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IN THE MIDDLE:
FACTORS AFFECTING A BLACK MALE'S DECISION TO JOIN A TRADITIONALLY
WHITE FRATERNITY AT A LARGE DIVERSE INSTITUTION

BY

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IN THE MIDDLE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the pre-college factors, attitudes, and experiences of black men who joined traditionally white fraternities (TWFs) at large public predominantly white institutions (PWIs) over approximately the past four decades. These factors, with special emphasis on issues of identity, self- and group-esteem, and group salience when the individual's environment changes, will be examined through the theoretical lens of Social Identity Theory.

An integrated set of qualitative methods was used to gather data. Participants were asked to complete a brief online demographic survey, were provided an opportunity to journal about their experiences, engaged in a semi-structured interview with the primary researcher, and were asked follow up questions where necessary.

Participants in this study de-emphasized their race as a factor in their identity and distanced themselves from a race-based fictive kinship due to both internal beliefs and external messages regarding negative stereotypes of blacks and black culture. Participants reported immersion in predominantly white social and academic experiences and environments, a comparative identification with white peers over blacks while maintaining a tenuous fictive kinship, and that membership in a traditionally white fraternity was consistent with their academic and social attitudes and priorities, while also acknowledging that full acceptance in white culture was elusive. Ultimately participants found themselves "in the middle;" navigating both worlds; not always fully accepted by whites while feeling disconnected from the views and attitudes of other blacks.

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IN THE MIDDLE

This work is dedicated to my wonderful wife Susan for her love, guidance and patience;

My children Madelyn and Hayden - may they live to learn;

and to my mom, Suzanne, without whom this would not have been possible.

IN THE MIDDLE

“One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.”

– DuBois (1903)

“Basically I’m complicated, I have a hard time taking the easy way.
I wouldn’t call it schizophrenia, but I’ll be at least two people today...”

– Gnarlz Barkley (2006)

Chapter One – Introduction and Problem Statement

Black males in higher education are a well-researched population. Politicians, educators, and community leaders regularly offer statistics regarding the percentage of black males in prison versus those in college (Walters, 2006; Boyd, 2007; Kessler, 2010; Ricard, 2010). In 2002, “black men comprised only 4.3 percent of all students enrolled at institutions of higher education, the same as in 1976.” (Harper, 2006 p.vii) Sometimes referred to as an “endangered species,” (Parham & McDavis, 1987; Boyd, 2007) black males have the highest attrition rates of any student population on “flagship” college campuses (Harper, 2006). In the U.S., over two-thirds of black men who enroll in college do not graduate within six years – “the lowest college completion rate among both genders and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education.” (Harper, 2006 p.vii) Admission numbers are low and retention and graduation rates are equally discouraging (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper, 2006). Though a great deal of research exists, these and other issues point to a need for new lines of scholarship on black males in higher education.

Much of the discussion among those interested in this topic is centered on ways to enhance the academic and social experiences of black males in order to increase retention and allow for a more effective entry into, and persistence within, a higher education environment. As Harper (2006) notes, “researchers have found that many black students must contend with feelings of alienation and isolation, racism and discrimination, and environmental incompatibility at predominantly white institutions.” (Harper, 2006, p.1) Issues such as these are often the causes of increased dropout rates, poor academic performance and more. Finding a connection on campus - feeling “included,” feeling “at home,” - helps to resolve these negative feelings and results (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Therefore, questions of this study focus on the social aspects of the pre-college and early college experience; more specifically on the decision to “Go Greek”; a uniquely “higher education experience” that has been shown to aid in retention and socialization in college (Pike, 2003). A better understanding of options offered to black males regarding Greek life, and their subsequent decisions regarding those choices, might therefore be exceptionally informative.

A black male at a large public predominantly white institution (PWI) typically has three choices regarding Greek life. He can join a Historically Black Fraternity (HBF) - a group typically made up solely of black males. He can join a Traditionally White Fraternity (TWF) - a group made up typically of all white members or a core group of white males combined with minimal representation of other cultures. Or, he could instead choose to remain “independent” and not join either type of group.¹

HBFs serve as valuable social support outlets for black college men, especially at predominantly white institutions, by encouraging unity among members and increasing black male involvement in on-campus activities “as well as offering early opportunities for leadership - all of which increase retention.” (Harper & Harris, 2006) Critics, however, claim that HBFs are akin to ethnic enclaves that only serve to further insulate an already marginalized group, limiting their involvement with broader, culturally diverse activities and leadership opportunities (Sidanius, van Laar, Levin & Sinclair, 2004). Highly publicized instances of extreme hazing rituals including branding do not help their cause (Foster, 2008; Ruffins, 2007; Battle, 2007 as examples). As Fox, Hodge and Ward (1987) note;

¹ Further delineation of culture, background, religion and more can be found in Greek organizations. Latino, Jewish, culturally diverse, and other subcategories exist. For the purposes of this study I focus strictly on organizations that participants identified specifically as “traditionally white”.

