Sorority was founded "as a sister organization to Phi Beta Sigmas" (Watts, 1983, p. 4). According to Patton and Croom (2009),

the three Sigma founders were concerned with promoting an inclusive community. Instrumental to fostering this goal was the assistance they extended to help five undergraduate women establish Zeta Phi Beta, whose focus was to challenge the burgeoning elitism that they perceived in other sororities and to exemplify "finer womanhood."

Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority overlap in their organization colors – blue and white – and their Greek names (Zeta [Phi Beta] Sigma).

Elijah's story of protection for their sorors insists upon the need for men to be involved in the matters of the sorority, particularly against other men. There were understood boundaries as to how the men could interact with the women when their sorority brother was present. In this way, Elijah was able to affirm their masculinity as a protector and guard of these young women. When asked about their status within their sorority, post-transition, Treyvon stated they were selective in who was informed, fearing member distancing and formal excommunication:

So there are, there are people in the Sorority who I actually have a close knit group of sorors who identify as LGBTQ, who I am out and open with about my trans... trans masculine identity. However [...] I am not out as trans masculine. They just know that like I'm a gay masculine girl to them, you know, and I just haven't felt comfortable, um, or really, the need... I think it's more so comfort to like say out loud that yes, I am a transmasculine, non-binary soror. Um, these are my pronouns. This is how I identify. I don't identify as a woman, because I think I'm also reconciling within *me* whether or not I *want* to give up my sorority? I mean I have, and will I be *asked* to give up my *sorority*?

Ways in which sororities assume cisgender heterosexuality can also compel queer individuals from socially engaging with members. Several participant experiences denote that sorors who they had formed close relationships with in the past passively disowned them. Treyvon recalls a recent event – a gala – in which members would not consider them a viable member, including one who was present at their initiation years before:

I said, “no, I'm a member of Epsilon Epsilon Epsilon.” “You a Epsilon’s husband?” “A mem-”, I was about to say, *I was born a girl*. Like, what, what, what do I need to say to get you to, to see me as a sorority member? ‘Cause I gripped her up. So the first thing in my head was, *so we just gripping anybody. That's what we doing*. And then I'm like, look, let me remind myself what I look like.

NPHC has a use of hand signs and grips by those who are members in order to identify each other. While the hand signs are used publicly, only an initiated member of the organization would know the hand grip, which is why the participant thought they had clarified their membership upon concluding the secret handshake. Further self-distancing from members occurred once Treyvon recounted instances in which they realized they could not see eye-to-eye in conversations on intimacy:

I can do that without having to, um, uh, censor myself. Um, a lot of times I had been in situations with sorors and they were talking about their husbands and their boyfriends and all these different things. And I'm like, I understand, but that is not the life I live. So can we talk about something else? And also realizing that you do need to have that space to have that conversation. I don't want to look awkward

and I don't want you to be awkward. So sometimes I will just take myself out of situations so that nobody else, nobody has to feel awkward.

This aligns with the experience of other queer men in NPHC organizations. Harris (2015) denotes how gay men also find themselves removing themselves from heteronormative social circles for their restrictive conversation on sexual conquests with women:

Strayhorn and Tillman-Kelly (2013) reported this as a common occurrence among gay or questioning Black male college students, as one of their participants explained, "Sitting around talking about girls, their breasts, and how many I laid over the weekend is not something I can talk about" (p. 99). This statement demonstrated how Black male college students' sexual orientation impacted their gender performance, thereby impacting their peer interactions with their Black male peers (p. 13).

Treyvon's observations of self-loathing Greek members coincides with the issue of cisgender and heterosexual expectation:

I would say for my Queer LGB, um, family to keep the door open when they walk through it, um, to not lose sight of who they are. I know so many queer men who have joined, um, D9 uh, well the five, um, the five-fold [referencing the five fraternities], and are assholes just, I mean, if you could drink toxicity, they drunk and you sitting here like, but no, but if there's a way for them to pass, then they will. Um, those who have been embraced by their, their chapters are much easier to get along with, um, than those who are not.

However, for transgender members, Harris' environment may make heterosexual transgender men seeking membership into fraternities feel more at home within their identity. Treyvon explains:

Um, for trans\* folks or trans\* folks who are part of the binary? Hmm. I struggle with that because there are so many folks who are anti trans who also identify as trans. And what I mean by that is they actually don't want to be identified as trans. They don't want to be identified as anything other than cis they want to blend in. Um, and they don't want to have to explain themselves. I get it. And so I guess for, for that, for some of them being a part of organizations that are, um, stereotypical trans, I'm sorry, stereotypical binary men, if you've always wanted and needed to feel manhood, they yes, you will get into a black fraternity and that will be like the, the, the culmination of all your hard work. And obviously you don't want nobody to know that.

*Passing.* Participants in Green's (2005) study, when asked to define maleness, as opposed to masculinity, also tended to define maleness in terms of genitalia and other physical characteristics. This finding was also found with the participants of this study. Referring to the coverage of sexual parts, Treyvon noted that dressing masculine affirmed their transmasculinity, as "the way that I present on the outside is very female". Appearance and presentation were the top two codes throughout the analysis process, yet male was often used to refer to medical, not social transitions. Out of the four participants, all of them identified as, or would coalesce to the orientation of "lesbian" before their gender transition. By college, three out of the four were presenting masculine of center, wearing clothing traditionally found in the men's department of clothing stores, or at men's clothing stores. All stated that, upon induction to the sorority's membership intake process, they adhered to the standard dress code of their organizations during the sorority's formal events. However, immediately after induction, the ways in which the trans\* members approached their challenging or refusal of feminine dress codes were diverse. Three out of the four noted not owning the traditional outfits for ceremonies, borrowing clothing from other sorors to fulfill the dress code. One adhered to not only sorority dress codes, but traditional feminine wear throughout college; after college, this person became more comfortable dressing masculine of center. Currently, all of the participants identify as trans\*, and all pursue and/or relationships with cisgender feminine women.

For the participant who dated a man, they considered the relationship due to their religious obligations, and believed the person encompassed a queer-leaning personality that would align with their own queerness. They both attended a religious college, which pressed a heteronormative construct of intimate relationships; outside of this, sexual and gender diversity education was not present. Treyvon was prepared to see this person as a viable long-term partner

until the person began to insist upon their relationship falling in line with traditional cisgender female-cisgender male gender roles and intimate conduct:

I married a man I met the second day I was in college and he was very persistent and I was just kinda like, eh, I guess this works. I guess this is a culmination of what you're supposed to do. Not something I wanted to do, but I just was like, I guess this is what I'm supposed to do again. It was kind of my plight. Um, and that's kinda how I was kind of presented to me. Like, you know, you're not dating any other man, this man is there. You should probably take advantage of it. And, um, him and I were friends, so there were parts of my personality that he understood and there were parts of who I was that he understood just like he was also someone who, um, was definitely outside of the traditional understanding of maleness. And so I like we, we vibed on that.

Um, he is a member of Xi. And um, on the surface I think he definitely exuded some of the stereotypes that, um, Xis have. And he found a place in that. Um, and so because of that, me being an Mu, him being a Xi, it was like the whole MuXi bond and we just, our, our worlds had to meld together because we're at home together and then our fraternal life is together. So we were always around each other. Uh, we also are in heavily involved in church, both of us. So again, like there was no, not being around each other in any capacity. And so when we began to grow, we literally grew away from each other because we were always forced to be with each other, if that makes sense.

After considering their transition, Treyvon announced their gender identity and pronouns on social media. This was during their relationship with a cisgender woman who identified as lesbian. Treyvon uses they/them pronouns and dresses masculine enough that the average person would have a difficult time denoting them as anything other than a cisgender man, though they are short in stature, have little facial hair, and have a higher toned voice than most cisgender men. They are not on testosterone and have no plans to medically transition. They wear a binder – a tight undershirt that flattens out breast tissue to partial- or full-concealment – on their muscular and thin frame, with a moderately chiseled facial bone structure. They describe when their first binder arrived:

When I got my first binder, she helped me put it on, and she was- didn't know what she was doing but it, she knew that it was gonna help me.

Changing one's pronouns, name, hairstyle, and wearing the binder were ways in which Trayvon transitioned.

So her and I had to get to that point. And she does, she's still stumbles over pronouns, but she also recognizes that that's something that's very important to me. And she has been very gracious and saying, "what do you need? How, how does this change certain parts of our relationship? Does it change certain parts of our relationship? What helps you?" Because again, I remember our conversation that she said, if, you know, I can't, I can't be with a trans\* man. And I was like, well, why not? She said, 'cause I don't date men. So at one part I was like, "aw, you see transmen as men, because that's what they are" and, "aw, I identify as a trans\* man, I can't be married anymore."

This fear of partner departure occurred with one participant. While Alton's partner was firm in stating they would not continue with the relationship if he transitioned, Treyvon's wife works through the inconsistencies of how outsiders see their partner, how she sees them, and how Treyvon sees themselves:

So my wife has gotten a lot of pushback and, and questions about how she navigates the world with me as a trans\* man. And she keeps saying, well, Treyvon doesn't identify as a man and if people feel like they need to then correct her. Like, no, they say that they trans.

But my wife right now, she's still learning. She's still asking questions. I still give her articles when things come up. I still let her know where I am, and every so often I let her know I don't [...] feel as though I need to medically transition and I don't.

So, [...] she asked me how, how do I identify, she was like, dude, when I talk about you, do I, do I call you husband or do I call you wife? And that actually stuck with me for a while 'cause I didn't know how I wanted to identify. I didn't want to identify as a husband at all. I, I don't, under the Judaic Christian idea of husbandry, I didn't want that. So my wife actually calls me wife and I'm, I'm okay with that. I think that's probably the most gendered thing [...] um, is probably the most binary thing and binary title that I hold. But I love the characteristics of a wife. And so I believe in that pledge.

When asked to clarify the duties of a wife, Treyvon explained,

Oh, so as, as a wife, a wife is, is meant to be and asked to be virtuous and, and, and humble with dignity, um, that she has an understanding of her role and what it means within their communion as it relates to how God has ordained them. And



women hold so much power within that. Um, they are the ones that pray for their, their spouse. They're the ones who go and intercede, they're selfless, um, in everything that they do. And for me and my title with my wife, I want to give her that. I don't want to just be a protector and, and, and a breadwinner. And as, as it were, the shepherd. And head is, uh, you can lead if you understand how to follow. And that is not clearly defined. But for a wife, there are so many scriptures that specifically talk about what it means to be a wife.

Treyvon's dedication to following the role of a wife situates their established relationship in the boundaries of comfort for their lesbian partner, and infuses their religiosity into their commitment of service and sacrifice to their relationship. Crawley writes, "Regarding the sexual ethics of the Black Church [...] All sexual activities occurring otherwise than the 'marriage bed' are discouraged and known as sinful, though homoerotics are particularly disdained and scrutinized" (p. 213-4). Treyvon's insistence of involving religion in their marriage – a relationship shunned by the sect of their upbringing – highlights how queered dedication to religion works both in lesbian dynamics and also in trans\* relationships, where the gendered designation is eschewed or made irrelevant.

And I was like, if God put much emphasis on the being very clear of what her role is, I want that. That's what I will do. So that's how I look at it. I don't look at it as a gendered space. I look at it as specifically as that's a title, that's our role. And if you really want your relationship and your, your marriage to work, you actually, both of y'all need to be ascribing to that role within your, um, within your union and not one over the other. Make them, make them equal and [...] be able to go to guide on your wife's behalf.

*Service.* While queered manifestations of intimate responsibility were derived from feminine expectations yet espoused through the masculine partner, participants used such logic to navigate their contributions to their feminine-expectant organizations as well. Despite being inactive and no-financial to their NPHC sororities, there are ways in which the participants queered their responsibilities as sorors to serve their organizations. In addition, they have found other organizations to join that offer support for transgender men, and have discovered Divine

Nine members within their ranks. There are several organizations – some utilizing Greek letters – to build community for transgender men and masculine of center cisgender women. There are also Greek letters organizations for queer cisgender and transgender women. A list of these organizations can be found in Appendix C. Most of these organizations are non-collegiate, but have similar structures of NPHC organizations, including hand signs, grips, and informal terms for induction like “line” (line brother/sister, to denote those with which one joined their organization) and “crossing” (the completion of the membership intake process). Treyvon states that they are more active in their fraternity than their NPHC sorority:

I would say I'm more, um, active in my fraternity, um, as of right now. And even that is not as active as I probably should be. I'm not active with Mu Mu Mu. Um, other than like helping, um, young members as a, as a confidant. Uh, I have had quite a few masculine presenting, sorors who've reached out to me and, and just kinda, you know, talked about some of the things that's going on with them, what it means to show up, um, as a lesbian, as a masculine-presenting lesbian, uh, as well as being able to, to also have those conversations that sorors have with about their intimate partners and being able to have advice. So I've been able to do that for Mu Mu Mu and particularly with, um, more masculine-presenting sorors. I try on Instagram, if I can see someone who I assume is masculine-presenting, me and you need to be friends.

When asked if they saw themselves being active in their sorority again, Treyvon stated they were looking into it, particularly to celebrate an upcoming organizational milestone:

Not gonna lie [...] I'm probably gonna be active again, specifically for centennial. So there's some selfishness in that. Um, but for right now, No, no, that's not what I'm trying to do. Um, in a fraternity, I am pretty active, not super active, but pretty, pretty much more active than I am in Mu.

Being in a fraternity dedicated to masculine of center women and transgender men offers the opportunity to discuss issues related to the very niche experience of being Melanin-Rich, transgender, and a man. Though resources for the LBGT community are burgeoning and supported by research in academia, think tanks, and nongovernment organizations, there are few

health and advocacy resources dedicated to transgender men. The existence of organizations for transgender men are necessary to fill in this gap:

[...] which it becomes a family affair in that regard. Um, and then just again, having the conversations about things that you would want to talk to your intimate friend group. Um, and I can do that without having to, um, uh, censor myself. Um, a lot of times I had been in situations with sorors and they were talking about their husbands and their boyfriends and all these different things. And I'm like, I understand, but that is not the life I live.

*Discovering parenthood.* One unique facet of manhood is fatherhood, of which one of the participants spoke. Though there are few studies on transgender fatherhood (Walks, 2015; Walls, Kattari, & DeChants, 2018), extant findings show that children raised by trans\* parents are no different than children raised in solely cisgender households in terms of developmental achievements, or likelihood of gender or sexual queerness (Green, 1998; Reisbig, 2007; Ryan, 2009; Pyne, 2012). However, transgender people and couples containing trans\* partners may face greater difficulty in family planning and adopting children (Green, 2006; Pyne, 2012). Alton notes that there are significant woes regarding gender he has discovered as a father:

It's just like, you know, kids make you recalibrate everything? It makes you realize how fucked up gender is from the beginning. Yeah. [...] People just making all types of assumptions about the type of child that [the baby] is going to be. Um, the like people's clothes that they buy, like how they sexualized babies. Like [shirts that say] I'm the hottest dude, you know, like look like clothes like that where you're like, what are y'all even talking about? Well, you know, [...] like there was one shirt I saw and it was like, ladies' man. I was like, what? Like this is a child, stop it right now. And so yeah just like, just how gender just plays into so much, you know, and raising a baby does that [...]

Alton's denotations of how impressed "gender is from the beginning" goes back before the child's entry into the world; at fetal stages, "this dramatically staged disclosure of a specific piece of information" is celebrated and is the impetus for a party of gendered gift-giving (Guignard, 2015, p. 482). "The colors invariably are blue for a boy and pink (occasionally reddish) for a girl, a well-established and unmistakable symbolic code in North America" (p.

486). The extensiveness of this party reaches into the traditionally unambiguous binaries of manhood and womanhood:

Guests may be required to dress in the color (blue or pink) “matching their guess.” Alternatively, they may wear a blue or pink badge or laundry pin, corresponding to their guess. They can also put a mark on a “guess board” or “cast their vote” in a ballot. As a variation on the blue/pink dichotomy, parents may use other symbols, such as a moustache, a typical marker of male facial hair, symbolizing the potential masculinity of the future child, or a ribbon or a pair of red lips, symbolizing a femininity performed through ornaments and cosmetics. In the invitation cards to a gender-reveal party that are illustrated in Figure 1, “boy” is symbolized by a “gun,” with blue or camouflage motif, while a pink “glitter” chandelier stands for “girl” (p. 486).

These symbols are a part of the norm-setting of gender. Cisgender women have facial hair, but in the United States, it is a faux pas. People across the gender spectrum have red lips, but the association to lipstick aligns with womanhood. Both men and women serve in the military; and chandeliers are associated more with high socioeconomic class rather than gender, yet only men are required to sign up for Selective Service, and women are primed to have a penchant for bejeweled decor. There are many possible reasons why would-be parents wish to hold such parties. It is a way of adding joy and reclaiming agency within the often highly medicalized and doctor-centered environment of reproduction (Guignard, 2015). *A New York Times* article under the Fashion & Style section defends the gender-reveal party as, “the rare surprise party that people can give for themselves” (Williams and Murphy, 2012, para. 3). It is, in North American countries, a celebration in relation to discoveries that may lead to disappointment or disownment in places “where cultural, religious, and economic factors motivate the preference for sons” (Guignard, 2015, p. 495). Alas, these rituals – decorated as games and fun – thrust a potential human into a required social pathway, coached by their impending parents into dreams of bearded military service or makeup long before they will have access to them. The *Times* article (Williams and Murphy, 2012) also hints at the submission of parents to the expectations of their

family, friends, and larger social network, to share what was historically a private experience with the world:

In a culture where many expectant parents feel obligated to tweet their pregnancy announcement, live-post their ride to the hospital via Instagram, and Skype the baby's first smile, it's the latest example of one of parenthood's formerly private moments becoming a matter of public consumption (para. 4)

While XYZ sees these parties as an extension of the baby shower, a way to celebrate the mother, an interviewee from the *Times* article, Greg Allen, sees the act as excessive and demeaning. Allen writes a blog for new fathers called daddytypes.com. "The whole connection of cutting into the cake to find out, like it's a stand-in for the uterus, is sort of sickening" (para 24, 25). In addition, the gender reveal party may culminate with a child born of the opposite sex, or intersex. Nahata clarifies (2017):

Most expectant parents are not aware that any or all of these scenarios exist. Ultrasound technicians and obstetricians do not typically say, "Just so you know, we may be wrong. Ultrasounds aren't perfect. Also, some infants have a condition in which genital anatomy is atypical and gender assignment may be changed." Furthermore, one rarely says, "Regardless of gender assignment at birth, some kids may later identify as the opposite gender." Parents have shared the trauma they have experienced moments after their infant was delivered, and instead of hearing the anticipated "It's a girl," providers crowded around mumbling that it may not be a girl after all. Parents of transgender adolescents have said, "I have to mourn the loss of the daughter I have raised before I can move forward with my son."

*Choosing birth sex.* The choice of knowing the likely birth sex on one's developing fetus and preparing parties, as well as names, "nursery, and [...] a color-themed wardrobe" are cultural traditions which could result in confusion if inaccurate; such medical inaccuracies can also occur under controlled conditions.

The ability to choose the sex of the child-to-be is also a new trend, as popularized by singer John Legend and his wife Chrissy Teigen's 2016 announcement of a "a girl by choice". Miller (2016) writes:

The [sex] is part of an elective IVF procedure called Pre-Implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD), in which a complete chromosomal analysis of each embryo is done.