Within the Black community, there appears to be controversy regarding Black participation in these organizations. One group advocates membership in social Greek letter organizations as an effective route for greater advancement on the part of Blacks, while others postulate that such membership only provides an environment that fosters less concern and minimal involvement in Black issues. (Fox, Hodge & Ward, 1987 p.522)

Regardless of their comparative value, the perceived value to a black male who may be new to a campus where he feels marginalized, possibly for the first time, is obvious.

Meanwhile the stereotypes of TWFs are equally well known. Although also examples of a type of ethnic enclave, it is more difficult for TWFs to justify the “voice” they provide for their members on campus, as these members are already the majority in nearly every case. Whereas HBFs are recognized for philanthropic activity, service to the community and cultural activities, TWFs are often chided for providing mere lip service to these types of ideals, while being accused of hegemony, alcohol and drug abuse, and academic disdain (Fox & Hodge, 1987; Chang & DeAngelo, 2001; Laird, 2005; Mathiasen, 2005; Foster, 2008; Hughey, 2010). Stereotypes perhaps, but as with many stereotypes, perhaps a kernel of truth remains. Media reports of racially offensive activities, events, and party themes at schools around the country are unfortunate reminders that such behavior persists (Feagin, Vera & Amani, 1996; Jobbins & Bolling, 2001; Hughey, 2010 as examples).

However, in an unusual twist on these issues, a comparative handful of black males within the larger group of those who “go Greek” upon arriving on the campuses of PWIs elect to join traditionally white fraternities - some that are otherwise populated exclusively by white members - instead of joining a black fraternity. How is this choice explained? What qualities of these students as well as the organization they choose to join factor into this unusual decision?

While I have received often flippant, sometimes sarcastic responses when posing these questions to a small sample of mostly black peers, colleagues, and students (“Those boys are confused!” “Grew up in the suburbs.” “Just trying to act white.” “I have no idea what those guys are thinking.”), the initial cynicism and sometimes uncomfortable beginnings of a discussion about race and difference usually finds its way to a critical dialog about the comparative benefits and drawbacks of black fraternities, white fraternities, student organizations as ethnic enclaves, and the failed efforts at developing a truly diverse undergraduate population across Greek and other organizations on college campuses.

I ask these questions to my colleagues and students because I want to understand the cultural, educational, and social influences at play for these individuals. My hypothesis is that black students who join TWFs have been socialized through pre-college educational and social experiences to demonstrate a type of anti-ethnic enclave behavior. For example, black males who join an HBF may have been socialized into a higher level of self- and/or group-esteem regarding their race, cultural identity, and background than those that join traditionally white fraternities. But perhaps just the opposite is the case. Maybe black men who join black fraternities feel a pull to learn more about themselves, their culture, and their backgrounds to better understand themselves. Or, perhaps it is simply a matter of self-preservation - a “safety in numbers” reaction to a perceived hostile campus.

McClure’s (2006) focus on black fraternities at predominantly white universities indicates that “black students coming *from a predominantly black background* (my emphasis) might experience additional difficulty in making the already tough transition from high school to college” and indicates that membership in an HBF is influential in the success of these students (McClure, 2006 p.1047). Conversely then, one might suggest that black

males *not* coming from a predominantly black background could encounter less transition difficulty and/or find membership in a white fraternity to be more appropriate. Also, a black male who selects membership in a TWF rather than an HBF might also be responding to the perceived comparative value of membership in each group, based on the predominant race and culture of the campus as opposed to racial and/or cultural expectations or stereotypes.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the sociological, cultural and/or personal identity characteristics and experiences of a unique subset of black male college students - those who select membership in a traditionally white fraternity at large, diverse, but predominantly white public universities. The question I investigate is, "What are the factors that affect a black male's decision to join a traditionally white fraternity at a large diverse institution?" The individuals in question could instead join a historically black fraternity, or simply choose to remain "independent" if a black fraternity was not suitable to their interests. A unique mix of qualities influences and/or experiences must therefore exist that led them to this unusual decision. Factors including but not limited to family, geography, pre-college schooling experiences, peer groups, and social activities/involvement might all be influential in this decision.

This question is unique in the literature. Other studies on non-whites in TWFs focus primarily on expectations of their fraternity and the experiences of these individuals once they have become members (Newsome, 2009; Hughey, 2010), as opposed specifically focusing on the pre-college factors and influences affecting why black individuals found the TWF to be preferable. In Newsome's (2009) case, five research questions were addressed,

only one of which was based on pre-college influences. Hughey (2010) addresses background as a factor in Greek choice but examines non-white members from a variety of backgrounds and focuses mainly on in-group and on-campus experiences and attitudes after joining the fraternity.

Further, in this study I examine a sample of individuals who have made this decision in varying decades from the 1980s through current undergraduate members to provide a broader perspective of this phenomenon and the factors influencing this unorthodox behavior. This is also unique as both Newsome (2009) and Hughey (2010) focus on current and recent alumni members only.

The answers to the question posed in this study may be influential in examining experiences and attitudes of a unique subset of the black male college student population and may assist in providing better academic and co-curricular support to these students, thereby potentially enhancing retention. The results of this inquiry may also be useful in examining ways that traditionally white Greek organizations at large universities can enhance the diversity of their membership to better reflect the population demographics of the schools where they are recognized. By making what may be viewed as a radical, or at the very least unusual decision, black members of white fraternities could be seen as a catalyst for supporting true diversity in the broader population of the campus, while feeling that their decision is perfectly sensible and reflects a logical conclusion based on their life experiences. The reasons behind the decisions why these participants chose not to join an HBF may be useful for determining membership strategies for those organizations as well.

In the sections that follow I provide both historical and theoretical lenses with which I contextualize my research questions.

Chapter Two - A Brief History of Greek Exclusion

In 2003, a black female student's acceptance of a bid to join a traditionally white sorority at the University of Alabama caused uproar within the Greek system, their alumni, and throughout the school, and forced the faculty and administration there to address the continued racial segregation problems within Greek organizations there. This situation is believed to be an intentional effort influenced at least in part by a secret society referred to as "The Machine" which is comprised of elite members of the Greek system, and is generally accepted by the vast majority of students and administrators (Associated Press, 2003; Gose, 1997; Sams, 2011). The fact that the problem of Greek segregation is still prevalent (Sams, 2011) and is not unique to Alabama (Chang & DeAngelo, 2002) is cause for some serious reflection as well as a better understanding of how this phenomenon came to be.

The development of Greek letter organizations can be seen as a reflection of the attitudes of the institutions where they were formed. In the earliest era of higher education, only white Christian males were welcome at most colleges. Therefore, no troubling issues of race, religion, difference and/or segregation existed within the school walls. As a broader diversity of populations became educated and sought admission, many schools began to implement policies of exclusion to preserve the purity of their ranks. In most cases, membership in Greek organizations followed suit. An illustrative context for this evolution can be found in the works of Syrett (2009), Karabel (2005), Sidanius van Laar, Levin & Sinclair (2004), Sanua (2003), and Feagin, Vera and Amani (1996). What follows in this section is an all too brief summary of the evolution of the segregated nature of white Greek fraternities.

The first college Greek letter social fraternity was founded at William and Mary College in 1776 (Sidanius, van Laar, Levin & Sinclair, 2004). As noted, during this early era racial segregation and discrimination issues were not yet prevalent in these organizations, primarily due to the fact that a diverse campus population did not exist. As Syrett (2009) notes;

Fraternities did not, in their founding constitutions, have restrictive clauses barring non-whites and non-protestants from membership. One Chinese student, Yung Wing, Yale class of 1854, was a member of Delta Kappa Epsilon. He may well have been the only person of color to be initiated into a college fraternity in the antebellum period. Because there were so few men of color on college campuses, initiating just one into a fraternity was not seen as a threat to the hegemony of whiteness that it would become later in the century. This was precisely the reason why there were no restrictive clauses in the first place: they were simply not seen as necessary. (Syrett, 2009, p.69)

The author also notes that;

Until the late nineteenth century, fraternities had no need to actually codify their racism and anti-Semitism; they attended institutions that were by and large free from ‘undesirable elements’. (Syrett, 2009, p.171-172)

However, Syrett (2009) goes on to note, “By the early 1910s...fraternities were adding codes of exclusion to their constitutions mandating that members must be white, Christian males.” (Syrett, p.172) Sidanius, van Laar, Levin & Sinclair (2004) further chart this change, noting that;

By 1928 more than half of the national fraternities and sororities had written rules and constitutions explicitly excluding applicants on the basis of religious affiliation and race. Furthermore, on a large number of American campuses, interfraternity councils admitted only White Christian fraternities and sororities to their membership (Sidanius, van Laar, Levin & Sinclair, 2004 p.97).