PGD was originally designed to help screen for genetic disorders such as cystic fibrosis and Down syndrome, says reproductive endocrinology and infertility specialist Jane Frederick, M.D., medical director of HRC Fertility in Orange County, California. The [sex] information came along with the screening, she says, and eventually couples starting requesting the testing for gender purposes (para. 7, 8).

This sex selection wave has been mentioned in research by Seiden (2019) and Matsumura (2017), instancing Legend and Teigen. While Matsumura (2017) notes that this is not the rise of choosing all fetal characteristics, “laws governing the use and destruction of human embryos” are few and far between” (p. 437). This leaves some LGBTQ researchers and activists concerned about the elimination of intersex embryos (Sparrow, 2013). A 2010 study by Hashiloni-Dolev, Hirsh-Yechzkel, Boyko, Wainstock, Schiff, and Lerner-Geva, found that 42.6 percent of married couples who were planning in principle to have more children expressed a desire to choose the sex of the future children; they desire the child’s sex differ from their born children, indicating that man still presume sex-gender alignment is a guarantee. Matsumura (2017) notes, “some embryos may have serious genetic diseases and would probably be eliminated on that basis” (p. 437). As Nahata (2017) point out, “Currently, it is estimated that 1 in 4500 to 5500 infants are born with a difference of sex development, congenital conditions within which the development of chromosomal, gonadal, and anatomic sex is atypical.” While Nahata (2017) continues, “The approach to decisions surrounding gender assignment, and medical and surgical interventions, has evolved to implement a shared decision-making model, in which parents and health care providers are ideally equal partners in the process” (p. 2). However, Sparrow (2013), Trafimow (2013), and Lemke and Rüppel (2019) question what the limits of “serious” may be, considering the history of the medical industrial complex in acting on behalf of the parent without parental

consent. These studies have questioned if PGD reduces the natural likelihood of embryos which have intersex traits to be eliminated from parental selection (Haramia, 2013; Sparrow, 2013; Trafimow, 2013). Gupta and Freeman (2013) states that because “intersex- related mutations are unique, arise spontaneously, and/or not heritable” and “spontaneous variations in embryonic development can cause [disorders of sexual development] in embryos that were previously screened and considered to be healthy”, this is not a concern. Sparrow (2013) contends, “historically, medical science has responded to the possibility of a child being born with an intersex condition as though it were an emergency” (p. 30). Butler’s analysis of gender performativity highlights that our society is so stringent upon how gender is performed, the “political operations” of all sectors – school, healthcare, religion, and more – are judicially founded. By ignoring sex diversity, emphasizing gender as synonymous with sex, and eradicating (presented by Sparrow, 2013), the link between the possibilities of biologically gender nonbinary children is censored. Children who are truly intersex and find themselves identifying as the opposite gender, or somewhere within the gender continuum, are then socially punished for a biological happenstance to which the public is ill-informed or uninformed.

As Peterson (2016) notes in *Gender Reveals: Stop Revealing Yourself as Uninformed*, we “should be asking about the sex, not the gender”. Siegel’s (2012) opinion article on these parties question if *what* the child will is more important than *who* it will be (paras. 5, 6). Back to Peterson (2016):

We have to stop misusing language in a way that promotes the idea that gender is inextricably linked to our sex organs. We have to stop enacting hard and fast rules for children’s behaviors, attitudes, preferences, and desires based on their biology. We have to allow children to grow up in a world that allows them to learn who they are for themselves [...]

Distancing. In this section I will discuss distancing, the second of the three themes.

Distance is define as, “to make or maintain a personal or emotional separation from: to place or keep at a distance” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Distancing is portrayed through fears and actualized excommunication from family, partners, and organizational members, as well as self-distancing. Self-distancing includes relocation, removing oneself from positions of influence, and becoming inactive in organizations.

One of the first instances of distancing which comes about in the participants’ narratives is Alton’s recollection of his parents’ reaction to him being interested in women. This is during his childhood, when he still identified as a girl:

I definitely was attracted to women and you know, I was a writer at the time, so I would, you know, write these really elaborate poems. And my gym teacher found one of the poems and called a parent teacher conference. Um, and which my, both my parents became enraged. Um, my mom left me with my dad and he basically like beat me until I bled and they both kicked me out of the home [...]

While Alton was the sole participant who experienced forced dismissal from their home, this is a common struggle for transgender youth. Emory University Department of Medicine’s Chloe Jordan is a transgender woman who experienced homelessness because of her transition. She is now a researcher of transgender women’s issues. She explains to *The Guardian* (Worthy, 2018):

“Many of us are living with no safety net, so we turn to sex work to survive, which also makes us susceptible to violence,” Jordan says. She herself experienced homelessness after coming out as trans to her family, and today uses her story to advocate for LGBT rights.

In addition to homelessness, participants experienced many forms of distancing from friends, family, and sorors after discovery of their queerness, both as a cisgender lesbian and as a trans\* person.

*Distancing from sorority.* Greek-letter organizations work within a strict space of gender norms, presuming and often relegating sexuality in ways that are cisgender normative. This



branding may block queer interests from considering membership, particularly if they are publically “out”.

During recruitment, Alton had tensions with some of the other sororities. Alton discusses his presentation, as a masculine-dressed woman was the reason for sororities distancing themselves from him at the time:

Like, that was not something that I was even expecting. And the [Lambda]s never, like, they never made eye contact with me, but like anytime I walked around a [Lambda], like they would get up or something, but like, it's just like really weird energy with the [Lambda]s on campus, um, until like some of my friends crossed and then that, that, that changed. But the upper-class [Taus] were very, my perception was homophobic. Like I, the language now I would use as homophobic. Um, but at the time I was just like, y'all got weird energy. Like I didn't know what it was.

However, an alumna sorority member approached him – at the time, identifying as a woman – and invited him to their membership interest meeting:

Um, so I went to a [sorority] informational, um, and I immediately connected to the women who were there. Right. Um, and they weren't phased at all how I looked, they actually complimented me like, Dang, that's a really nice suit, stuff like that where I was like, ah, cool. You know, and so, and [that sorority member] would just hype me up. Like, you know, I'm like, you out here already involved on campus. Um, and so that was like super transformational for me. Um, and you know, for me, like I said, family was always an important. So I felt like she was an older person who was genuinely interested in looking out for me.

So after, after the initiation process, um, I was that neo, I wore my letters everywhere. Um, so the funny thing is that people began to know me as the gay [sorority member], which, you know, I don't know. Like, now that I think about it, like I didn't mind it. I didn't care.

This pushback was noted in Literte and Hodge's work on reactions from alumnae sorors when they found out members were lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Elijah notes this was most noticeable when he came to events out of dress code:

So like we would do formals instead of me wearing like a black dress, I would come in like a black suit and I got pushed back on that because you know, for certain events we're not supposed to wear pants.

Undergraduate sorority members were often supportive of Eliah's pushback, which ties into dedication. Sorority members who were close to the member were dedicated to the bond of sisterhood established with the member:

So, um, it was my line sisters that were actually going to the bat for me saying, well, if you know, if we're living out our values of, you know, uh, making sure that we're welcoming other people, there are going to be women who don't want to wear dresses or skirts anyway, so why is this now an issue? Um, so it was just little things that I think were going to be a lot of areas of tension that kind of just bubbled up to the surface, um, because of me just openly identifying who I was.

Cis-normativity is the presumption that all people perform gender in alignment with the culture norms ascribed to their designated birth sex. After Elijah publically transitioned, other sororities hesitated to partner with his chapter, which led to some of their sorors not inviting them to events. Elijah plays out a reaction received when asked about an event other sorors attended:

Or, um, we don't really know how to invite you to social gatherings with other sororities because yeah, you're part of the chapter, but you don't identify as a woman.

In addition to this cis-normative presumption, heteronormativity – the presumption that all men like women and all women like men – is an ideology preserved within society, but is more stringent in NPHC organizations.

Greek life is, it's very, very gendered. There are a lot of lines that you just don't cross and keep only even think about the fact that we're operating in this gendered spaces. So when I started questioning these things, I'm just trying to make sense for myself, not thinking that I'm trying to shake the table for my organization.

While college is supposed to be a place where students, faculty, and administrators collaborate to execute programming, workshops, and classes where normative ideals can be questioned, the religiosity of the sorority's alumnae often acted as their defense for not supporting these programs.

[If I asked] what if we partnered with like, you know, the, um, the LGBT student group on campus, I would get pushback, um, with some of some of the programs

and initiatives that I wanted to do. I'm not necessarily from the members of my chapter, but from our graduate chapter, because a lot of them, you know, we still went to church with them every Sunday and things like that.

As Elijah began to transition, they began to remove themselves from taking on decision-making positions in the chapter:

I decided to take a step back and focus on myself. Still show up to events that were being hosted by the organization and participate as a member but not the, at the forefront of, okay, well I think we should go in this direction of doing this and doing that because I get, I just wasn't in the energy of fighting people at that point. I was trying to graduate.

Treyvon received mixed messages for sorority sisters, based on their closeness. While sorors who they entered the organization with were unwavering, older sorors began to devise ways to conceal their orientation:

When I first came out my LSs [line sisters] my undergrad chapter, um, sorors, sorors that I had built really tight bonds with? It didn't matter to them. They was like, "that's, that's what's up. Do what you need to do. If you got a problem, we can fight." Like that's how [...] they were, my prophytes. Grad chapter? It was this image that they wanted and the image was, "if you're going to be a lesbian, then you need to be a feminine-presenting lesbian, because [...] we can hide you. We don't have to explain anything. Even if you come with a woman, why can't she be your sister?" Like, they had already rationalized that part of me. So I didn't really bring my, my partners as a lesbian anywhere around my, my sorority sisters, um, except for those who were very close to me.

Elijah discussed that post-transition, they no longer felt they could utilize the connections their graduate chapter members had with graduate programs:

So now have [to] figure out, okay, how am I going to get to grad school now that I know that is something that I want to do and do I have to tell them that I identify as trans\*? Um, what does that look like? Is that going to this no harm me from getting accepted into a program? Um, and then not being able to rely on a lot of the grad folks in my grad chapter who would have been able to help me, because now it's kind of like they are on eggshells with me with talking about certain things, 'cause they don't know how to approach me. So I kind of was like in a moment of like, okay, uh, I don't really know who to talk to, I'm trying to talk to people but I'm getting like, there's like kind of like a wall in between us.

Alton needed a close soror to vouch for his status as a member to enter a sorority social media group:

I tried to join the [sorority] Facebook group and people were coming in after me [getting approved who applied after them], like a few years ago, [until a soror] came up in there and said, no, that's my spec [close sorority member], and they should be in this group, you know.

In addition to sorority-specific groups, there are groups for all NPHC members, as well as groups for NPHC sorority members only. These social media groups offer notices on employment opportunities, workplace training, and related organizational and social opportunities to financial and non-financial members. Member checking is typical of members seeking entry into private groups for NPHC members. However, when sorors checked his private page, Alton explains a discussion immediately beginning about men being present in the group, launching a string of indirect commentary about trans\* members, an experience similar to that which occurred at their statewide meeting on dress code:

Um, but I had a really bad experience at a [...] meeting in [the state he resided in]. Um, and it shifted my relationship with [my sorority] because they were focused in on - they were talking about dress code - and that meeting was about me.

Alton, Treyvon and Elijah experienced direct pushback from sorority members about if they were members, and why they would continue to claim sorority membership. Cisgender members presumed they would disaffiliate. This presumption, Treyvon insists, has prompted more focus on transgender women attempting to become members, than addressing transgender men who already are members:

And so the presumption that every trans\* soror solely identifies as a binary male is presumptuous. A lot of us do identify as non-binary, but masculine-presenting. Some of us do identify as male. And it's nothing wrong with that because the ideals and the, the love has never changed. But presentation in NPHC is more than anything.

Speaking of another sorority's news of clarifying membership to include those who identify as women, Jalen wonders if such a policy will spread throughout the NPHC organizations, and what this means for those who are already members but do not identify as women:

[E]ven though recently [a sorority] expanded the definition of woman to include trans\* Women, I don't identify as a woman, but I also don't identify as a man.

Though support for their transitions from closely-knit members, and their past achievements within the sororities are the foundation of their dedication, unfamiliar sorors outweigh known sorors. Treyvon reflects on how sorors who discovered they were also sorors would balk at their divulgence of affiliation:

So that's, that's where I feel in that as a lesbian, if I was feminine-presenting, everybody was okay with it. We just didn't talk about it as a masculine-presenting. I have been told so many times, "why do you want to be here? Why are you here? Um, I didn't join this organization to be with men. I specifically joined this organization so I wouldn't have to deal with men."

For those who are in their sorority but to which they do not have close ties, exercising sisterly bonds for professional networking is nearly impossible. Alton continues:

Like I no longer have community, but I'm a part of this organization, you know, so it's, I have this lifetime commitment and affiliation with no true benefits. Right.

Excommunication can happen from same-gender organizations, but also co-ed realms with constricted expectations regarding professional conduct, like the military (Stryker & Whittle, 2006). Jalen explains, after living out straightness as an undergraduate, they garnered the desire to live as queer during their post-graduate years in the military:

I knew that at the time I was in the military, that I'm comfortable with who I am. So I ended up leaving the military early because that was prior to Don't Ask, Don't Tell. Um, to when Obama repealed it, so I was like, I'm not going to ruin *my life* by serving in the military knowing that you see an openly gay, I'm going to get a dishonorable discharge. So I opted to leave. And from there, I started dating women.

Belkin (2003) gives us a brief understanding of the National Defense Authorization Act, the U.S. military protocol put in place by President Bill Clinton in 1994, before its striking down by President Barack Obama:

According to “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” known homosexuals are not allowed to serve in the US armed forces. Unlike the previous policy, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” does not allow the military to ask enlistees if they are gay, but similar to its predecessor, it does stipulate that service members who disclose that they are homosexual are subject to dismissal. The official justification for the current policy is the unit cohesion rationale, which states that military performance would decline if known gay and lesbian soldiers were permitted to serve in uniform (p. 108).

With such restrictions in place, LGB servicepersons were placed under a microscope, forced to silence themselves regarding their lives, or must discuss their lives in heteronormative ways. In a professional realm built upon trust and cohesion, “this policy not only affect[ed] the eligibility of thousands of women but helps to create the military's image of what it means to be a man or a woman” (p. 218). One can see the ties between these limitations imposed on queer military members and those described in Literte and Hodge’s work on NPHC sorority life, as well as numerous studies on religiosity on LGBT persons’ perceptions of self (Cameron & Ross, 1981; Hansen, 1982; Herek, 1988; Hinrichs, & Rosenberg, 2002; Larsen, Cate, & Reed, 1983; Larsen, Reed & Hoffman, 1980; Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992;

While those who are not active in their organizations for a myriad of reasons may have done so due to discrimination, such ousting may not necessarily impact networking with members of other NPHC organizations. Alton was able to use their sorority affiliation to get into graduate school. While considering their career change from marketing to education, a cisgender man friend began coaching him through the interview process:

And he's like, you know, introducing these people of color to the field as you know, and you get to go to the conferences. So I, you know, I did that with one of

my friends. Um, and I think another, you know, point is that he's a [...]Upsilon. And so, you know, it's always like been these on like these touch points of like Greeks in my life to be like, you should do this. Um, and so, did that. He was, he went to Harrison University for his Master's [degree]. Um, and so he connected me to people and I applied to, I only applied to one graduate school and that was Harrison. Thankfully. I got in.

*Fears of abandonment by sorority.* Citing such aggressive distancing from sorors, Jalen exercises selective divulgence of their trans\* identity because they are concerned about losing ties to members of the organization, as well as their membership.

The larger group of sorority sisters and even my line sister/s, I am not out as trans masculine. They just know that like I'm a gay masculine girl to them, you know, and I just haven't felt comfortable, um, or really, the need... I think it's more so comfort to like say out loud that, yes, I am a trans masculine, non-binary soror. Um, these are my pronouns. This is how I identify. I don't identify as a woman, because I think I'm also reconciling within me whether or not I want to give up my sorority? I mean I have, and will I be asked to give up my sorority? Because [...] I don't identify as a woman, but I also don't identify as a man.

While NPHC sororities have become more diverse in allowing women from diverse ethnic, national, and socioeconomic backgrounds within, and even expanding to create affiliate organizations for non-collegiate women and girls (like Sigma Gamma Rho's youth affiliate groups, the Rhoers and Rhosebuds, and non-collegiate group, the Philos), organizations for men have little impact in the mission and activities of the organization. Even as queer fraternities develop – like Delta Lambda Phi, a collegiate fraternity for gay men – these organizations highlight that ““gay men, by virtue of being gay men, go through a unique, shared social experience” (Torbenson & Parks, 2009). They continue by expressing why they have decided to keep their organization single gender, and how they developed a sorority as a resource for lesbian women: “those who claim that our lesbian friends, as much as we love and support them as comrades-in-arms, have the same social experience as gay men, are, frankly, deluding

themselves. Our lesbian friends have the option of pledging our ‘sister’ sorority, Lambda Delta Omega” (p. 196).

Jalen notes that the NPHC sororities have yet to traverse the discussion on the status of people who transition after they are already members:

And so that's a very gray area that the sorority has not discussed. We're so caught up right now in terms of the extremes of the spectrum that we haven't really begun to talk about the people that are in the middle of the spectrum. And so I've really haven't come out in that way to a lot of my sorors yet. Um, all of my sorors know that I now go by Jalen, but in terms of my pronouns, so I'm really working through this transition period and my, in its entirety. And its fullness. Because there are a lot of outstanding questions and things that I have to kind of reconcile as it relates to the sorority.

Alton is resistant towards disaffiliating, and equally resistant towards the notion that their sorority would question their membership over their transition:

I mean, you know, I think the, the, the thing about being a [sorority member] is like, I will never denounce my letters. Um, somebody's gonna have to kick me out.

*Comforting Others through the Transition.* Treyvon’s afterthought within their public encounter with a sorority sister fits into the theme of comforting others through the transition. This also relates to the theme presented earlier in the study regarding invisibility.

One of the ways in which transgender men comforted their cisgender sorors was through their invisibility. As they saw the same silicone bracelets, pins, bags and line jackets I saw worn by my sorors – at conferences, in airports, at homecomings and galas – they would delight then restrict their communication, in concern of making the sisters uncomfortable. Treyvon details of one such experience when they attended a gala and ran into a soror who was at their initiation. The soror acted as if they had never met. Treyvon continues:



And I don't think it made it easier when I also introduced my wife because they feel like they couldn't put the two and two together. And for me, when I look at myself, I don't see male. I don't, I am, people sometimes use that, but um, I don't, I don't see male. So, um, yeah, I think that that was it. And we were out in public and I just, I didn't want to make it any more awkward that it already was.

As Treyvon speculated:

I sometimes have to be very, very conscious of what I look like. I was at another event with another organization and in the lobby of the hotel that we were in, um, it just so happened to be some, um, sorors who were there. Um, and they had their, they had their Epsilon shirts on and I, I, I was going to speak and I thought about having to explain who I am and explain why I know things. Um, because they, they, they're not seeing me as anything other than a man. Um, and so I know how I am sometimes perceived.