These new “rules” can be seen as something of a “trickle down” effect as a broader population sought admission to universities. As access to higher education became more widespread and somewhat more culturally diverse, reactionary policies were put in place to

maintain a level of self-perceived integrity at universities, and in turn, within the fraternities. In the introduction to The Chosen, Jerome Karabel's 2005 epic work on the history of admissions policies at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, Karabel explains how the "Big Three" historically "admitted students almost entirely on the basis of academic criteria for most of their long histories" but that "by the 1920s when the traditional academic requirements no longer served to keep out students deemed 'socially undesirable'" the admissions programs began a campaign to prevent certain populations from being admitted. "(T)he leaders of the Big Three devised a new admissions regime that allowed them to accept – and to reject – whomever they desired." (Karabel, 2005 p.2) This new admission requirement was described as "character." A quality that was intentionally hard to define, admissions based on "character" was found to be an excellent way for leaders at these schools to select essentially whomever they chose for admission as opposed to selecting students based on merit. According to Karabel (2005) the intent of these policies was to keep Jewish students from being admitted while maintaining high admission rates for "high-status Protestants."

Sanua (2003) describes these policies as "juridical barriers" and describes their presence in fraternities of the time. In her work on the development of Jewish fraternities Sanua explains that;

(J)uridical barriers supplemented the old social barriers. From the 1870s and 1880s onward restrictive or sectarian clauses became common in college fraternity constitutions and by-laws. Membership could be limited to those belonging to a particular church or those who were "Caucasian," "White Christian," born a Christian of two Christian parents," or "of full Aryan blood." In one Christian fraternity in the 1920s, possession of one eighth Jewish blood disqualified a student for membership." (Sanua, 2003 p.39-40)

Sanua (2003) goes on to note "College officials rarely protested these exclusions. In their view, fraternities were private social organizations and membership selection was a private affair." (Sanua, 2003 p.40)

Blacks, of course, suffered under these “juridical barriers” as well. Feagin, Amani & Vera (1996) note that:

“for a long period blatantly anti-black discrimination at most colleges and universities was prescribed by local law or custom” and that “in many areas no African American students were allowed; in most others they were discouraged from attending or restricted once on campus.” (Feagin Amani & Vera, 1996 p.13)

Only seven black students graduated from Yale between 1924 and 1945 (Karabel, 2005). In 1939, a black student who was “accidentally granted a full scholarship to Princeton” was pulled from the registration line by the director of admissions and told he was “not wanted at Princeton” and should “go to a college of his own kind.” (Karabel, 2005 p.232) Syrett (2009) describes this era as a time of white superiority within fraternities. A situation reflective of the policies and attitudes of the schools at which they were housed;

“(M)ost fraternity brothers probably assumed, without giving it much if any thought, their superiority to African Americans. This was part and parcel of what it meant for them to be men. Though it would have differed in significant ways in the North and the South, there is no question that for white men, manliness was inextricably bound up in their whiteness. This was no less true for those who joined college fraternities. (Syrett, 2009 p.70)

Desegregation was coming, in university policy as well as eventually to the constitutions of Greek letter organizations, but the change was slow. Syrett (2009) indicates that Amherst led the way;

The national saga of fraternity desegregation began in 1946, when Amherst College’s trustees formally decided that no fraternity on Amherst’s campus after World War II would be allowed to operate if it or its national organization contained a membership clause that restricted membership based on race, ethnicity, or religion. (Syrett, 2009 p.248)

However, as Syrett (2009) later notes;

Not all undergraduates accepted racial integration. Although the racial controversies would lead some students across the country to found fraternities that specifically embraced a multicultural membership, others clung to more outdated forms of racial exclusivity and prejudice. Indeed, social scientists studying fraternities continued to find that their members were more ethnocentric than their nonaffiliated peers and harbored more prejudice toward

nonwhites and Jews. And many of these fraternities, with or without explicit discrimination clauses, continued to select their members based on skin color and religious affiliation. A number of students in a 1956 nationwide study of college freshmen attested to this. (Syrett, 2009 p.258)