Alton communicates understanding that they have male privilege now, which may make his voice more pronounced:

I think it's something that is important to note that as a masculine of center person, just being seen more as male, I think provides easier access.

Elijah noted how women from his organization were ignored by fraternity men if he was in the room during joint planning, prioritizing his voice:

[...] the respect that I received from them was very different than before I transitioned and how my other sisters treated. Um, it's like if we were in a meeting talking about co sponsorships there, I got the attention, they would look to me as the final decision maker even though I'm not the one running the meeting. [...] I didn't really think would have been a such shift. Um, but it came off like it like within like weeks of me, you know, presenting more masculine, he/him pronouns, and changing my name socially.

During Elijah's transition, comforting people came through being flexible in correcting people regarding their actualized pronouns and new name:

So that kind of made me not to be as, I guess, strict with people when it came to pronouns or with people addressing me by Elijah. So I would say, okay, you can

just call me E or El. Um, because I was trying to make them feel more comfortable with me, you know, going through this process of coming out [...]

This is also the case with Jalen's family. Fear of divulgence is not limited to voluntary units (e.g. sorority and military), but extends to the family dynamic. For example, Jalen's fear of divulging their queerness to their grandmother exposed the grandmother's historical ties to the LGBTQ community: "And that was really moving for me to know that, like, I had a support system." As noted earlier, Jalen considers themselves thankful for their acceptance of their sexuality and believes it would cause undue tensions to address a change in pronouns.

*Distancing from religion.* Religion appeared in all four of the participant's narratives, usually divulged very early into the telling of their familial experiences and upbringing. Within these stories, there are themes of two genders, which are aligned with birth sex (i.e. male-designated people are boys and men; female-designated people are girls and women).

Jalen's story is unique in it was the sole response which did not begin with a religious foundation. Elijah's interview begins with their religious upbringing, immediately after denoting their hometown in the Southeastern United States: "So I grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, born and raised and grew up in a devout, Southern Baptist Christian household." This is also the case with Treyvon, whose very first words of response were about religion: "My process as far as knowing about gender came about through, um, family, um, both members. Uh, my mom and dad were both, um, heavily involved in the church." While their mother's family was less religious, their father's faith insisted upon her adherence to the conservative faith, which the family was a stronghold of their religious community:

My mom was very much a spiritualist, but when she married she had to, um, officially convert. So my immediate family, um, mom and dad were heavily into, um, even today in Christian theology.

Treyvon continues to discuss how religion shaped their views of sex and gender:

I had a very Judeo-Christian understanding. Um, and from that understanding, it was absolutely male and female. Um, God created men and women to procreate. [...] And so he means that he's gonna have a whole bunch of grandchildren. And that's kind of how my dad lived and does believe, even now.

Sullivan-Blum (2004) writes, “sexual morality in traditional Christian discourse is linked with a naturalized heterosexuality” (p. 199). They continue, “Christians who condemn homosexuality [...] argue that homosexual activity falls outside of the “orders of creation” revealed in Genesis and is unnatural” (p. 200). The orders of creation are what Treyvon discusses as the fruits of heteronormative behavior – reproduction – which is the deemed the duty of women. I will explore this further in an upcoming section focused on womanhood. Jalen’s introduction to religion came through high school friends being affiliated and active in Christianity:

When I got to high school, I started, uh, like my close group of friends were very religious. So I started going to church and while I was going to church, I was being taught [...] that being gay was *wrong*. Um, well, theologically I was being taught that being gay was wrong. So that's where I, I started to go down this path of like, *hating myself* because I knew that I was different. Um, and now through my relationship with God, it’s inherently wrong.

Treyvon’s concern of living against anti-gay religious ideologies expressed within the church as a child limited their desire to pursue not only relationships with cisgender women, but also all intimate relationships in general during high school:

I had *one* friend, um, and her name, Simone; she was my like closest friend [...] I had a like a massive crush on her. And so realizing I couldn't do anything about my crush, she became my really good friend. And so that was a way to show my care and admiration for her was through friendships. [...] and um, I just wasn't comfortable around being with men. Um, it, it just didn't suit me.

As noted earlier, Jalen’s relatively late introduction to religiosity resulted in similar sentiments towards sexual orientation. At this point, however, none of the participants are aware of the

continuums of gender, sex, sexual orientation, and have limited perceptions about performativity.

It was not until Jalen's opportunity to hear from a religious leader during college that they realized there were LGBT faith leaders.

I struggled a lot with my sexuality in college and trying to figure out who I was if I knew that I was having crushes on all of these girls but like I couldn't act on it because, and inside of me I knew from being in church that it was wrong. And it wasn't until my junior year where I went to this leadership organization [retreat] called LeaderShape, and there was a panel of leaders and one of the panelists was lesbian reverend and it completely shifted how I saw myself. I said, wait, hold up. There's a lesbian. [...] She's out, she's gay and God loves her enough to be a reverend and to be ordained, like, woah! Like this was mind blowing for me [...]

As Dial (2006) notes, "LeaderShape is a comprehensive program which seeks to empower undergraduate students to maximize their leadership potential [...] the program is designed to educate students about leading with integrity, with the ultimate goal of improving student organizations and learning environments (p. 6). Like Jalen, Elijah also became more confident in his identity during a college student leadership retreat. This is also when they realize that their Christianity caused them to question how to act on their orientation:

So we did a lot of things of like, you know, Multiple Dimensions of You [a student development activity on identity], um, uh, looking at how your race intersects with your religion intersects with your gender identity and, and your sexual orientation. Um, and then really seeing how, like that was a moment when I realized like my Christianity, um, was kind of in conflict with, uh, how I identified gender wise because everything I was ever told was, you know, you get in, you get married, you have children and natural family, man, woman, anything outside of that is an abomination, you go to hell. And that was kind of like point-blank-period.

In addition to their orientation, the retreat gave Elijah language to understand the diversity of gender expression, which led them to questioning the positionality of their religion with their gender identity:

And so for me it was like, well, I don't necessarily identify as a lesbian, but I do identify as a man. So am I still sinning? So those are the questions that I would

pose people and would never really get an answer. It always went back to like homophobia. And I'm like, well, I'm not really gay. So am I still doing something wrong? Even though it's not, I don't see myself as gay.

This passage denotes an attempt to dedicate oneself to religion, while questioning one's queer identity. As all participants delve further into their discovery of self, religious adherence becomes less important, and LGBTQ community support becomes more pertinent.

I am definitely a follower of Christ. I don't identify as a Christian. And the reason for that is that I don't like the religious and the religiosity that is wrapped into what Christianity means. Um, Christianity has been used as a tool, a divisive tool that has enslaved, has raped, that has beat, that has murdered many people who look like me. Many people who share my identities in various forms. I don't identify as a Christian. Do I follow Christ? Yes. I think that Christ was a very influential figure in history. [...] people literally said he had like supernatural powers. It didn't matter. So I guess for me, I look at that as like, literally, you can walk on water and don't, a motherfucker don't care if they don't like you, they don't like you. So we don't, like you tried to, to, to impress em. It just ain't gonna work. It's just not. So, um, Do you do you and I appreciate right or wrong, he believed he was the son of God. And sometimes you got to be bold enough to just believe you are God walking around here. Cause sometimes that's the only time you can get shit done. So I guess those are the things that I follow within there.

The church's vocalism on heteronormativity, with the shunning of queer orientation and identities, is still an unsafe realm for LGBTQ people. In particular, several instances of violence in sermons, as well as in physical action, have been tied to the church. These instances occur predominantly in the Bible Belt and cities with significant melanated populations. Significant in this usage equates to areas where melanated people make up twenty percent or more of the population. In June 2019, pastor Grayson Fritts "called for the government to send a riot team to a Pride parade scheduled for June 22 in Knoxville". The *New York Times* reported, Fritts called the queer community, "'freaks' and 'worthy of death'," in addition to "L.G.B.T. people should be arrested, tried, and if convicted, executed" (Garcia, 2019). While Fritts is of European descent, 28.5% of Knoxville encompasses melanated people, and nearly a fifth (18%) of the

Knoxville community encompasses Melanin-Rich citizens; Knoxville also hosts a sizable LGBTQ+ population (Yarbrough, 2019). He was also a Knox County Sheriff's Office detective at the time of his comments, and worked in corrections beforehand (Knoxville News Sentinel, 2019).

Policing of gender norms through the sorority came through older sorority members within the graduate, or alumnae, chapters. As an undergraduate, suggestions of programming involving queer issues were shunned by the alumnae chapter, which controls the financial viability of undergraduate chapters. Elijah noted that programming suggested involving a queer facet, or partnerships with LGBTQ groups was unacceptable, as their religious views influenced their support:

So it was, it was kind of like teetering on that line of you're kind of pushing it, you're pushing into around that. We're not really, uh, you know, trying to, you know, support her.

This passive apathy disallows for students to program of issues related to violence perpetuated by alleged religious values. In late 2018, Kelly Stough, a 36-year-old woman of transgender experience, was killed. She was shot by Albert Weathers, a 46-year-old Detroit preacher (Raven, 2019). While Weathers' defense has argued the death as a result of an accidental shooting, a transgender woman working as a sex worker in the area the death occurred identified Weathers as a frequent customer of women engaging in sex work. The woman, according to *The Detroit News*, "said she stopped going on 'dates' with Weathers because he would give the transgender women 'the run around' when it came to paying her" (Brand-Williams, 2019, para. 10).

Ward (2005) cites the church in "playing an important role in its genesis, legitimization and weekly reinforcement [of homophobia] in black communities" (p. 493). This hatred extends to transphobia, of which many in the community see as one in the same.

I miss Black Church. Black Church has shaped so much of me [...] I learned how to teach as a Sunday school teacher. I would say I would not have um, uh, spoken and had been a speaker in so many different avenues that it wasn't, you know, having to learn those recitations for Easter and all these other different things like who I am as an orator was absolutely shaped through the black church. And so for that, I, I've missed it at times. I miss the Gospel music. I miss good music. Gospel music is one music on earth that is literally a combination of joy and pain in a way that cannot be replicated. And I love it and it feeds me.

While the participants in this study all have childhood ties to the church and have expressed a distance from it, the elements of such upbringing still influence their perceptions of life. Ward (2005) affirms Treyvon's reflection:

Even if as adults they no longer embrace the church or religious principles, many blacks have been profoundly influenced by the church ideology and imagery with which they were raised, and this continues to influence their later beliefs and practice (p. 495).

This influence comes with the absence of papal representation in issues impacting the LGBT community the most. An interview with *The Guardian* notes how the Church is not only apathetic, but furnishes hatred (Worthy, 2018):

Bishop Clyde Allen III, 45, the founder of Vision Cathedral of Atlanta, argues that the black church doesn't help. Once the cornerstone of the black community, it has perpetuated toxic attitudes about gay people, he says, which is particularly detrimental to the self-esteem of the many black gay people who look to the church for spiritual guidance (para. 5).

There are instances of change as well. Jacksonville, Florida's Rev. R.L. Gundy was a "vocal, high-profile opponent in 2012 of changing Jacksonville's anti-discrimination law to cover lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people", yet supported it in 2015. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference leader cited a failure "to develop backing at the grassroots level" when explaining his dissent. He and fifty religious leaders then joined the Jacksonville Coalition for Equality in pressing for the addition of LGBT people to the city's anti-discrimination laws (Bauerlein, 2015). The Ordinance added the categories of "sexual orientation" and "gender

identity” in 2017 (Hong, 2017). Jacksonville is the twelfth largest city in the United States, and is nearly a third Melanin-Rich (31%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

*Queer Community as Family.* Familial and sorority distancing, as well as protective self-distancing, led to the physical relocation of many participants, for employment and community in LGBTQ friendly regions. Distancing will be discussed in a later section. While discovering one’s trans\* identity can result in separation, it was motivated by their relocation. Alton’s first move placed them in a college environment working specifically with queer students:

That was the first time somebody asked me my pronouns, like were calling out to me was like, even stuff like that to where I was just like, oh, I never really, oh, I can choose? Like, I don't have to say she? You know, like that's the kind of stuff that I was like, oh, and then watching like how like open the students were? And you know, one, one day, one person was identified in this way and then maybe, you know, the next week they have different identifiers for themselves. Just like wow. You know?

A desire to move into a better-paying position compelled another move across the country. As noted above, moving from one sector of the queer community to another changes intimate and platonic relationships; a presence on dating applications resulted in connections with other trans\* people, who became a tangible support system after moving.

And so met up with them, had coffee, like, and so like that's how I got connected to a lot of community. [They] actually introduced me to a lot of, um, folks. [...] And so I was going to community events and being asked to sit on people's boards and doing things like that and just meeting different types of black queer people who had different identifiers for themselves. Um, and so that was just really, really, really cool for me. And when I got top surgery, it was like community who took care of me. Right. Like that, you know, I'm, I still had a very intense and strange relationship with my family. And so these people became like my chosen family, you know.



While Alton witnessed discrimination of a professor by students, he had few direct experiences with trans\* people. His move to the East Coast gave them opportunities to create close relationships with trans\* people who looked like him:

Like, look at all of these black queer, beautiful people in all types of bodies. That was one of the, that was one of the first times that I actually had a person who is F-to-M [female-to-male] who had their shirt off at the party. And so I was like, oh wow. Like looking at their scars in person and like all those things that I had never been exposed to. And so yeah, like just being able to like see myself was really important for me. Um, and so yeah, that original plumbing party [for people who have not had genital gender reassignment] was like what kind of set off my community. Like the, I've met a lot of people at that party that I'm still fucks with, to this day.

The socials held by East Coast trans\* collectives are an example of families of choice as denoted within Austin, Lindley, Mena, Crosby, and Muzny's (2014) study of noncollegiate sororities and fraternities among lesbian and bisexual African-American women. Chosen family within the trans\* community accepted Alton and all of his identities – as Melanin-rich, masculine-identified, as a scholar, Christian, and as a sorority member – in contrast to facets which his cis-het and Christian family and sorority members, and cisgender lesbian intimate partners took issue with. Immediate understanding of the excommunication from these arenas and exposure to trans\* people at all stages of transitioning fulfilled the concerns Alton has with pursuing testosterone use and top surgery. This made it easier for Alton to explore transitioning.

*Distancing from womanhood.* The foundations of girlhood and womanhood come with restrictions imposed by family and society regarding responsibilities and roles which likely do not overlap with boys' and men's expectations. The adherence to such roles may be more difficult for transgender children, who likely do not have the terminology or support to discover their gender identity until they are nearly or fully independent from the family construct. Nahata (2017) found,

these children have strikingly high rates of mental health concerns; they are also frequently victimized by peers, and authors of studies have shown that half of transgender youth consider suicide and 25% to 35% make an attempt (p. 2).

Butler's (1986) explanation of de Beauvoir's lamentations of gender constriction within the book *The Second Sex* denote how women and/or female-bodied people feel they must overcome or perfect womanly presentation:

Sartre's comments on the natural body as "inapprehensible" find transcription in Simone de Beauvoir's refusal to consider gender as natural. We never experience or know ourselves as a body pure and simple, i.e. as our 'sex', because we never know our sex outside of its expression as gender. Lived or experienced 'sex' is always already gendered. We become our genders, but we become them from a place which cannot be found and which, strictly speaking, cannot be said to exist (p. 39).

Treyvon discusses the plight of becoming a woman early in their life, an indicator they realize was an alarm of trans\* dysphoria:

I remember even crying about that one time and my dad basically saying that women have to go through it. So that's basically my, my plot in life, my plight, really. Um, because of the fall of Eve, guess what? This is what you're doing. Um, so I think that also gave me a very negative image of my body. And the way I showed up in the world was because I felt like I always was a second class citizen, um, that my ideas will never be, um, would never go anywhere without the approval of my husband.

Within this passage, a direct connection is made between de Beauvoir's insistence that female-bodied people are seen as not only different from male-bodied people, but rank second to them. In Treyvon's interview, he discusses the desire to join a sorority in order to learn how to act like a woman. Jalen affirms such a statement, noting that joining a sorority gave them the ability to hide their queerness.

I knew that I was masculine and I always grew up even from like a little, little girl. I would, I was tomboyish. I never liked dresses. I never liked dressing. So I really have always been masculine in that sense. However, I tried to become more feminine. Um, at the helm was my mom saying, well maybe you should try a

dress, maybe you should try make up, things like that. And then also again fitting into the cis, heteronormative ideal of what a sorority girl was like I wore the ceremonial white dress, I wore dresses to our programs, I wore high heels, I wore things that would allow for me to fit into, not only again this cis normative idea of what a sorority girl was supposed to look like, but what I was told what a Epsilon woman is supposed to look like.

Treyvon appreciates the sorority environment for its education on the cultural dynamics of being a woman, which further aided in their understanding of self:

I believed in having to earn your spot. [...] And so that to me made sense and I felt like these women were going to give me something and I was lacking and that was sisterhood and understanding what it meant to be a Black woman because that act could not wrap my mind around. I knew what it was to exist in a Black body. I knew what it was to exist in a socialized Black female body, but it did not know what it meant to be a Black woman. And I feel like those experiences are very different. And so I was hoping that they were going to be able to give me that, um, when I got to college.

Harris' (2015) experience within fraternity life exalts a similar approach to attempting heteronormative masculinity in mannerisms and dress:

I blended in well, very well actually. I was meticulous about how I walked, the swing of my hands, the inflection of my voice, and the style of clothes I wore [not too flashy, but not too dull] (p. 9).

However, reflecting on such assimilation meant playing into the rigid norms of Greek fraternal acceptability. Harris continues:

My self-monitoring behaviors were a result of what I refer to as a gendered blazer of success or, as Pollack (1999) referred, as a "gender straitjacket," stitched together by a plethora of mixed nonverbal messages nestled in between "narrow, rigid, and limited [models] of being a man" (Edwards & Jones, 2009, p.214) (p. 12).

Unfortunately this behavior of *cool posing* excludes some gay or questioning Black males along the margins of the Black community, and even further from creating and maintaining positive peer interactions with straight Black college aged men (p. 13).

Even for those who are known gay members, the intentional un-queering of demeanor served not as a suggestion, but a mandate for other queer aspirants. Khoury (2013) writes,

Gay men belong to each of the five fraternities, despite the efforts of some to deny their existence. Thomas (1998) tells of his story of pledging Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity and the internal struggles he faced as a gay man. He says, "I wanted to be a man! I wanted to prove to myself and to others that. . . I could pledge and join a Black fraternity" (p. 13).

This may be easier for a lesbian willing to still dress femininely to do. As Jalen describes, he was still dressing the part of a feminine woman as an undergraduate, To distract from internal and external questioning, Jalen dressed femininely and often led casual harassment towards out, queer students.

I knew that I was masculine and I always grew up even from like a little, little girl. I would, I was tomboyish. I never liked dresses. I never liked dressing. So I really have always been masculine in that sense. However, I tried to become more feminine. Um, at the helm was my mom saying, "well maybe you should try a dress, maybe you should try make up," things like that. And then also again fitting into the cis, heteronormative ideal of what a sorority girl was. I wore the ceremonial white dress. I wore dresses to our programs. I wore high heels. I wore things that would allow for me to fit into, not only again this cis normative idea of what a sorority girl was supposed to look like, but what I was told what a Epsilon woman is supposed to look like [...]

As Risman reflects the words of a sorority interviewee, "I am learning to be a woman" (Risman, 1982, p. 231). For cisgender women who join sororities as a means of navigating womanhood, the structure of the rituals, dress, and communication between each other teaches and emphasizes mores of femininity. Even as leaders in progress for women, the traditions of duty as mothers led the defenses for their social advancement. As Turner (1952) writes, "Very true it is, that a race or nation can rise no higher than its women, whose duty it is to make the homes and shape the young plastic lives of all who come into this world" (p. 156). Risman continues,

Many theorists have suggested that institutional opportunity and reward structures function to limit the possible identities people can assume. Identities are only in part a matter of choice in that ascribed characteristics, such as sex, clearly influence how others react to an individual. This is particularly relevant for a study of sororities and gender role; in the Greek system for formal regulations are different for males and females. Institutional patterns can also limit the identities people may assume by restricting the significant others by whose standards the self shall be appraised (Risman, 1982, p. 232-233).

This is the same in historically-inclusive colleges, as Fleming notes regarding the training of women. The result of such training at Spelman, for example is: “Spelman may unintentionally make ‘good’ women who know when to be intelligent and when to lapse into feminine passivity” (p. 51). For cisgender sorority women who identify as LGB, they may also stay in the closet for fear of what being out may do to the reputation of their organization on campus. While other student organizations may not have much of an issue with sexual orientation, sororities are realms of femininity, of which a heteronormative standard is enforced through dress, dating, and programming.

Study participants who joined sororities while identifying as women look back at their experience as a way to affirm their womanhood, of which the sorority proved impossible for them. Elijah notes that Lambda presented them with the traditions aligned with femininity, which they initially believed were difficult to achieve because they lacked a sister circle. Interpretive reproduction, a theory developed by Corsaro (1997) and Corsaro and Rosier (1992), denotes that college gives students the opportunity to reconstruct information they receive from childhood and adulthood, which can empower students to believe they can enact rapid changes in their world (Sanday, 1990; Seabrook, McMahon, & O'Connor, 2018); institutions like sororities become a realm of both observation and questioning, as noted by Elijah:

Honestly that organization was kind of like that last ditch effort. See, okay, I'm trying, my God, I'm trying everything to be a woman you're saying that I am. So this is it, this doesn't work. Then you got to figure out a plan B ‘cause I don't like,

I don't know how to navigate life going, like go through the motions of, of being like this.

Sororities commonly partner with other fraternities when it comes to relationship-related topic programs. While sororities do not continuously partner with other sororities, they will do so on the annual basis when discussing traditional women's issues (i.e. the wage gap or misogyny in the classroom). Once he transitioned, Elijah realized outsiders began to ask about the sexual orientation of all of the members of the chapter:

[They] had questions about like our chapter as if I always, it's a chapter that, you know, accepts dykes, or like is this the gay chapter? And things like that. So like there was a like a little period of time where that there was like a rumor going around about that. Um, but I was like, the only [trans\*] person within my chapter at the time and while I was at university, like all the woman that had came in after me, were very feminine-presenting and, um, they, uh, even if they identified as being bi or lesbian, like they very much, um, exuded femininity. So, um, just, just me being the kind of like the lone outsider and that, that, that's pretty masculine that, um, some of the sororities are just like, oh, we don't want to partner with them.

Much like with Elijah, Alton was placed in a realm of understanding queerness with the other Greeks on campus. Alton's induction clarified the off-putting demeanor of some other sorority's members from when they first began looking at organizations:

So right, so after I, after initiation, interesting things began to happen. One I found out who the closeted sorority members were, right. Because now all of a sudden, I guess I got a pass, it was cool, right? Um, and so I was either getting hit on or people begin to kind of the giving me a look like, *no, she's a lesbian, right?* Talking about certain people. Um, and so that was always interesting, found out that there was a bunch of closeted Lambdas and I was like, "oh, that's why y'all looking at me with the stank face, because you don't want me to blow your, your whole situation up."

This instance occurred before Alton transitioned. The fear of being "outed" is covered to an extent in extant literature, with concerns of harassment, demotion or failure to promote, and

firing noted by employees of companies (Chasnoff & Cohen, 1996; Gore, 2000; Poverny, 1999; Szalacha, 2004; Trudy, 2000). However, there were few instances where Melanin-Rich women were the focus of such outing (Bowleg, Brooks, & Ritz, 2008). Alton's masculine display upon entry to the organization did not interfere with how the Tau's overall membership was viewed, yet there was visual feedback from public displays at other campuses, where masculinity was reserved for fraternal display and Alton was unknown to the audience. Alton describes instances where both Greek and non-Greek people would question his place in the stroll line, an informal choreographed dance members do about parties:

[M]eeting other people off campus, that was always interesting. Like in strolling with other sorors and see what people's reaction was when they saw men strolling with other feminine women, right? So it was just always interesting. There was either people were like, *hmm, that's interesting*. Or just like kind of disgusted it like, you know, like *what the hell are y'all doing?*

When Alton's chapter visited other campuses, their distancing from womanhood was more apparent to onlookers. Nevertheless, Alton's sorors support maintained their commitment to the sisterhood. For Treyvon explains that their distancing from womanhood was motivated by the bravery of their sorority founders:

It resonates in my spirit to have, um, sorors who paved the way when there was no way, that stood against odds that, um, that put their all life on the line. [...] I think it also shaped who and why I felt that I had to live authentically. I don't, I probably wouldn't have done that if I didn't join [the sorority].

Dedication. In this section I will discuss dedication, the last of the three themes.

Dedication is displayed by the interviewee as well as towards the interviewees, through LGBTQ Greeks in community with each other despite organizational affiliation; sorority members in their respective organizations; to self; and to oppressors within their intimate circles. I end the section

by discussing their dedication to the NPHC, and their suggestions and guidance to NPHC as queer members.

*Dedication to queer members in Greek life.* Family distancing came across in all participant histories, of which Alton shared the most contention with parents. Forced outing from a school authority resulted in Alton's early physical excommunication from their household. Alton affirms that queer communities aided in the redevelopment of a family dynamic: "I still had a very intense and strange relationship with my family. And so these people became like my chosen family, you know." The discovery of successful queer people was the first step to three participants coming out either as lesbians or as trans\* people. Jalen realized they could be gay, out, and religious, as well as a leader in their community after hearing a reverend speak at a student leadership conference in college. Jalen continues:

And also there were people in my group, who, I would have never known that they were gay until we got comfortable in this week long retreat to where they came out. And I was like, wow, these are amazing people and I maybe people can be gay too, so I don't like have to kind of hide who I am.

For Treyvon, finding a community of queer Greeks helped them recognize that they were not alone in the gender-strict environment of sororities:

Um, and then found like this underground network of, [Divine Nine] LGBTQ sorors that I didn't know existed. I actually found them in a D9 rainbow group [on Facebook]. I got added to this D9 rainbow group. Um, and I was the first time I had even I even knew that you can be a trans masculine soror. Like I didn't know that was a thing. And then I met, met folks and I was like, you exist.

Treyvon was surprised to find out how long many of the trans\* members have been members of their organizations, showing a dedication spanning decades:

I think Harvey was the first to medically transition into male [...] for over 20 years. So it was just like, wow, how is that like a thing and why does no one know



that? Um, and then met other, um, members at different stages of their transition. And so that was, that was awesome. And to have that community and to also have that assurance that it, it can be okay. Um, so I think that made it easier for me, but I definitely always pay homage to, um, to [three transgender men] for literally creating a, a path and being okay with the complete transition of what they look like, but them still being very much like, but my ideals and my love for the organization has never changed.

Treyvon expresses his dedication to trans\* members who provided social support to their transition through their fraternity service. Trayvon's fraternity includes many Divine Nine sorority members:

I feel like I can stand in the gap for, uh, my, my trans brothers who are still a part very much a part of the, the, the legacy of [the sorority], but may not be able to navigate spaces as easily as I may be able to. And My, and my navigation is, is definitely not smooth sailing at all times, but I can definitely get past a lot more people than, than some of my brothers can.

*Dedication to identity.* Elijah's coming out as a transgender man came after coming out to their undergraduate community and being pushed into the shadows at the behest of graduate chapter members, as well as hesitation from other sororities to program with his undergraduate chapter. In addition, fraternity members' acceptance of their transition expected a transaction between the sorority members as a conduit for intimate networking with their sorors, further establishing a dyad between their identity and organization:

So I, that's why I decided to take a step back and focus on myself. Still show up to events that were being hosted by the organization and participate as a member but not the, at the forefront of, okay, well I think we should go in this direction of doing this and doing that because I get, I just wasn't in the energy of fighting people at that point. I was trying to graduate.

Alton's witnessing of transgender aggression during their graduate school experience was one of the primary instances they had with hearing transgender rhetoric. While it was not covered in undergraduate or graduate programs, there was a transgender member of faculty they

met during their graduate program, who faced discrimination. Students and staff stumbled over their pronouns and discussed their identity in a negatively manner behind their back:

There was a professor who was trans\* at Harrison University and used *ze/zim* pronouns. And I remember how mean and insidious people were about this person and making fun of them and being like, “What the Hell is wrong with this person?” Like this... Really fucked up language around describing this person.

Alton used the witnessing of this experience to push themselves to get their terminal degree, allowing him access to research, teach, and influence policy:

So I've always just been like very intentional about yo, like nothing, nothing's gonna stop me from having access to space because of my identity and anything I didn't see is only going to bolster like the fact that I deserve to be in these spaces. Like I'm going to be teaching people in every space that I'm in and transforming every space that I'm in.

*Dedication to sorority.* Elijah is the sole participant to come out as both a lesbian and transgender men during their undergraduate experience. When asked, “Would you have changed anything about joining a sorority”, Elijah replied:

I think I would have waited a year, but I still would've joined that organization after my freshman year. [...] knowing everything that I know about the organization, all the work that I put in and the people that I was able to meet and be connected with, I still, because in the mindset that I was at that age, I still would have wanted that connection and would have wanted to contribute in the ways that I was able to, um, through the sorority.

Treyvon affirms that while they are not financially involved, they seek out masculine-presenting sorors to serve as a mentor and confidant:

I'm not active with [the sorority]. Um, other than like helping, um, young members as a, as a confidant. Uh, I have had quite a few masculine presenting, sorors who've reached out to me and, and just kinda, you know, talked about some of the things that's going on with them, what it means to show up, um, as a lesbian, as a masculine-presenting lesbian, uh, as well as being able to, to also have those conversations that sorors have with about their intimate partners and being able to have advice. So I've been able to do that for [the sorority] and

particularly with, um, more masculine-presenting sorors. I try on Instagram, if I can see someone who I assume is masculine-presenting, me and you need to be friends.

Members that Treyvon reaches out to may be masculine-presenting, but they may identify as cisgender straight women, as well as cisgender LBG women, and trans\* members, though many identify as cisgender lesbians. Alton is not financial, but remains moderately visible as a member through the addition of organizational trinkets in their work office:

I have a [sorority mascot] that sits on my bookshelf and then I have a little statue that has [sorority letters] and it's visible [...] so, you know. Because I do think that it also is a really great conversation starter [...] like, "oh, I didn't know." "Exactly, let's talk about it. Yeah, right. Let's talk about gender."

Treyvon expressed similar feelings about representing their sorority in their professional spaces:

Um, people who know me know me, they know I love Xi. In my office is always, I have paddles up, I got [the mascot] up, my [membership] jacket is in my office.

While none of the interviewees are currently active in their NPHC sororities, three expressed a desire to participate formally in their organizations in the future. Treyvon was excited for an upcoming checkpoint in their sorority's history, noting, "I'm probably gonna be active again, specifically for [an organizational anniversary]."

All participants cited fear of discrimination, including their presence being a motivation to bar them from being recognized as members. However, Alton insists they have never regretted their choice in joining a sorority:

I will always have a girlhood, I will always have connections to womanhood. Um, and I still firmly believe in, in the tenants of the organization, um, in the founding of the organization. And I also am a real stickler of if I worked hard for something, I don't appreciate people kind of trying to take it away from me. Um, I also believe that even in the time as an Undergrad, we created a legacy on that campus. And we worked with like, you know the [sorority] ran the yard while I was there. And so it feels like just outward erasure when people are like, oh, you shouldn't be affiliated with this organization anymore. I'm like, well, what about all the stuff that I've done and you know, the, the connections that I do have to my Undergrad [...]

Alton denoted several instances in which fraternity and sorority members espoused rhetoric insisting he was not a good fit for their sorority. When asked whether he believed a fraternity would have been a better choice for their membership post-transition, Alton declined:

Um, and so I think, but I really struggle with it because I, I so, so firmly believe in the founding and the staples and the foundation of the sorority. And so, and there's no other organization, fraternity included, that feels that way to me.

For Treyvon explains that their distancing from womanhood was motivated by the bravery of their sorority founders:

It resonates in my spirit to have, um, sorors who paved the way when there was no way, that stood against odds that, um, that put their all life on the line. So I recognize that visibility matters, and so forth that I don't think I would've learned that without going through and being a part of [the sorority]. Um, so yeah, I would've did it all over again cause that's what my founders did. As much as people try to tell me that's not what our founders stood for anytime you Black in the area they don't want you, I know it if felt like to not be wanted. I know what it feels like to be threatened. I know what it feels like to have my livelihood and my body putting in harm's way because I believe in something and I believe that I should have access to things. So for that, [...] I'm doing exactly what my founders wanted me to do.

In reflecting on members who have dissuaded them from addressing themselves as members, Alton discussed how their contributions to the sorority justify their concern for the welfare of his undergraduate chapter. He expects the respect that is afforded to alumna members, though he rationalizes that his current presentation may concern current undergraduates:

I get that I might make people feel unsafe now. And so that's why I tread lightly and not, you know, wear letters and do things like that.

*Dedication to NPHC.* When asked about the relationship they have with NPHC Greeks throughout all organizations, Treyvon responded with criticism regarding the investment of NPHC into change for the Melanin-Rich community nationally. Treyvon believes NPHC needs to reflect on the colonialist ideology at work within the organizations:

I think NPHC in moving to a... is a hierarchical space and we're what, 2022, the great eight will be a hundred, and in a hundred years, what have we done collectively with our, our great orgs, being over a hundred years old? What have we really done for the upliftment [sic] of Black folks? What have we done to shape the history in a way that's not just, [Dr.] Martin Luther King[, Jr.] was an Alpha. Like what have the NPHC as a whole done other than just these individuals who happen to have that affiliation. And we kinda got credit after the fact and I don't know what we can do to fix it other than letting that ego, that ego that is completely entrenched in white supremacy. Our ego is, is not even ours. And I guess that's why it, it annoys me so. 'Cause not even our egos.

They continued:

[B]eing a part of the, the L, the G, the B, and the Q, is much more accepting on the local level than it will be at the national level. [...] I think the fight for humanity, the fight for what it means to be a man, what it means to be a woman, um, as it relates to humanity as it relates to being Black is, uh, where so many of our brethren struggle. They don't want to be associated with anything that could possibly taint the image of supremacy. And so for them, I think it's definitely going to be more on an individual level.

Elijah implores that the Council addresses the issue of gender discrimination utilizing outside practitioners:

So I think actually using the NPHC as a governing body to be the overseer of how these conversations go about, how we talk amongst each other as organizations about issues like that all of Divine Nine are facing. Um, and I think also having people that are outside of the organizations that are the experts when it comes to talking about gender identity. When it comes to talking about sexual orientation, you know, get consultants talking about how do we, like, how does NPHC be more inclusive with students that do identify as trans\*, do identify as non-binary, both during their, you know, membership, before their membership or after they're no longer members or go to grad chapters. Um, 'cause I think there's just a lot of people just figuring out how to do things individually by chapters and not there being a protocol that everyone is aware of or abides by through national headquarters.

Kidd and Witten (2008) note that in addition to “the ignorance of the general public about transgender identities”, the “problem of institutionalized bias and terminology conflation with respect to gender and sex” means scholars often have concepts of gender and sex conflation solidified through their collegiate experience (p. 48). Treyvon insists that NPHC, comprised of

organizations founded due to racial discrimination, should resist falling to similarly separatist ideals:

I don't think we should create another organization. There should not be, um, eleven organizations and put all the trans\* people in this organization. But all the, the, the gay folks and the lesbians, the queers, put all of them in this group, so we don't have to deal with it. I think that happens a lot, especially at higher ed. How do we create a subgroup so everybody is happy, instead of just making shit inclusive? Like you don't have to create another group to make people happy. You can just make everything inclusive and we don't have to have that.

In the next section, I will reflect on the themes from the literature review.

Ties to Literature Review Themes. Violence, representation, and survivors oppressing survivors were the themes found in the literature review. I will first give a brief overview of how these themes present themselves in extant works; I will then describe how the themes appear throughout the findings presented by my study participants.

Literature which culminated to the themes discussed the creation of the Divine Nine in the face of discrimination, not only from Anglo universities which resisted their matriculation, but from social organizations after they were admitted to these segregated institutions. The refusal to let hued men join the fraternities at Anglo campuses like Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, led to the founding of the first racially-inclusive fraternity for collegiate men, Alpha Phi Alpha. This literature then discussed how strict adherence to racial and gender separatism culminated into the founding of Anglo sororities. Though these sororities were founded because Anglo men refused Anglo women's inclusion, these women utilized similar separatist ideals to block the participation of hued women from NPC sorority participation (representation/survivors oppressing survivors). Though the foundation of the NPHC resulted from a desire for historically race-inclusive organizations to ban under one accord, their strict adherence to gender

presentation has culminated in de facto prohibition of queer and queer-presumed aspirants (representation/survivors oppressing survivors).

For queer students who are accepted into NPHC organizations, these members are presented with a cisgender, heteronormative, and religiously-driven membership which normalizes belittling femininity in men and masculinity in women, emphasized in multiple ways. Primarily, gender rigidity is enforced through formal dress standards on paper and de facto informal dress throughout their public displays. Secondly, heteronormativity is enforced through songs and chants. Third, members who fall outside of organizational norms are pressed into invisibility – though failure of acknowledgement as a member and not being invited to sorority activities - and lose the benefits afforded to other sorority members (violence/survivors oppressing survivors).

From this research, these findings are affirmed. In addition, it finds that trans\* members may face direct communication from members noting a desire for them to cease affiliating with their organizations. While research on transgender aspirants of NPHC organizations is scant, trans\* members who joined before their gender transition are faced with members who are largely intolerant of their actualized identities (violence/survivors oppressing survivors).

This study culminated into three of its own themes: discovery (of queerness, language, community, and masculinity); distancing (from sorority, religion, and womanhood); and dedication (to queer members of NPHC, their identity, their sorority, and to NPHC as a whole). Below I will detail how this study's findings interrelate to the themes found in extant literature. While these have been sectioned off, they often overlap.

*Violence.* The definition of violence was given in Chapter Two under Conceptual Framework, which read,

Violence takes many forms in the queer community. Stereotyping is the central reason for the rise of street violence against transgender persons throughout the contemporary national culture; in short, the power of place and the status of a person or group are the major shapers. The cultural phenomenon of homophobia and transphobia is an experience which many Americans have witnessed, and while there is decreasing social acceptance for explicit expressions of homophobia, few of us speak out against microaggressions against the LGBT community. In addition, homophobia and transphobia are perpetrated against straight-identified individuals who are not gender normative as a means of policing gender (Beaver, 2015). This silence has damaging effects (Sue, 2010).