The battle for equality and integration on college campuses was fought throughout much of the twentieth century. Greek organizations have been a much harder sell. Concurrent with the affirmative actions of the 1960s, prejudicial policies on university campuses became indefensible but Greeks remained steadfast;

Throughout the period (1960s to early 1970s) the number of non-white and non-Protestant students who became members of traditionally white, Protestant fraternities rose only slightly. And when one of these fraternities did take in a new member, it often made headlines, as almost invariably some other chapter of the same national organization protested. Even without a protest it was news enough – at least in campus papers and sometimes among college administrators – that a black student had been initiated into a previously all-white fraternity. (Syrett, 2009 p.260)

Sidanius, van Laar, Levin & Sinclair (2004) note that although it took several more years,

...(b)y the end of the 1970s, these exclusionary entrance requirements had all but disappeared from American universities. Nonetheless, despite the removal of these explicitly discriminatory practices, many empirical studies suggest that ethnocentrism and generalized prejudice remain associated with Greek organizations (Sidanius, van Laar, Levin & Sinclair, 2004 p.97).

Almost 20 years later it would appear not much progress had been made. At the close of the 20th century, Boschini and Thompson (1998) suggested that it would be in the Greek system's best interest to become more open to a diverse population. As the populations of college campuses continue to change and the "traditional-aged white student will become the minority," Greeks must be more willing to open their doors to a diverse population in order to survive. The authors further noted that most colleges maintain policies and mission statements that "include expectations of diversity and inclusion." (Boschini & Thompson,

1998 p.22) Although fraternities (and sororities) remain private organizations, as representatives of the campus on which they reside it will behoove these group to attempt to reflect the aims of the school and the population as well (Boschini & Thompson, 1998).

Today, most colleges and universities have policies to ensure that race, culture, and in some cases even gender, be excluded as conditions for joining student organizations. At many institutions, student organizations Greek or otherwise, must include a non-discriminatory policy in their constitutions in order to be recognized and funded as a university group. This also exists at the national level for most if not all Greek groups. For example, all nine of the original “Divine Nine” Historically Black Fraternities and Sororities are “officially colorblind” when membership is considered (Associated Press, 2003). Nevertheless, membership in Greek organizations is homogenous and membership based on racial characteristics remains, even if officially prohibited, (Chang & DeAngelo, 2001).

Therefore, the decision to join a white fraternity not only defies the general assumption that black males would seek a peer group that is representative of their race when transitioning into a new, predominantly white college experience, but also defies the traditional expectations and historical trends of fraternities; groups with a history of segregation that continue to demarcate by race, even if today they do so unconsciously; without malice or even intent.

Chapter Three - Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I identify and briefly explain the predominant theory through which the data collected is analyzed – Social Identity Theory (SIT) - as well as introducing supporting theories and concepts that, combined with SIT, serve to provide the fullest perspective possible of the unique stories of the interview participants in an attempt to explain their decision to join a TWF.

Social Identity Theory

Data analyzed in this study is examined through the lens of Social Identity Theory. Self-esteem and group-esteem based on race and identity, and the influence of these factors on the individual's self-identification might all be factors. External influences of the groups with which the individual identifies himself should also contribute (Tajfel, 1981). Developed by social psychologist Henri Tajfel in the 1960s, SIT was a reaction to the predominant theories of social psychology regarding the behavior of groups. According to Tajfel's original definition, SIT addresses:

“That part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.” (H. Tajfel, 1981 p.255)

SIT would suggest that as minorities, black males are consciously aware of their membership in a group that is made up of people of their race. This awareness is heightened when immersed in a majority white culture. Yet, these individuals go to college and intentionally select membership in a group that is non-representative of their race-based identity. Therefore, how is race influential in their self-concepts?

Tajfel further states that:

“The assumption is made that however rich and complex may be an individual’s view of himself or herself in relation to the surrounding world, social and physical, some aspects of that view are contributed by the membership of certain social groups or categories. Some of these memberships are more salient than others; and some may vary in salience *in time* and as a function of a *variety of social situations*.” (H. Tajfel, 1978 p.67) (my emphasis)

It is possible then, that a black student’s membership in a white fraternity is a function of the new social situation experienced as “college.” Perhaps the new environment is a catalyst for a lessening of salience for the membership in his race-based group.