Violence is expressed by cisgender women by excommunicating and making invisible those who do not align with their expectations of womanhood, which are placed on them by men but they police between each other. They are suspicious of women who under and over perform femininity. In terms of the participants, transmasculine men are often derided by cisgender women as underperforming, or incomplete women. If trans\* men are “clocked” – publicly presumed and addressed as their birth sex – as female, they are referred to as lesbians. This violence is rarely reported or researched because it manifests through microaggressions, not physical violence. Kidd and Witten (2008) write,

Typically, “gender-based violence” or “gender violence” is understood to mean any form of violence against women. However, the implicit definition of “woman” is based upon reproductive (gonadal) genitalia and the social construction of personhood/identity via the binary social edifice resulting from the gonadal status of the individual. Thus, it is rare for gender-based violence research to include non-normative (i.e., non-Western) or non-traditional gender identities (androgeny, agendered, gender-benders, gender-blending, etc.) and their resultant sexualities, pair-bonding, or socioeconomic and demographic status (p. 31).

Because Alton affirms his gender as a man through dress, name, physical appearance, and pronouns, representation is a theme which is applicable. However, the insistence he is a lesbian, and refusing to accept his gender and orientation changes are evidence of violence. Alton’s reply



insists that purposely mis-gendering him – the act of assuming one’s gender, or assuming one’s gender aligns with their birth sex – ignores the steps they’ve taken to feel whole:

Like when people are like, you're a lesbian. I'm like, oh no, [...] the aesthetic that I feel the most safe in is, you know, taking testosterone and having facial hair and things like that. Like that's what makes me feel safe in my body.

There are unique differences in how trans\* men are received versus masculine-presenting women, though there may be overlaps with how they are received due to appearance (physicality) and presentation (dress). For instance, masculine women are deemed deviant because they are presumed to seek sexual fulfillment through unsuspecting cisgender straight women; however, cisgender straight women can present as masculine, through dress (i.e. wearing flat shoes or sneakers for comfort), due to uncontrollable anatomical differences (i.e. facial hair, broad shoulders, etc.), or both (e.g. wearing one’s hair short due to alopecia; wearing loose-fitting clothing to hide a mastectomy; wearing pants to hide a skin condition). Presuming a person is a sexual threat to women due to appearance and dress, gender identity or sexual orientation, is no different than gay panic defense used by cisgender men against gay men and transgender women. The sole variation is the violence women perpetuate against queer people is not usually physical. Nevertheless, the apathy of women towards queer or queer-assumed women manifests into the justification of apathy towards queer issues, even when the victim or survivor was female-born (Perkiss, 2013).

Higher education contributes to the violence against trans\* people by creating barriers to everyday resources available to cisgender students. Using the panic defense as justification, campuses have ejected trans\* people out of housing and limited bathroom usage, for concerns of intimidating cisgender students (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, and Tubbs, 2005; Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015; Seelman, 2014, 2016). Participant Alton noted that year-long on-campus housing was one

of the main considerations for their college selection process. As trans\* youth face dramatically higher rates of homelessness than the straight youth, college residence halls may be the only place students have to live.

Characteristics of culturally-normed cisgender men, like facial hair, short haircuts, flat chests, accompanied with dress, remove the ability to be confused for a masculine-presenting lesbian (though lesbians may present with many or all of these characteristics). Ellis' (1906/2001) account of "sexual inverts" describes trans\* men likely to adopt men's presentation, including dress. He writes, "male garments are not usually regarded as desirable chiefly on account of practical convenience, nor even in order to make an impression on other women, but because the wearer feels more at home in them" (p. 141).

Physical appearance changes may involve cutting one's hair, as Alton did: "When I cut my locs [...] and seeing my face for the first time with a low cut, I was like, oh, I think I'm a whole grown ass man." He also pursued top surgery (the removal of his breasts) and the use of testosterone. However, not all transmasculine persons desire medical transitioning (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). Gender ambiguity may be a desire for those who identify as nonbinary (Diamond, Pardo, & Butterworth, 2011; Levitt & Hiestand, 2004; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014); in this study, the two nonbinary participants appear masculine but can be vocally clocked, for example. Without naturally deep voices or testosterone, Treyvon presents as masculine in dress, haircut and body frame, but posits they can pass as a woman, which could be beneficial to tolerance as a reactivating sorority member in the future:

So for me, I still pass and I recognize I have that passing privilege because I have not medically transitioned. I don't have a, I don't feel a need to medically transition into maleness. I produce enough body hair as it is, so I'm not trying to get no more.

The next section focuses on how oppressed people (e.g. women by men, hued people by Anglo colonizers) oppress other groups of people. For example, queer people are oppressed by straight people, but cisgender LGB people often join straight people in oppressing trans\* people.

*Survivors oppressing survivors.* Violence is often subverted by alignment with the status quo.

Some people are unable fit the status quo to do so due to their visual differences, as noted in the last section. An example of othering in college which was given in Chapter Two under Conceptual Framework, reads,

Women's shifts into historically-exclusive institutions spread them out, leading to less representation and increased invisibility and silencing. Carroll (1982) writes, "there is no more isolated subgroup in academe than [cisgender] Black women".

NPHC sororities were created to provide space for hued women to confide in and support each other through the academic process and their post-collegiate adult lives, while also establishing an Anglo-friendly monolith of the Melanin-Rich scholar to the public. Shelton (2008) affirms,

[...] for members of BGLOs [Black Greek-letter organizations], group identity became synonymous with the repression of individual identity. The creation of a collective or 'sameness' became a primary objective to achieve the association's larger goal. The essential (albeit unconscious) goal of BGLOs was to contest the negative representation of African American people. The goal was to facilitate, validate, and construct a positive image of blackness. Thus, BGLOs employed essentialism for strategic purposes. (P. 214)

Because of essentialism, transitioning for trans\* members of NPHC sororities places them in an even more isolated group than cisgender Afro-original women. Traditions and policies tied to feminine and heteronormative expectations make establishing and maintaining sisterhood within sororities difficult, particularly with those in which one has no personal ties.

For queer people, the traditions and policies of Greek life means having a public and private face, or closeting oneself. As noted within the literature review, the sole study on sexuality and NPHC sororities found that sorors who identified as queer were offered

membership only after proving to extant members that she could “pass” (as ladylike/straight) and that she would not use the sisterhood for romantic exchanges (Literte & Hodge, 2012). Trans\* members face or fear facing this tension within their sororities, which has led to all of the participants in this study distancing themselves from formal participation in their sororities. While all attempted to normalize at least in part with the dress code for formal events involving their organizations, these instances were physically and emotionally challenging for the trans\* members, even before their gender actualization. Alton and Elijah recall borrowing other sorors’ clothing to fit the standard; Elijah, Jalen, and Treyvon resisted dating for much of college to hide their queerness; Jalen succumbed to harassing out queer students to hide their own queerness; and Treyvon participated in a marriage with a man to fulfill their religious obligations and sorority expectations. One example of the expectation of marrying according to homonormative ideals is evident in sorority sweetheart songs, which are sung at weddings by members. As noted in *Discovery*, love has historically been a way of bonding sorority and fraternity members; the longing for marriage with a man involved with the Divine Nine presumes he is a member of an NPHC fraternity (vs. a sorority). Reflecting an adage of Anglo sororities, these songs presume the bride is marrying not only a man, but also a cisgender, straight fraternity man. The sweetheart song for Delta Sigma Theta (DST) goes as such:

She may be an Omega Sweetheart  
Or the Dream Girl of A Phi A.  
She may wear a Kappa diamond  
Her love may a Sigma be  
But if she wears the Delta Symbol,  
Then her first love is DST.

All NPHC sororities have sweetheart songs, as well as chants, which refer to the fraternities as apt partners. A popular chant used by sororities will refer to themselves as the sorority that all the

fraternities desire: “What the Kappas like, what the Q dogs love, what A Phi A can't get enough of!” For those who are queer, or those who will marry a non-affiliated member (or perhaps even a partner who did not attend college), these songs affirm the exclusivity of both NPHC and higher education. For a community where little more than half (58.2%) attend college (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), this tradition espouses cisgender heterosexual femininity with class consciousness. These traditions communicate, that a sorority woman is straight and is only looking for partnership with a college-educated, straight fraternity man. The desire for cisgender, straight, educated women may be to marry someone who is equally educated and involved in similar organizations is a facet of racial uplift and is underrepresented in research. Lawrence-Webb, Littlefield, and Okundaye (2015) affirm that, “a complete discourse on the relationships of African American women and men cannot be held without including aspects of love” (p. 633). They continue,

the feeling and sense of lovelessness being expressed and experienced in the African American community between women and men...and between varying communities (heterosexual, lesbian and gay, elderly, Generation Y, etc.) is perceived as though it is a normal phenomenon” (Lawrence-Webb et al, 2015, p. 633).

These organizations seek to provide standards of fitness for the Talented Tenth, the upper-echelon hued scholars which W.E.B. DuBois claimed would be the hope for their race. With proper education and social training, led by the tenets of Christianity, these leaders have the responsibility to intermarry, succeed in their careers, and work on behalf of the other ninety percent (Hughey & Parks, 2012; Jenkins, 2012; Literte & Hodge, 2012). Alums of these uplift organizations, then, are to choose who garners such training from their organizations, and who continues the legacy of selection with these expectations. In one of the few studies that examines cisgender, heterosexual women's treatment of cisgender, lesbian-identifying women in sororities,

Literte and Hodge (2012) concluded that personal and conservative religious views by older members, as well as the power and control they wield over undergraduate and graduate recruitment, fundraising/financial affairs, and social participation, impact who was able to join. Traditionally feminine ways of dress and communication, virtually unchanged since these organizations' inceptions, are written within sorority policy and solidify the gendered rigidity of presentation and action for members. While there is little written on this perspective from an NPHC standpoint, gender role adherence is present in literature on Melanin-Rich women's stress from performing traditional and nontraditional roles in their communities for generations, which "have been profoundly impacted by the historical legacy of slavery and segregation" (Davis, Levant and Pryor, 2018, p. 822). Women have passed the resilience of generations along with an insistence on fulfilling "African American femininity: spirituality, pride, self-reliance, care for children, thinness, domesticity, and modesty" (p. 834). As divulged through the themes, producing the next generation is a requirement of women's resilience against colonialism, which transcends traditional male accompaniment (Muñoz, 1999). Peltier, Laden, and Matranga (1999) explain, "in the 1960s and 1970s women began to seek degrees because of inflation making two family incomes essential and divorce which forced women into the working world to support children" (p. 363). Davis, Levant and Pryor (2018) press, "despite the fact that many African American women have adopted the provider component as part of their gender role, femininity [...] is also very important".

Gender role stress may arise when African American women perceive that they are unable to meet the standards of societal gender role ideals consistent with hegemonic femininity. Furthermore, being expected (and expecting themselves) to adhere to both traditionally feminine and masculine norms creates gender role conflict, which may result in psychological distress (p. 822).

While women enforce tenets of femininity to attract partners, these values also aid in workplace resiliency in Anglo realms. The expectation of working regardless of marital status balks at violence against them, as women who are well-educated and hireable are less likely to maintain physically-abusive relationships with partners. Creating a second family of women with social and professional astuteness, guards sorority women against racism and sexism from non-Africana people, and sexism from Africana men. Through the membership intake process, “members developed a closeness that many described in terms that reflected a real family” (Schuh, Triponey, Heim, & Nishimura, 1992). This bond throughout sorority members is consistent and supposed to aid in lifelong challenges, including but not limited to workplace success; motherhood; and navigating the educational system from birth to college, where these children will hopefully become legacies (multiple-generation Greek members). As HBCUs and public institutions (where a bulk of underrepresented students attend college) face decrease funding and closures, Melanin-Rich students “indicated that academic dismissal and inability to obtain sufficient funds were the chief reasons for their nonreturn” (p. 361). The Greek bond purportedly aids in generational persistence through college, establishing class mobility; NPHC organizations offer scholarships and academic support initiatives for high school and college students to prepare for and stay in college until degree completion (Patton & Croom, 2009; Ross, 2001; Trenor, Grant, & Archer, 2010). Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. has a national initiative which specifically focuses on creating a pipeline for Melanin-Rich students into HBCUs, a prioritization justified by their foundation as the only places which continuously offered enrollment to racially-diverse students. While federal funds have never been equitable for these schools when compared to their public Anglo counterparts, HBCUs have promoted themselves as places of refuge from colonialism. However, HBCUs are also vestiges of colonialism, as

queer or gender role defiant students find heightened tension on these campuses, and often find more resources at better-funded and more secular PWIs.

HBCUS and BGLOs are focused on educated hued people to become change-agents, utilizing conservative values for their strategies of blending in with the upper-class Anglo status quo in a majority of facets (dress, demeanor, educational attainment and work) except those related to civil rights, in which they hold more revolutionary ideologies. A part of this conformance to the status quo is reproduction; education and work ethics are to be passed to a larger generation to maintain upward mobility. Cisgenderism and heteronormativity within these constructs suggests queer people either are disinterested in the rearing of the next generation, detrimental to the training of youth, or face more obstacles than cisgender, heterosexual Melanin-Rich people, which would make them greater liabilities than assets to this mission; thus their inclusion distracts from the purpose of the organizations. Multiple excerpts from the interviews support this. While queer people may not reproduce, they must fall within the presentation guidelines of femininity and fecundity. Treyvon's experiences from their upbringing (finding out they were born intersex) detail how his family insisted upon his appearance as a fecund woman, to maintain familial status and draw suitors. Treyvon was forced to date men when they showed no interest in them. Through medical issues involving their reproductive system, their family maintained the necessity of presenting as marriageable and when an educated man showed interest in them, Treyvon married. Several participants noted that lesbians were deemed more acceptable by their sororities if they maintained feminine dress and behavior. Treyvon recalls,

[...] that's where I feel in that as a lesbian, if I was feminine-presenting, everybody was okay with it. We just didn't talk about it as a masculine-presenting.



Treyvon explains that for some women, a masculine presence distracted from their ability to withdraw from environments where they were subjected to sexism, making them aggressive towards masculine-presenting members:

I have been told so many times, "why do you want to be here? Why are you here?" Um, "I didn't join this organization to be with men. I specifically joined this organization so I wouldn't have to deal with men."

As Collins (2004) denotes regarding relations within Melanin-Rich communities: "Black men were not intimidated by [...] a strong Black woman, as long as she was on their side" (p. 125).

Presenting as opposite of the binary is the demonstration of acceptance of men's dominance, whereas presenting as masculine or showing a public attraction to women is counter to men's dominance. Collins' example regarding women athletes compares the double-edged sword of men and women: "In essence, the same qualities that are uncritically celebrated for Black male athletes can become stumbling blocks for their Black female counterparts" (p. 136). She explains further by using the Women's National Basketball Association as an example:

WNBA players are sexualized in the media in ways that never apply to men. Their sexuality helps sell basketball, yet it must be a certain kind of sexuality that simultaneously avoids images of the muscled woman or the sports dyke and that depicts the women as sexually attractive to men (in other words, as heterosexual) (p. 136).

[T]o strengthen the association between the women players and ideas of motherhood and family, the league recruits children to its games and routinely showcases families and children on its television coverage. Pre-taped interview segments aired during games often focus on the family life of the players [...] Shots of teams during time-outs focus on the players' closeness, showing an emphasis on hand holding and group hugs. These dual strategies of treating the women as sexual objects and repositioning them within domestic family settings both work to contain the lesbian sexual threat of Black female basketball players (p. 136-7).

In a similar fashion, sororities provide a depiction of women who are ladylike, marriageable, and professional, but also act as an outlet for women to express their power without men's reprisal.

Elijah's observation notes that women who were interested in women are acceptable to sorority members if they are feminine, which allowed for his sorority to maintain amicable relationships with other sororities.

[...] all the woman that had came in after me, we're very feminine presenting and, um, they, uh, even if they identified as being bi or lesbian, like they very much, um, exuded femininity. So, um, just, just me, being the kind of like, the lone outsider and that, that, that's pretty masculine that, um, some of the sororities are just like, oh, we don't want to partner with them.

Partnership with other sororities gives women the opportunity to share their collective talents and create larger networks for student leadership and professional development. In joining their organizations and abiding by pledges to perform the apex of respectable womanhood, NPHC women have been tasked with the challenge of fighting against notions of masculinity and de-sexing. Their diligence to displaying womanhood in alignment with colonialist values promises them the respect of NPHC men As Ray (2012) explains:

During the membership intake or "pledge" process, Black fraternity men are socialized to respect women. While Black fraternity men are becoming members, they are taught by older members how to treat and interact with women. They are also socialized to represent "the Black Greek" in predominately Black settings and "the Black college student" in predominately white settings. In this regard, Black fraternity men embody what Du Bois (1903) termed the Talented Tenth. Du Bois (1903) conceptualized the Talented Tenth as the top 10% of Blacks who are educated, politically active, and in a position of influence to assist with ameliorating racial inequality. BGLOs [Black Greek-letter organizations] are positioned to contribute to this cause and have historically done so (p. 655).

Ray continues, "As a result, fraternity men who behave this way not only distinguish themselves individually, but they also distinguish their entire fraternity as respecting womanhood." This training results in favorable views from women: "most women view him as more romantic in his approaches towards women, respectful, and supportive of gender equality" (p. 646-7). This treatment comes with restrictions of presentation: "women must act "lady-like" and present

themselves in a respectable manner” (p. 649). This requirement – taught to sorority women by ways of dress, conduct, and interwoven into sorority hymns and songs:

The perception of the type of woman is determined by the woman’s overall physical appearance (e.g., beauty, weight, dress, accessories), social network ties, previous interactions, and lastly personality characteristics (p. 649).

This evaluation is meant to dissuade from contention with men on gender roles and combat stereotyping women as unapproachable and masculine. Participants in this study falter from the expectation fraternity men expect: straight, feminine women who are romantically interested in them. While this discrimination is rooted in the realities of performing educative and protector identities in one-parent homes, surviving forced separation from their patriarch through slavery and incarceration, these stereotypes have been reemphasized through Melanin-Rich men. Collins (2004) explains:

Black male comedians have often led the pack in reproducing derisive images of Black women as being ugly, loud “bitches.” [...] “bitches” are routinely mocked within contemporary Black popular culture. For example, ridiculing African American women as being like men (also, a common representation of Black lesbians) has long been a prominent subtext in the routines of Redd Foxx, Eddie Murphy, Martin Lawrence, and other African American comedians. In other cases, Black male comedians dress up as African American women in order to make fun of them. Virtually all of the African American comics on the popular show Saturday Night Live have on occasion dressed as women to caricature Black women. Through this act of cross-dressing, Black women can be depicted as ugly women who too closely resemble men (big, Black, and short hair) and because they are aggressive like men, become stigmatized as “bitches” (p. 125).

Ray notes that the training of men through “fraternities serve an essential function of creating a mechanism that leads to Black men treating women more equitably than they otherwise would” (p. 656). In the execution of their own training, sorority members’ social ties with members who “too closely resemble men (big, Black, and short hair)”, is seen as counter to the presentation of marriageable, perception-changing women (Collins, 2004; Phillips, Wilmoth, & Marks, 2012). As Jalen stated in their gender and sexual orientation identity, identifying as trans\* places them

between the continuums of both straight and gay, and neither woman nor man, which is outside of the imagery of NPHC fraternities and sororities:

So where now I identify as queer because I tend to look up, I'm like, well if I'm trans masculine I'm not necessarily gay or [...] lesbian because I no longer identify as a woman who exclusively dates women, so I've opened it up; now I identify as queer.

To reduce the perception of themselves as, “aggressive, hypo-feminine, undesirable, independent, domineering, and assertive” (p. 823), sororities have developed and upheld norms which downplay the queerness of women’s bi-gender obligations and emphasize the hyper-feminine. As Harris (2015), Literte and Hodge (2012), and the participants in this study show, these norms – of homonormative gatekeeping and gender presentation enforcement – effectively prohibit the discussion of sexual diversity in the organizations and maintain the underrepresentation of publically queer alumni.

While the Divine Nine’s aspects of love and desire fulfill a need for public acts of love, expectations of uplift fulfillment – the foundation of the Divine Nine – exclude queer partners, partners who are not NPHC affiliated, and those without ties to academia. This exclusion impacts Divine Nine members, and involves others as both oppressors, victims, and bystanders of colonialism. Yep (2003) affirms that pressure to represent these gendered standards – for self, family, and organizational reputation – impact all people:

Although it is experienced consciously or unconsciously and with different degrees of pain and suffering, this process of normalization is a site of violence in the lives of women, men, and transgenders—across the spectrum of sexualities—in modern Western societies. (p. 18).

Included in the queer spectrum are intersex-born people, who may face targeting if they do not align physically or perform as their presumed gender, or if they fail to escape ambiguity.

As noted above in Collins (2004), masculine women are feared for exuding the toxic masculine performativity of cisgender men; as defended in instances of violence against gay men and transgender women by cisgender men, queer people are accused of progressing sexual contact with unsuspecting and disinterested parties. While not expressed through this study, cisgender men have used gay panic against masculine-presenting women to justify violence against them. However, this study shows fraternity men supporting a transgender man in order to use their affiliation with sorority women to secure sexual fulfillment. This oppression is also portrayed through refusing trans\* agency; in Elijah's experience, erasure manifests as rationalizing transgender men as sorority affiliates – not members – who must act as conduits for cisgender men's acceptance as them as men (Rossiter, 2016). This occurs as cisgender men act in accordance to what Anglo society sees as the exceptional Melanin-Rich scholar, whose fraternal ties are equitable to Anglo fraternity life. Alas, NPHC fraternities hold better reputations in the realm of romance: Ray and Rosow's (2010) study finds that "Black men exhibit more romantic approaches" towards women, "whereas White men exhibit more sexual approaches" (p. 523), a conclusion attested to the hypervisibility and social policing of Melanin-Rich men on campuses which are historically race-exclusive.

Cisgender women may challenge trans\* agency whether or not they are straight or queer; while trans\* men may place them in an underrepresented group, those who pass as men can gain male privilege. Elijah discusses in the section *Discovering Masculinity and Manhood* that he immediately began receiving the social benefits of having his opinions prioritized in meetings, and men respecting his sorority sisters more in his presence. Schilt and Connell (2007) note that cisgender people witnessing this process enforce gender norms on the transitioning person, including the cisgender women who they may now have privilege over. Organizational

disaffiliation, then, may be used as a gauge to determine the dedication to one's actualized identity. Trayvon recalled a soror (a cisgender lesbian) who told them if they wanted to transition, they wanted to be a man. As such, the soror argued, Trayvon should not be interested in being in the sorority:

So I did have one instance where I had a sorority member who also identify as a lesbian. When I came out as trans\*, she posted something on her page about how she, um, Lambda had a, um, some, something got out for Lambda that they didn't want trans\* women to be a part of it, and she put this on her page and she's a member, of Mu and she was basically like trans\* people need to be in their own organization. And I literally remember sending her message like, really? That's what we doing? You do realize who I am. "Well, I really don't think that you should probably be in the organization anymore," was basically the way they came out. And I was furious because that particular person was someone I had helped, that I had, uh, been a part of her, um, venting and expressing why she was online [going through membership intake] and having like, you know, reassuring her of the all the love that [...] as a lesbian, she was still gonna have that.

The normalization of femininity – upheld by cisgender people, both LGB and straight – justifies refusing membership to queer people (Literte & Hodge, 2012), as well as hiding or belittling masculine members to the point of self-exclusion, as seen throughout the participants' experience. Though all are oppressed by their race, birth sex, or queerness, or all of these statuses, trans\* presence in sororities is deemed an affront to sororities being a place for cisgender women to withdraw from the lull of patriarchy, adding contention to one of their few realms of refuge (Rasheem, 2018; Rich, 2016; Roberts, 1994). This is a similar defense made by the all-Anglo PHC sororities, which banned non-Anglos while facing social exclusions in their gender-desegregated collegiate environments. The one difference is the participants in the NPHC sororities discussed are not potential members, but initiated members. All of the participants have been members since the early 2000s. A transgender member, then, is convinced that they can only comfort their sorors and live authentically through quiet disassociation.

Representation. Revisiting the twoness of DuBois' double consciousness theory, the participants paint an understanding of multiple streams of twoness: as persons led by religion and eschewing religion; as undergraduates and as graduates; as closeted and uncloseted queer-folk; and as women and men. These transitions read much like the review of *The Autobiography of a Colored Man* by James Weldon Johnson, by Professor Charles Alexander:

It should have a wide reading among the Negroes of his country because it tells the story of a soul-life of the rays in an inimitable manner, by a member of the race who has lived two lives or in two worlds, the Black and the white.

In two accounts, participants noted concerns of reestablishing their financial and active [contributing monetarily and active within their chapter] membership, for fear of formal disassociation; others have circumvented representing their sororities, or were not invited to NPHC events, with the event hosts defending they did not wish to contribute to the sororities being sneered on social media. While these members have gained their true identity, they have lost their identity as a soror through member excommunication. This excommunication has occurred by sorority members as well as other NPHC members. Treyvon recalls being cut out of a photo of NPHC members from an event they attended:

I have been in pictures where I've been cropped out, um, because they didn't want me to, they didn't want me to offend members [...] or they didn't want me to end up on Funny Greek, um, FunnyGreekShit.com, um, about looking too masculine. Um, and also reppin' [the sorority], and there's been times I hid [...] If you asked me directly, yes, I'm not gonna deny being a member, but [...] I have to give it up sometimes, [...] I have to take and choose my battles cause I don't, I just don't feel like the fight and don't feel like the eye rolls, and I get more from other sorority members than I do from men.

As noted earlier, the traditions of the sorority may cause members to self-distance in order to fully actualize their identity. Treyvon highlighted that dress code policies can also impact those who may wish to wear pants to cover or mask disability. As Elijah notes in his close sorors' defense of his presentation at formal events, "if we're living out our values of [...] making sure

that we're welcoming other people, there are going to be women who don't want to wear dresses or skirts anyway, so why is this [...] an issue?" These gendered norms are archaic in practice; eight of the nine NPHC organizations were founded in the early 1900s, when women were chastised for wearing pants, jeans, and suits, which were rarely sold in women's departments or styled for their body types (Kaiser, 2013, Martin, 1968). Therefore, the concerns of transgender members are not only of themselves, but also of other members and calls for progress. Women's business attire now includes suits and slacks. While queering dress codes deliberately balked at the feminine, it also sparked a conversation about possible updates to traditions which could benefit all members. DuBois (1903) writes, "he simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face" (p. 9). In this way, transgender men wish to have their membership and contributions to their sororities recognized by their sorority members. They expect to be recognized by their gender, pronouns, name, and to garner privileges the same access and benefits as cisgender members.

As a cisgender, straight, Melanin-Rich alumna woman, one is a part of the overrepresented demographic within NPHC sororities; as an active, alumna member, one is also a part of the collective with the most economic and ideological influence over matters pertaining to their organization. In the midst of queer othering, these privileges are handicaps to the work of organizations dedicated to uplift. While NPHC organizations participate in service to communities in economic need, programming and partnerships with national organizations that focus on LGBTQ issues is circumvented. There are programs for assisting scholars in setting to college and persisting through to graduation. The organizations have done work with community education and testing for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and infections, an



issue which benefits LGBTQ people. However, the organizations collectively practice de facto membership restrictions to queer or queer-presumed students. The failure to support LGBTQ initiatives and organizations on local and national levels, and the delay and denial of membership to emerging leaders disenfranchises a section of scholars who, if supported as intentionally as their cisgender, heteronormative counterparts, would become powerful voices in the matters of the organizations at the most influential levels.

## Conclusion

Within this study, I detail ways in which trans\* members' agency is challenged within Greek life. The participants in the study have had their gender identities questioned via misgendering and designation in incorrect sexual orientations; members have expressed to the trans\* participants that their presence makes them uncomfortable. As a result, NPHC organizations have refused to partner with their organization on events due to their orientation/identity; their identity has been deemed reflective of the whole of their chapter; and sorority members have insisted they disaffiliate. Kidd and Witten (2008) write,

[...] the treatment of the transgender population, with respect to violence and abuse, could be viewed, under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1951, article 2, items a, b, & c), as crimes of genocide against the transgender-community members in the U.S. and other countries (p. 32).

There are many queer members in the membership of NPHC, including but not limited to Omega Psi Phi member Bayard Rustin, the openly gay Civil Rights leader who counseled Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and drafted the March on Washington (Arsenault, 2006). This mentorship was balked at by those who insisted being LGBT was anti-Christian and would stain the respectability of the movement. This pressure made Rustin largely invisible in the historical ledger of the United States, even in books focused on Afro-Original people. When NPHC

fraternities discuss their contributing members to the Civil Rights Movement, Jesse Jackson is the famous Omega captured consistently, alongside Hosea Williams (Phi Beta Sigma), Martin Luther King, Jr. (Alpha Phi Alpha), and Ralph Abernathy (Kappa Alpha Psi). His erasure, or lack of representation, is a way in which straight people of all hues have perpetuated violence against queer people. The story of Rustin fuses the themes of representation, survivors oppressing survivors, and violence together. In discussing the politics of power, Butler (2004) writes:

[...] it is one matter to suffer violence and quite another to use that fact to ground a framework in which one's injury authorizes limitless aggression against targets that may or may not be related to the sources of one's own suffering (p. 4).

This research places cisgender women in the same category as cisgender men in regards to their privileges to control this social environment, as well as their access to successful fraternity and sorority alumni in intimate and candid arenas. Few members have been as public with their alignment with queer NPHC activist. For instance, Huey Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., stated that queer people are a part of, and necessary to the uplift movement (1970):

Remember, we have not established a revolutionary value system; we are only in the process of establishing it. I do not remember our ever constituting any value that said that a revolutionary must say offensive things towards homosexuals, or that a revolutionary should make sure that women do not speak out about their own particular kind of oppression. As a matter of fact, it is just the opposite: we say that we recognize the women's right to be free. We have not said much about the homosexual at all, but we must relate to the homosexual movement because it is a real thing. And I know through reading, and through my life experience and observations that homosexuals are not given freedom and liberty by anyone in the society. They might be the most oppressed people in the society.

And what made them homosexual? Perhaps it's a phenomenon that I don't understand entirely. Some people say that it is the decadence of capitalism. I don't know if that is the case; I rather doubt it. But whatever the case is, we know that homosexuality is a fact that exists, and we must understand it in its purest form:

that is, a person should have the freedom to use his body in whatever way he wants.

That is not endorsing things in homosexuality that we wouldn't view as revolutionary. But there is nothing to say that a homosexual cannot also be a revolutionary. And maybe I'm now injecting some of my prejudice by saying that "even a homosexual can be a revolutionary." Quite the contrary, maybe a homosexual could be the most revolutionary (p. 157).

It is important to analyze what is communicated in these realms, and what solidifies as de jure policy and de facto culture, as these become pathways and roadblocks to aspirants joining and initiated members fulfilling their lifelong commitment.

The interview results identified three themes that explained participants' experiences and reflections on their sexual orientation and gender identity journeys, and the reactions from sorority members to these personal developments. Those themes included Discovery, Distancing, and Dedication. Each of these themes, in their unique way, explain what these sorority members, who identify as transgender men and transmasculine nonbinary persons, faced as queer individuals within their familial, educational, and social dynamics from childhood to present. Through this study, I discovered the ways in which cisgender women oppress transmasculine members of NPHC organizations. In the review of themes, I have shown ways NPHC distances itself from the queer community through recruitment, community service, and retelling of organizational history.

In the next chapter, I will espouse the theme of dedication to detail the implications of the participants' experiences, as well as the limitations, applications, and further research planned as related to the findings.

## CHAPTER FIVE. CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, & FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of transgender men who belong to NPHC sororities and the influence of those experiences on membership persistence post-transition. This study addresses transgender men's sense of belonging once their gender identity changes to one that is deemed antithetical to sorority affiliation. This is the first study to explore the life experiences of female-born, transgender men and transmasculine, nonbinary people within sororities. This is also the first study to explore trans\* people within NPHC organizations, and one of very few studies on LGBTQ discrimination within NPHC sororities (Literte & Hodge, 2012). The findings of the study indicate that trans\* people in NPHC sororities face passive-aggressive communication from sorority members outside of their intimate circle, who question their claim to membership and will socially excommunicate them.

Those who may be disturbed by the study include local, regional and national levels of the National Pan-Hellenic Council, the collaborative organization which is composed of nine international historically-hued Greek-letter sororities and fraternities. In addition to the individual organizations, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., historically Black organizations which are gendered, such as single-sex colleges (like Spelman and Morehouse colleges), as well as culturally-focused academic journals, may not see this research as relevant, or perhaps will see it as threatening to the Melanin-Rich status quo. This reasoning is understood by the author and is well-documented in extant research. As Hughey and Hernandez (2013) note,

[NPHC organizations] remain shrouded in secrecy and rumour. For some, the continued existence of [NPHC] in the age of Obama seems antiquated. For others, they are understood as little more than stepshow entertainers, agents of hazing, and 'educated gangs' (cf. Hughey 2008a, 2008b). Hence, given the history of 'controlling images' (Collins 1991, p. 68) whereby blacks were portrayed as either entertainers or violent criminals, some hold that [NPHC organizations] are subject to narrow news coverage. Walter Kimbrough, author of the authoritative *Black Greek 101* (2003), argues: 'Outside of [a hazing incident], black Greeks don't make the news. . . We have to use stepping as a vehicle to get a message out' (cited in Briggs, 12 January 2007). This assumption begs the question: has recent mainstream media discourse examined [NPHC] beyond hazing and stepping? And if so, what are the contours of that discourse? (p. 299)

This humorously ties to an oft theme of gender-bias discussion: "When women get together and talk about men, the news is almost always bad news", writes bell hooks. "If the topic gets specific and the focus is on black men, the news is even worse." My motivation for this research is not to demean the organizations, question their existence, or open a door to further hatred from those who benefit from the ideological in-fighting of underrepresented people. The inspiration of this work came from a desire to understand how NPHC can better contribute to our individual missions. People negatively impacted by colonialism are not strengthened by their exclusion of viable – educated, energetic, desirous – contributors to decolonization. Gomez and Smith (1990) note: "We leave ourselves in a very weakened position if we allow the system to pit us against each other" (p. 47).

## Findings

This study's central question--" What are the experiences of trans\* / transgender men/transmasculine members of NPHC sororities?"--has important implications for future research in higher education, particularly student affairs and Greek life. In this study, the opportunities for a multiplicity of voices to reflect upon their trans-masculine experiences highlights several barriers to support for trans\* NPHC members. However, there were findings

which highlighted the community of trans\* members in NPHC sororities, of which many were active in other national service and educational organizations. The findings are presented as developed through the life experience, from upbringing to post-transition.

A primary finding is that all of the participants faced silencing or suggestions of silencing regarding their queerness before reaching college. The reactions from family members ranged from passive acceptance to physical violence. In one instance, a parent noted they were accepting of their child being a lesbian, but warned them about telling other family members. In the extreme case, the participant was outed by a school administrator, which led to their homelessness. These experiences occurred before the participants and their families had the language to understand the trans\* identity. Despite a lack of active support from family members regarding their queerness, none of the participants searched for or inquired about queer-friendly environments upon their search for universities. However, this silencing did result in suicide ideation in at least two participants.

Secondarily, three of the four participants noted their inspiration for joining NPHC organizations was to learn womanhood. Participants noted they were interested in their organizations because of the academic support, professional development, and service elements involved, but also as a way to understand the identity they were instructed to emulate. Through the gender rigidity and policing of femininity, trans\* members saw this arena as a last effort to gauge if they could healthily exist as cisgender women. While the fourth participant noted their apathy with policies steering members into feminine mores even before their initiation, they expressed a desire to join a sorority in search of chosen family, of which the bond of sisterhood was a welcoming aspect. Their sorority selection was a response to negative feedback from other

sororities regarding their public resistance to femininity. Therefore, this participant also searched for womanhood, by means of acceptance rather than feminine enforcement.

Another key finding highlights the emphasis of presentation placed on masculine sorority members. While NPHC sororities carry traditions of dress from the early 1900s, changes in fashion – which have made previously queered clothing acceptable for women – have persuaded formal dress (skirts and dresses) to include formally men’s only units such as pants and suits (Mattlin, 1968). However, the participants note that these changes were acceptable when feminine-presenting members donned them. For sorors who present or identify as masculine, sorors unfamiliar to them have policed and problematized their presentation.

The ability to participate in their organizations was a part of many of their decision-making processes when considering their transition, though acts of resistance began before their transitions. Sorority members’ reactions to dress, even outside of sorority functions, may present a roadblock for transgender men’s communication with members about information regarding the sorority, and the believability of membership in general. While utilizing government-issued ID would clarify identity, name changes occurring after sorority affiliation may not be recognized by the organization, and sex designation changes may void the acceptability of membership by the most open-minded of members. For those who have joined as cisgender candidates and transitioned, members who return to being active will likely have to follow dress constraints of their sororities and may be referred to in ways which mis-gender them.

One of the findings that came from the study is an understanding of relationship viability in queer female groups. There is a stark differentiation between masculine-presenting lesbians and transgender men. Their dating pools may or may not overlap. Some cisgender women who are lesbians may not compromise with their partner’s decision to transition. When one of the

participants accepted a position with benefits which would allow for a majority-covered medical transition, their partner – who they deemed to be a long-term partner – expressed that they 1) were not willing to relocate with them; and 2) did not wish to have a partner who identified as a man. Their partner noted, though their gender expression was very masculine, they were not interested in having a partner who was going to have their breasts removed or start testosterone.

Two of the four participants maintained relationships during and after undergraduate career. Two did not pursue relationships while in college. One participant, who did date during undergraduate, pursued a relationship with a cisgender man; the other pursued several relationships with cisgender, lesbian-identified women. For the participant who dated a man, they considered the relationship due to their religious obligations, and believed the person encompassed a queer-leaning personality that would align with their own queerness. This act of covering for a closeted queer person with a straight façade is called *bearding* (Schlossberg, 2016). The participant – who married a cisgender man in an NPHC fraternity – prepared to see this person as a viable long-term partner until the person began to insist upon their relationship fall in line with traditional cisgender female-cisgender male gender roles and intimate conduct.

Other findings include the acceptance of queerness and trans\* identity by fraternity members of NPHC organizations, as well as other non-NPHC Greek organizations; the negative feedback within each narrative came from the alumnae women of their respective organizations, and from women of other NPHC organizations. Trans\* members have experienced discrimination through a lack of acknowledgement in person, as well as via social media platforms. Other NPHC members have cut participants out of pictures where they displayed sorority affiliation in some way. These reactions were denoted both before and after transitioning, highlighting a distancing of women from female masculinity. The members



practice self-distancing from their cisgender sorority members, and are not active participants in their organizations. Two have joined fraternities for transgender men. Sorority members in which they held close ties with before transitioning, and NPHC fraternity members, are those that the participants held the most contact with after their step back from formal participation. These members were willing to aid trans\* participants in academic and professional networking, benefits afforded to all NPHC members through their membership obligation. These benefits were limited through their sorority connections for these participants.

Another key finding of this study was that trans\* members were still interested in involving themselves with Greek letter organizations and giving back in ways that are reflective of the mores and values of their organizations. Despite being inactive and non-financial to their NPHC sororities, participants inserted themselves into service for the organization by becoming mentors to queer aspirants and members. They often utilized social media to provide counsel to other queer members and aided them in circumventing and overcoming discrimination. In addition, they have found other organizations to join which offer support for transgender men. There are several organizations – some utilizing Greek letters – to build community for transgender men and masculine of center cisgender women. There are also Greek letters organizations for cisgender and transgender queer women. Most of these organizations are non-collegiate, but have similar structures of NPHC organizations, including hand signs, grips, and informal terms for induction like “line” (line brother/sister, to denote those with which one joined their organization) and “cross/ing” (referring to the membership intake process).

The participants represented in this research did not declare a single overarching queer or transgender identity. They presented complex narratives of multidimensional hue-manity. They

did not attempt to box people into one identity; they offered many possibilities of what queerness can look like in response to pervasive stereotypical narratives. As Halberstam (2019) writes.

Arguments about excessive masculinity tend to focus on black bodies (male and female), latino/a bodies, or working-class bodies, and insufficient masculinity is all too often figured by Asian bodies or upper-class bodies; these stereotypical constructions of variable masculinity mark the process by which masculinity becomes dominant in the sphere of white middle-class maleness. But all too many studies that currently attempt to account for the power of white masculinity recenter this white male body by concentrating all their analytical efforts on detailing the forms and expressions of white male dominance (p. 2).

As referenced in the introduction, Ahmed (2006) notes that non-normative bodies, whether differed by race, class, gender or sex, or even levels of physical or mental ability are queered. This research is a starting point for further inquiry into the empowerment of queered people and their relationships with each other.

### Limitations

The following assumptions were present in this study: It was assumed that participants in this study were not deceptive and answered questions honestly and to the best of their ability. Each participant was purposefully selected as an alumni member of an NPHC sorority and it is assumed they completed their undergraduate degree. It was assumed participants met the criteria required of participants, as described in the Informed Consent. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with an overview of the purpose of the study. It was assumed that the participants understood the interview content.

The following are the limitations of the proposed research design (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Another limitation of this study was the use of telephone interviews; due to the distance of a majority of the participants from the researcher, face-to-face interviews were not possible. While qualitative interviews generally occur face-to-face (Jamshed, 2014; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004), I chose to conduct interviews by telephone in order to maximize my

geographical access, as well as access this hard-to-find and hard-to-reach population (Novick, 2008). Because transgender people are a target for violence, those who may participate would risk outing to the general public, or bringing undue attention to themselves if face-to-face interviews occurred. BGLOs have been considered “secret societies” and empirical research studies are limited. Authoritative documentation is not readily available to nonmembers. As noted by Brown, Parks, and Phillips (2012) some members and organizations oppose participating in research studies “because they perceive it to be violating secrets, airing dirty laundry, and even putting the organizations at risk” (p. 3). Thus, the researcher experienced difficulty in obtaining information confirming news reports from these organizations, as well as gaining present membership numbers from many of the organizations. Estimated numbers given reflect the numbers last posted on organizational websites, which are in flux and likely over represent the number of active, financial members.

The researcher is a member of a NPHC sorority and a cisgender woman. The researcher objectively looked at the data through the lens of a researcher, following systematic research protocols to prevent bias. Nevertheless, this research has been conducted by a person who do not identify as trans\*, and will be formally evaluated by a faculty collective which does not include trans\* people. While participants were given opportunities to survey the process, the absence of trans\* scholars is a limitation in the analysis process; greater emphasis to the inclusion of trans\* people in inquiry involving their lives – of which they carry unique experiential vantage – is a necessity in future research.

The following are the delimitations of the proposed research design. The interview of transgender members of BGLOs was delimited to only those joining their respective sororities in the United States, limiting the demographic sample. While recognizing several organizations

operated undergraduate and graduate chapters outside of the contiguous United States of America, the researcher chose to stay within the USA to reduce the coverage of drastic cultural differences in sorority life outside of the regions unbeknownst to the researcher, reducing researcher bias. The interview of transgender members of BGLOs was delimited to only those joining NPHC sororities in the United States, limiting the demographic sample. A delimitation of this qualitative narrative study was that it was not racially diverse because it only examined the experiences of BGLO who identified as African American, Black, and/or Melanin-Rich. This also limited the application of the study findings because they might not be generalizable to the Melanin-Rich population as a whole or to non-Melanin-Rich BGLO members. While recognizing several culturally based Greek-letter organizations operate chapters outside of the umbrella of NPHC – such as the National Multicultural Greek Council, and National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations – the researcher chose to stay within the NPHC to focus on the largest and oldest of the Greek letter organizations serving underrepresented communities within the USA. Future research may examine these populations. In addition, there is a class consciousness which must be detailed in documenting one of few studies of transgender men, particularly hued transgender men in higher education. As noted earlier in the text, *The Guardian* reports, “poverty and chronic homelessness plague the black LGBT community, particularly those who are trans” (Worthy, 2018, para. 3). For those who graduate from college, this gives a class advantage that does not exist for a majority of transgender people; in addition, transgender men gain masculine privilege in transitioning, which can result in better paying jobs for individuals who pass as cisgender men. Much of the sex discrimination cases files which have reached federal appellate courts feature transitioned women, who have not been covered under Title VII of the Federal Civil Rights Act of 1964. Therefore these experiences in relation to other

studies of trans\* people does not feature the physical, mental, and financial restrictions which are evident in mass data collection sets regarding LGBTQ communities.

All study participants were required to verbally agree to the Consent Form read to them prior to the interview. Their permissions were audio-recorded. Obtaining informed consent ensured the researcher adhered to guidelines imposed by the Institutional Review Board at Louisiana State University. Participants received full electronic transcripts from their interviews. They were asked to review the transcript for accuracy, revise or adjust their comments as they deemed appropriate and then resend the transcript to the researchers. None of the participants sent back edits of their interviews.

My research extends the reflection opportunities by providing the opportunity for transgender men to dialogue their presence and experiences in NPHC organizations but does so without representing the educational realities of transgender men who are not graduates of colleges and universities. Because of early excommunication from a supportive family dynamic, mental health barriers, an absence of stable housing, and concerns of discrimination within higher education, LGBT people have less access to colleges and universities. This is even more likely for transgender and non-binary people, whose transitions have less support, even within the LGBT community.

## Implications

According to Smith (2019), “BGLOs eradicate two of the biggest factors in a student’s decision to drop out of college student isolation and alienation and motivate students to feel connected to their campuses” (p. 20). However, when students are excommunicated from their organizations for being sexual or gender variant, they are cut off from receiving the benefits cis-

normative and heteronormative students readily receive. This is a setback which becomes even more evident in alumni realms, which is the source of these strict norms.

This preliminary work highlights the resilience and vulnerability of trans\* Greek members. It also illustrates that attempts by authority figures within sororities to create protective environments through regulations on presentation (through dress), and limits on participation (through excommunication and invisibility) may be backfiring. The picture is a complicated one. In some instances, members in our study felt that regulations and expectation of invisibility were justified and even helpful to their transition. As the members began to further progress their transition, they sought communities which were less defined by their NPHC affiliation and more within their similar queer and transition experiences. Self-advocacy and trans\* community movements such as the Brown Boi Project, the Black Trans Advocacy Coalition, and multiple non-collegiate fraternities and sororities dedicated to the brotherhood and sisterhood of transgender men and women emphasize that, rather than curtailing voices or making choices on their behalf, academic communities, and social organizations (like religious, Greek, as well as athletic groups) can support the self-determination and persistence of diverse members. But in order for self-determination to be supported, the lived realities of these students must be understood and respected, and supportive infrastructures developed.

For administrators, there is a dollar value in challenging faculty and staff to be more inclusive with their research, teaching, programming and policies as well. While participants did not note that their college selection involved gauging the queer friendliness of the campuses, campus environment impacted the ways they socially interacted. While one of the participants chose their campus due to their scholarships and year-round housing (entities necessary for a

housing-insecure student), the community he experienced on his visit – one which accepted them as a masculine-presenting person – solidified their engagement once they arrived.

While all of the participants engaged on campus throughout their matriculation, campus culture determined who displayed or did not display their queerness. Student leadership workshops allowed two participants to engage with people who were queer and who looked like them, and put them in association with students who gave them opportunities to explore their identities. This led to one of them transitioning during their undergraduate experience, and led the other to stealthily engage with the queer community. The sole participant who attended a religious institution, however, was the least engaged with an environment which would give them space to understand their queer identity; this person attempted to live out an identity and sexuality which aligned with the norm pressed by their college. However, all of the participants discussed their sororities pressing for feminine presentation, a requirement of formal events. One participant noted that their sorority members actively chastised some queer students.

Discrimination against trans\* men in higher education is not readily studied; the story regarding the trans\* man who formally disaffiliated from their sorority after facing discrimination at George Washington University changed student policy. Students are not the only targets of such discrimination. One participants noted witnessing discrimination against a trans\* professor. These instances can lead to charges against the university. A quick review of court cases within recent years (2015-2019) notes that almost all of the cases involving trans\* people referred to transgender women, which aligns with the data on transgender violence. In 2015, a transgender woman brought a hostile environment claim against the Southeastern Oklahoma State University and the Regional University System of Oklahoma (*US v. SOUTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY*, 2015). The Plaintiff claimed “at the time

she announced her intent to change gender Defendants began treating her differently, ultimately denying her tenure application” (Introduction). Within this brief, it is noted that “the Tenth Circuit held a transsexual individual is not within a protected class” (Sec. 2). Jennings (2010) notes that “many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) university faculty worry about the effects of self-disclosure in their professional lives” (p. 325). Further research is necessary on trans\* faculty members’ experiences in higher education, particularly those who are also racially underrepresented. Trans\* studies offer primarily unhued populations and do not consider the impact of intersectional identities; there are no studies which focus on Melanin-Rich transgender men.

At present, there is no coverage of discussion or policies related to transgender men who are members of NPHC by the umbrella. With the 2019 changes within two very notable HBCUs, however, this is likely on the eve of consideration. For newly admitted transitioned men and women at Morehouse and Spelman Colleges, respectively, hearsay and the exposure which comes from living in housing, participating in sports, utilizing bathrooms, and joining organizations like fraternities and sororities may make these students – who may very well desire to live *stealth*, or without identifying as transgender – very uncomfortable in their dream environments. For transgender members of organizations who are already members, a policy extension denoting their presence would allow them to be more open about their trans\* experiences in Greek life.

## Recommendations

A narrative is the "study of how humans make meaning of experiences by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future" (Connolly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 24). In this section of the paper, I will develop



recommendations based on what participants expressed about their past, present, and future statuses within their organizational affiliation and what they see as positive changes organizations could make in creating trust and support for queer members.

A first step would be to develop a steering committee of queer members who are willing to address issues of discrimination within the NPHC as a whole. This highlights the reason for the umbrella organization's existence: addressing issues impacting the Divine Nine as a collective and instilling policies which clarify the intention and purpose of our work. A few researchers with published works in relevant arenas – within Greek life, LGBTQ history, student affairs, and Melanin-Rich pedagogy – include Vincent Harris, C. Riley Snorton, D.L. Stewart, T. Elon Dancy, Shaun Harper, and Ifi Amadiume. Many of these individuals are cited through this study and have ties to NPHC.

The question on one sorority application, asking if the individual identified as either a woman or female, is the most inclusive current way to assure gender alignment with the organization's look. But what if one transitions afterwards? Should a person who identifies as a man have membership in a sorority, which was erected as the foundation for women's empowerment and leadership? Can a man lead a women's organization if they were born female? How would sorority members react to this? These are questions which must be addressed with impacted individuals in a committee dedicated to resolving issues of gender discrimination. These are also questions for future research.

Additionally, these experiences can be utilized to engage, challenge, and motivate the National Pan-Hellenic Council to create workshops which address sexual orientation and gender diversity. The development of accessible comprehensive sexuality education materials that recognize and incorporate the complex lived experiences of queer and trans\* youth, helping them

to reduce risks associated with private information releases (under FERPA), discrimination and hazing. Additionally, young LGBT people should be engaged in the development and design of materials, programs and initiatives to include their unique student development needs. Finally, in collaboration with self-advocacy movement groups, the development of policy statements that will guide development of sex- and gender-inclusive environments for LGBT students – as well as faculty and staff – in educational settings necessary in higher education, as well as the K-12 arena, workplaces, and legislation on all levels.

Connolly and Clandinin (1988) found that "personal practical knowledge is a moral, affective, and aesthetic way of knowing life's educational situations" (Connolly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 59). The resources which aided the participants in exploring themselves must be considered for all students. These resources are professionals on campus and third party entities which are invited on campus by administrators.

Two participants talked extensively about the impact of programs like LeaderShape on their exploration of self. A student affairs practitioner under Greek life aided in the sole participant who transitioned during their undergraduate years being able to affirm their identity with counseling and uniting with other queer undergraduates. However, other undergraduate leaders, particularly cisgender women within NPHC, were not as accepting. In addition to student leadership development training, there is a need for training curricula and resource materials to enhance the ability of Greek life administrators, counselors, admissions coordinators, athletic directors, job and career services administrators, social workers, and residential program staff to accommodate nonbinary and transgender students' health needs. Information about homophobia and transphobia, sexual, and reproductive rights (and realizing transgender men also may need services that have been rendered "women's health" services),

and safer sex information should be integrated into the work that coordinators and student leaders undertake with Greek life. For transgender and non-binary individuals, seeing “female-coded” imagery while purchasing menstrual products could create a sense of distress for some customers (Murphy, 2019). Small changes – like the move made by Procter & Gamble, to remove the Venus symbol (♀) from wrappers for their Always brand sanitary pads – are ways to affirm transgender men’s need for health products and services (Koenig, 2019; Murphy, 2019). This training would normalize the existence of trans\* students and aid in quelling the social segregation perpetuated by cis-het students towards queer students.

This conceptualized curriculum has political constraints. First, universities need to offer the ability for potential and current students to choose both their sex and gender on university documents, beginning with the college application. The freedom of self-identification: giving students the option to have their chosen name on their IDs and on college documents (class rosters, directories, etc.); providing the option to choose both sex and gender while applying; and offering personal and career counseling which considers the unique obstacles trans\* students face in their lives and in their future workplaces are needed. Organizations should allow for students to apply to the organization with the name they will use at the university, only asking for the legal name if background checks are a part of the process, and to merge documents. Colleges can use this data to assess the size of their trans\* population and conduct more accurate research (i.e. offering data encompassing cisgender and transgender demographics). As noted from the Southeastern Oklahoma State University case, some states do not recognize the rights for transgender individuals. This makes inclusive policies difficult to attain. There are, however, many unrelated reasons which benefits a greater population of students. Dallas County Community College District allows for students and staff to “use a first name other than that

individual's legal first name on the ID card", which they call the "preferred name". Their District ID FAQs (2019) page denotes:

The reasons for choosing a preferred name are personal and different for each person. Reasons for using a preferred name may include:  
Wanting to use a nickname, middle name or initials  
Wanting to use a stage name or gender neutral or gender non-conforming name  
Wanting to use a name that a person is in the process of legally changing  
(DCCCD, "What Is a Preferred Name and Why Would Someone Want To Use a Preferred Name?")

For states which affirm transgender rights, like New York, these policies can be promoted as queer-friendly acts. The New School "is a progressive university with its main campus in New York City" ("About"). Within the LGBTQ section of their university website, there is information on how to change one's name on their campus ID, for both "preferred" and "legal name changes". Under their section titled *Name Change and ID Cards*, The New School writes:

The New School understands the importance of being identified by the correct name. The university is working diligently to make that happen in as many systems as possible on campus.

It adds, "the university is legally obligated to use a student's legal name in the following areas: Financial aid; transcripts; health insurance plans; diplomas; hiring forms such as I-9 and federal and state tax forms; enrollment and/or degree verification; [and] student bills (The New School, "Name Change and ID Cards").

Some contend that such change for such a small group of individuals is an upheaval with little impact. As referenced from Bawer (1984) in my *Theoretical Framework*, Bawer contends that standing out causes aggression towards underrepresented groups, which he describes as "accredited victims group[s]" (Bawer, 1984, p. 210). Bawer describes the affirmed queer as doubly-conscious, aware of their setbacks through discrimination, but driven by a desire to own and love their difference over being an accepted part of the masses. However, it is noted by

several participants in this study that they are very much in alignment with the majority of the work done by their organizations, and though inactive and non-financial at present, two strongly expressed a desire to become financial again. All of the participants noted a continuous act of reaching out to masculine-of-center members via social media and at conferences during LGBT offshoots, and offering support and mentorship. The work of building community is done outside of their NPHC organizations, but within realms where queer NPHC members feel safe expressing their concerns, frustrations and hope for Greek-letter organizations. These realms include groups within social media outlets like Facebook and Blackplanet, as well as applications made for LGBTQ people such as downlink and Grindr (Duguay, 2016; Fox & Ralston, 2016; Fox & Warber, 2015).

More research is necessary to establish the links between attitudes toward transgender people and a broader range of underrepresented groups in higher education, including, but not limited to, post-transition transgender women in fraternities, and post-transition transgender women in sororities. Also within higher education, transgender athletes in sports (from intermural to NCAA); transitioning and post-transition college applicants; and transgender international students require further study. In addition to the study of students in higher education, faculty and staff within colleges and universities have become targets of negative treatment as workers.

This research highlights the experiences transmasculine identities have had with cisgender women, but the majority of violence enacted towards trans\* people occurs at the hands of cisgender men. The education of cisgender students on trans\* identities is necessary to inform the next generation on the rights they are denied. This violence must receive focus in order to develop better cultural competency about sexuality. In the same year as *US v. SOUTHEASTERN*

*OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY*, the Supreme Court of Georgia affirmed the conviction of a cisgender man who murdered a transgender woman who was a sex worker (*Thomas v. State*, 2015). The man argued that he did not know the victim was a transgender woman, though he'd contacted her through an advertisement which denoted such. The convicted "was sentenced to life imprisonment for malice murder" (173). Such attempts to victim blame are rife with shame regarding sexual curiosity and fear of exposure. It is important to note that the transgender woman was referred to with masculine pronouns and their masculine birth name throughout. Without students having the opportunity to engage in dialogue regarding such events in classrooms and workshops, students will not have the understanding to fairly evaluate policies and laws which lend themselves to equal treatment of trans\* people, and leaders who identify as trans\*, without bias. Education must also inform the government of its own limitations of population data.

Many of the government's data collection entities focus on aggregating data for sex, yet conflate sex and gender. For instance, because we do not collect information on gender, academia is culled into referring to institutions which serve one gender as same-sex institutions. While historically, records which indicated male sex would be accepted for consideration at universities for men, like Morehouse and Hampden–Sydney Colleges, Morehouse now considers males who transition to womanhood to be ineligible for matriculation, and men who were born female as eligible. Same-gender institutions – instead of same-sex – would be more precise language. Both must be collected for a better understanding of how large our trans\* population is nationwide. This is a step that could be taken during the next Census in 2030. In addition, knowing how much of our population is non-straight would allow for us to understand the diversity of queer individuals. There are gaping holes in our understanding of who queer people

are; for instance, we have little data on those who identify as trans\* but who previously identified as straight, and with transitioning, now identify as gay or lesbian. Knowing how much of our population is intersex, along with their geographical, age, racial, religious, and income demographics creates a pool of literature and experiences we have yet to explore. With this information we may find the generations of intersex people who were improperly coded within binary options at birth are a source of knowledge about queered people which gives the world greater understanding of the biological sex, romantic and sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression continuums. Literature dedicated to understanding these realms of sexual and gender diversity – tying them to the demographic data we already collect – will result in better research in human resources, sociology, psychology, political science, and more. We need more data to have better policies, from university housing placements to military service.

Transgender populations outside of academia, particularly those within non-collegiate transgender and nonbinary-serving fraternities and other community-based organizations, need to have their experiences with cisgender and heterosexual violence – but most importantly, their resistance and success despite these contentious factors – documented and shared so we may develop better K-20 and community curriculum on sexual and gender differentiation.

## Conclusion

In a twitter post, user @trinisadian asked, “why do so many educated people lack basic empathy?” In response, user @totesnotsophie responded, “Higher education is a form of classism and if you're not careful you end up looking down on people you swore you were going to help.” Future research within the area of LGBT studies should be done using a community-based research approach (as used within Minkler, 2003), using non-tradition streams of knowledge like blogs and social media to exalt the voices of those with experiential knowledge

who do not have ties to traditional platforms of data sharing. Studies including a research team comprised of queer people both inside and outside of academia, jointly proposing action-oriented recommendations to support and promote the issues LGBT students and graduates face, is the best way to initiate change regarding sectors of the university environment deemed behind the curve. LGBT students and alumni (and those who work with them) need educational resources that are accessible, honest, and relevant. As noted from this study's participants, the LGBTQ community is using technology to connect and share experiences.

Given the small number of participants and the particularities of our sampling strategy, care must be taken in considering the transferability of these results to other transgender men and nonbinary transmasculine people. Additionally, living in large urban epicenters may have resulted in these participants receiving greater supports and being more connected to the larger LGBT community compared to transgender men in rural and remote areas where there is no visible LGBT community. Nonurban transgender men may be more vulnerable to discrimination given their lack of exposure to group support. It is noteworthy that despite their relatively high dedication to maintaining a historical affiliation to their sororities, none of the members interviewed were still active and financial members of their organizations. Without support, there may be other members with gender discomforts which will not be actualized due to their lack of connections to queer support. Future work should continue to explore how the intersecting identities of being Melanin-Rich, NPHC-affiliated and transgender may compound vulnerability to ousting and impact active participation. Studies on transgender men who joined NPHC *fraternities after* their transition; transgender women who joined NPHC *fraternities* before their transition; and transgender women who joined NPHC sororities *after* their transition are all viable studies in the future. I would also like to explore how the intersecting identities of being



Melanin-Rich and transgender may compound vulnerability to ousting and impact active participation in the military, within athletics, and in entertainment (Fischer & McClearen, 2019; Gates & Herman, 2014; Stanley & Smith, 2015). The stories of transgender women like actress Laverne Cox and writer Janet Mock are documented in their memoirs. Celebrity creates a different experience for trans\* people, but these stories open a door for researchers to tell the stories for trans\* identities without celebrity. These are realms where visibility, discussions and policy are emerging, yet lack academic survey. The failure of academics to address transgender and nonbinary populations deliberately results in policies and procedures guided by generalizations, excluding necessary voices.

The delay of such discussions, Butler argues, is why violence remains:

[...] there is the fact as well that women and minorities, including sexual minorities, are, as a community, subjected to violence, exposed to its possibility, if not its realization. This means that each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies-as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure (p. 20).

Butler's (2002) statement on the efficacy of social movements calls attention to how cognitive dissonance is a significant setback to an underrepresented populace fighting for fights, particularly in resistance to gender:

As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification. Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the "congealing" is itself an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means (p. 43).

Underrepresented people handicap themselves by infusing the same social hierarchy on their people as colonizers have done to them.

This research in its conclusion highlights a need for acknowledgement and deliberate inclusion of the underrepresented within our underrepresented collective, as our institutions have begun to address. While Morehouse and Spelman are only at the infancy of their strides to provide salutation to transgender scholars, it is a poignant move which compels a conversation about how NPHC organizations will function at schools which only host the organizations tied to the normative gender presumption. As gender-rigid as these institutions are – as well as the 32 historically-Anglo women's colleges (including "the Seven Sisters" colleges like Smith) and three historically-Anglo men's colleges (Saint John's, Hampden-Sydney, and Wabash) – NPHC organizations should approach the pathway of defining who belongs, with both caution and understanding of the diversity within their present membership.

## APPENDIX A. PROMOTIONAL FLIERS



photo: @\_tranedaddy\_

# PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

## TRANS\* MEN'S EXPERIENCES IN BLACK GREEK-LETTER SORORITIES

### DO YOU:

- identify as a melanin-rich/Africana transgender man, or masculine non-binary adult (18+)?
- hold a Bachelor's-level degree or higher from an accredited, non-profit university or college?
- hold (or previously held) membership in a sorority within the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) and transitioned any time after joining an undergraduate chapter?

**PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR/DOCTORAL CANDIDATE**

Sydney Epps  
Louisiana State University  
sepps2@lsu.edu

**If so, you are invited to share your experience!**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of African-American/Africana/Melanin-Rich Identified, transgender men (referred to in research as Female-to-Male, or F-to-M transgender individuals) as well as masculine-affirmed non-binary adults who belong to Black Greek Letter sororities (BGLSs).

If you have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, you can contact Dennis Landin, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-0692, [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu), [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb).

Epps is not a member of an NPHC organization.



**YOU ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH  
STUDY ENTITLED**

**EXPERIENCES OF TRANSGENDER MEN WHO JOINED  
BLACK GREEK-LETTER SORORITIES (BGLS)  
PRE-GENDER TRANSITION**

The study focuses on the influence of gender transition on treatment within BGLSs. Participants must hold or have held membership in an NPHC sorority and be graduates of accredited, non-profit colleges and universities in the United States, holding at least a Bachelor's level degree. The first part of this in-depth interview process is expected to last 60 to 120 minutes and will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes.

**THIS STUDY IS SUPPORTED BY LOUISIANA STATE  
UNIVERSITY. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT  
SYDNEY EPPS (DOCTORAL CANDIDATE/PRINCIPAL  
INVESTIGATOR) AT SEPPS2@LSU.EDU.**

Please be not a member of an NPHC organization.

photo credit: @Sire.Brax of @StealthBrosCo



# TRANS\* MEN'S EXPERIENCES IN BLACK GREEK-LETTER SORORITIES

## WE'RE LOOKING FOR YOU!

The purpose of this study is to understand the past and current experiences of African-American/Black/Melanin-Rich identified, transgender men (referred to in research as Female-to-Male, or F-to-M transgender individuals) as well as masculine-affirmed non-binary adults (18+), who belong/ed to Black Greek Letter sororities (BGLSs) and joined during their undergraduate years, pre-transition.

Interviews will be conducted via phone and audio-recorded. Participants can expect interviews lasting 60-120 minutes; interview time and duration is set by the participant. For further information, please contact the Primary Investigator.

**PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR/  
DOCTORAL CANDIDATE**

Sydney Epps  
Louisiana State University  
sepps2@lsu.edu

If you have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, you can contact Denise Lordin, Institutional Review Board (225) 578-3032, [rls@lsu.edu](mailto:rls@lsu.edu), [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb).

### DO YOU:

identify as a melanin-rich/Africana transgender man, or masculine non-binary adult?

### DO YOU:

hold a Bachelor's-level degree or higher from an accredited, non-profit university or college?

### DO YOU:

hold (or previously held) membership in a sorority within the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) and transition after joining an undergraduate chapter?

Photo is not of a member of an NPHC organization.

## APPENDIX B. LIST OF QUESTIONS SENT TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for your interest in the LSU Research study on Africana/Melanin-Rich transgender men/masculine nonbinary experiences in Black Greek-Letter Sororities. This study is conducted by me, Sydney Epps, LSU Doctoral Candidate, for my dissertation (Experiences of Black Transgender Men Who Joined Black Greek-letter Sororities Pre-Transition). Please see the attached flier to confirm you qualify to interview.

If you are interested: Please send me three dates and time intervals that suit your schedule between May 27th (Monday) and June 7th (Friday), between 12 noon and 9 PM CST. Please send your phone number as well. Expected time is under 2 hours, so please send 2 hour intervals which work for you.

Interviews will be conducted by phone. At the start of the interview, you will be read the consent agreement and give audio permissions for participation. Interviews will be recorded.

One or two follow-up interviews may occur at a later date, and the interviewer may ask for supporting evidence to gain a greater understanding of your shared experiences. These are optional. Expected conclusion of the interview process in all realms is August 1, 2019.

If you know any other person who may meet interview protocol, please feel free to send them the attached flier. Please send the following Demographic Data answers back with your three dates and times. Please indicate your own time zone in order to clarify meeting times. A calendar invitation will follow within 48 hours of receipt.

### Demographic Data

Demographic data helps us better understand who we have surveyed, and also allows us to look for any patterns in how different communities are impacted by the issue being studied. It also

allows us to compare our survey data to other data from existing data sources or baseline data.

Options have been omitted to give participants the freedom to use language which best suits their experience.

How would you describe your sex (i.e. female, male, intersex, etc.), gender identity (i.e. nonbinary, two-spirited, women, man, nonbinary, etc.), and sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, pansexual, asexual, straight/heterosexual, etc.)?

Sex:

Gender Identity/pronouns:

Sexual Orientation:

How old are you?

What is the highest level of education you have (list degree subject)?

Are you registered to vote in the US?

How would you identify your race/ethnicity?

What is your country of birth?

Which country or countries are you a citizen of?

(If U.S.) What is your city and state of birth?

(If U.S.) What /is/were/are the city/cities and state/s of your degree institution/s?

(If U.S.) What is your city and state of residence?

What is the language you are most comfortable speaking?

What is your marital/relationship status?

How many total adults (over 18) live in your household?

How many total children (under 18) live in your household?

What are the ages of the children in your household?

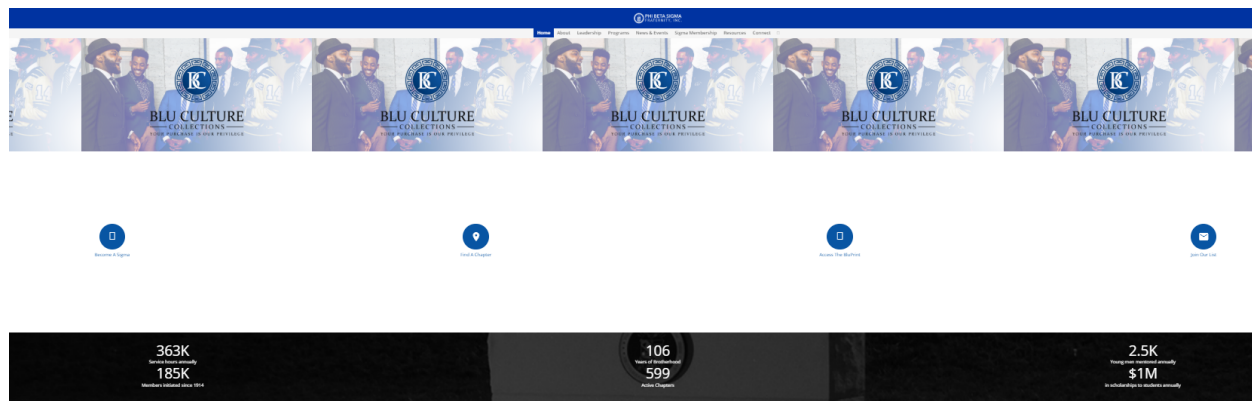
What is your employment status (i.e. full/part time/self-employed; student; industry, etc.)

Do you have health insurance coverage?

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email or by phone at (215) 917-7518.



## APPENDIX C. SCREENSHOTS OF NPHC WEBSITES WITH MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS



### Phi Beta Sigma



### Zeta Phi Beta

# Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.

"GREATER SERVICE, GREATER PROGRESS" SINCE 1922

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## History

**Established:** November 12, 1922, at Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana.

**Membership:** 85,000+

**Division:** Five Regions - Central, Northeastern, Southeastern, Southwestern, Western.

**Service Channel:** Over 500 chapters in the U.S., Bahamas, Bermuda, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Canada, Germany and Korea.

**Sorority Flower:** The yellow tea rose.

**Sorority Mascot:** The Poodle.

**Sorority Colors:** Royal blue and gold

## Mission Statement

Sigma Gamma Rho



**IOTA PHI THETA®**  
 FRATERNITY INCORPORATED  
*Founded 1963*

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## CHAPTER LOCATOR

There are more than 30,000 Iota Phi Theta members across the United States and abroad. If you're interested in learning more about a chapter, click on the map below to find one near you.



## Iota Phi Theta



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## Membership

REACTIVATION

PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS

RISK MANAGEMENT

ANTI-HAZING POLICY

EXPELLED MEMBERS

SUSPENDED MEMBERS

Nine Howard University students were led by Ethel Hedgeman (Lyle) into forming a sisterhood in 1908. Five years later, Nellie Quander and her gallant and visionary associates contributed the added dimension of an international organization and perpetual membership.

**Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated®** is proud of her 1,024 chapters and nearly 300,000 members in more than 55 nations and all 50 states. Membership is by invitation only.

If you are matriculating as a full-time student attending an accredited four-year college or university, membership is obtained through an undergraduate chapter. Look for authorized and printed rush flyers to post on your college campus or visit your campus' Office of Greek Life. Please read the [Risk Management policies](#) for your school and Alpha Kappa Alpha.

If you have a bachelor or advanced degree(s) from an accredited four-year college or university, membership is obtained through a graduate chapter. An active graduate chapter will extend an authorized and written membership letter of invitation upon approval of the official Membership Intake Process to prospective members. Please read the [Anti-Hazing policies](#) for Alpha Kappa Alpha.

## Alpha Kappa Alpha



DELTA SIGMA THETA SORORITY, INC.  
*A Service Sorority Founded in 1913*

HOME ABOUT LEADERSHIP SERVICE MEMBERSHIP NEWS RESOURCES CONTACT MEMBER PORTAL SEARCH



## MISSION & PURPOSE

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. was founded on January 13, 1913 by 22 collegiate women at Howard University to promote academic excellence and provide assistance to those in need.



### MISSION

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated is an organization of college educated women committed to the constructive development of its members and to public service with a primary focus on the Black community.

### PURPOSE

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, is a private, not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to provide assistance and support through established programs in local communities throughout the world. Since its founding more than 200,000 women have joined the organization. The organization is a sisterhood of predominantly Black, college educated women. The sorority currently has 1,000 collegiate and alumnae chapters located in the United States, Canada, Japan (Tokyo and Okinawa), Germany, the Virgin Islands, Bermuda, the Bahamas, Jamaica and the Republic of Korea.

The major programs of the sorority are based upon the organization's Five-Point Programmatic Thrust. More than ten thousand members typically attend Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated's biennial national conventions, and each of the seven regional conferences (held during years when there is no national convention) typically hosts thousands of members. At its recent 51st National convention held in the District of Columbia, more than 38,000 members registered and attended.

Delta Sigma Theta



## Alpha Phi Alpha



KAPPA ALPHA PSI®  
FRATERNITY, INC.

Print Page

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It is a fact of which Kappa Alpha Psi® is proud that the Constitution has never contained any clause which either excluded or suggested the exclusion of a man from membership merely because of his color, creed, or national origin.

Kappa Alpha Psi® is the 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest existing collegiate historically Black Greek Letter Fraternity and the 1<sup>st</sup> intercollegiate Fraternity incorporated as a national body. It remains the only Greek letter organization with its Alpha Chapter on Indiana University's campus. The Fraternity has over 125,000 members with 700 undergraduate and alumni chapters in nearly every state of the United States, and international chapters in Nigeria, South Africa, the West Indies, the United Kingdom, Germany, Korea and Japan.

## Kappa Alpha Psi



## APPENDIX D. IRB APPROVALS



### ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Sydney Epps  
Education

FROM: Dennis Landin  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: March 28, 2019

RE: IRB# E11639

TITLE: Experiences of Transgender Men Who Joined Black Greek-Letter Sororities Pre-Gender Transition

Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair  
130 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578.5983  
[irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu)  
[lsu.edu/research](http://lsu.edu/research)

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review Date: 3/28/2019

Approved X Disapproved \_\_\_\_\_

Approval Date: 3/28/2019 Approval Expiration Date: 3/27/2022

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2b

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Landin", is written over a horizontal line.

### PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING – Continuing approval is **CONDITIONAL** on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects\*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.**

\* All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>



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## VITA

Sydney Epps was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After graduating from Central High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, she attended the Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Journalism with a minor in African-American Studies, and a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminology. While at OHIO, Epps's involvement in residence life, Greek life, health promotions and academic advancement led her to pursue a career in Student Affairs. Epps spent her final year at OHIO in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, researching the educational opportunities available to children of upper-middle to upper-class households, and the children of working-class domestic workers serving upper-middle to upper-class households. Upon graduating from OHIO, Epps moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to work as the Residence Coordinator/ Interim Director for the Rock School for Dance Education, a residential campus for classically trained students from ages 12-25. She then relocated to Hartsville, South Carolina to work as the Residence Life Coordinator for the Governor's School for Science and Mathematics, a residential high school for high-achieving STEM students from across the state.

In search of career advancement, Epps became the Area Coordinator/Director for the First-Year Experience at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU), in the Department of Housing and Residence Life. In 2016, Epps graduated from ERAU's Daytona, FL-based Business program with a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership, and decided to pursue their PhD at Louisiana State University (LSU) within the School of Education's Educational Leadership and Research – Higher Education Administration program. While at LSU, Epps served as the graduate assistant for College of Human Sciences and Education in the School of Education, under the direction of Dr. Joy Blanchard, then Dr. Kristen Gansle. Furthermore, while

at LSU, Epps served as a teaching assistant and instructor within the Departments of African and African-American Studies and Education. She served as Health Care Voter Campus Fellow for Washington-based The Hub Project; student representative on the Governor's Commission on Women's Policy and Research: Sexual Harassment Subcommittee; advisor to Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.'s Gamma Pi Chapter; Events Chair for the Black Graduate Student and Professional Association (BGPSA); Ph.D. Representative for the Higher Education Student and Professional Association (HESPA); and participated in the Urban League of Louisiana's inaugural Baton Rouge Urban Leaders in Equity and Diversity (ULEAD) Cohort.