By 1986, Tajfel and regular collaborator John C. Turner had determined more specific criteria determining SIT-based behavior and individual identification; a sampling of which are included here:

- 1 – Individuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem; they strive for a positive self-concept.
- 2 – Social groups or categories and membership of them are associated with positive and negative value connotations. Hence, social identity may be positive or negative according to the evaluations (which tend to be socially consensual, either within or across groups) of these groups that contribute to an individual’s social identity.
- 3 – When social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group or join some more positively distinct group, and/or to make their existing group more positively distinct. (Tajfel & Turner in Worchel & Austin, 1986 p.16)

For my purposes, the “groups” affecting identity may be two-fold. These individuals may be examined as part of the group that is made up of the race with which they self-identify. Alternately, it could be the fraternity that they self-select. One might expect to find that these men describe their self-identity and their self- or group-esteem as based less on their race and more on other sociological and cultural factors. Another possibility as noted above may be that the participants find association based on race as negatively discrepant and therefore seeks to lessen affiliation. Or, perhaps the decision is based on their evaluation of the HBFs on campus as being “not for them” for any number of reasons.

It is also important to note Tajfel and Turner's reference to time and changing social situations. Salience of identity categories such as race may be in flux based on the presence of competing social influence groups and may change over time. For example, individuals making this decision may find that the salience of their race to their own identity may be more influential when at home or in other non-Greek social settings, or may reflect a change of attitude from high school based on change of location and the effects of time away from the previous social setting.

As Hogg (2006) notes;

"Social identity is motivated by two processes, self-enhancement and uncertainty reduction, that cause groups to strive to be both better than and distinct from other groups." (Hogg in Burke, 2006 p.126)

Hogg further explains uncertainty reduction as an "epistemic motive" in which,

"People strive to reduce subjective uncertainty about their social world and their place within it – they like to know who they are and how to behave and who others are and how they might behave." (Hogg in Burke, 2006 p.126)

Hogg notes that these views are influenced by group norms and that,

"(I)f people identify strongly with a group whose norms prescribe certain actions, then they are more likely to do those things than if they did not identify strongly (with that group)." (Hogg in Burke, 2006 p.126)

This suggests that perhaps black males who join white fraternities are making a decision based on a cultural norm of a group with which they identify strongly, in an attempt to more closely align with those norms and reduce an inherent uncertainty based on the race difference between them and others in their social circles.

Social Identity Theory provides the opportunity to examine the pre-college cultural and social characteristics of these participants through lens that examines influences, motives, and changes to these over time and in new environments. Further theories and concepts noted here serve to support the evidence examined via SIT.

Social Identity, Ethnic Enclaves and Fictive Kinships

Universities nationwide have championed “diversity” as a panacea to resolve issues of racism and discrimination and foster an environment of tolerance, appreciation, and ultimately multiculturalism on campus. Open admissions policies, first-year programs, special interest housing, and many other faculty- and administration-driven programs have been developed and much funding has been spent in an effort to bring college students closer together cross-culturally.

Pike & Kuh, (2006) for example, refer to numerous studies that indicate that:

“(A) diverse college campus provides students with opportunities to interact with peers who are different from themselves and that these interactions ultimately contribute to a supportive campus environment and mediate students’ intellectual and personal development.” (Pike & Kuh, 2006 p.426)

As noted, although not necessarily malicious in their intent, Greek organizations often do not reflect this diverse nature of their campuses. In some ways, this lack of diversity is comparable to the concept of an ethnic enclave.

Digby & Perry (2006) explain that historically an ethnic enclave represented “migrant communities who choose to live in close proximity” and “may consist of residents, businesses...religious buildings and community institutions.” The authors go on to note “most (ethnic enclave) communities result from social preference and economic motive.” (Digby & Perry, 2006 p.2)

The “economic” influence of the TWF as an on-campus enclave can be seen as the social capital that the organization wields with respect to status, popularity, power, and influence (Severtis & Christie-Mizell, 2007). These groups are culturally-based social preference groups formed within a larger population; a population within which these groups

may actually consider themselves minorities or at the very least feel persecuted on an increasingly diverse campus. Research on TWFs has shown a tendency for members of these groups to describe an increase in ethnocentrism and a sense of victimization, even when the campus is predominantly white (Sidanius, van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2004). This phenomenon could increase the insulated nature of the enclave mentality of the group.

Individuals more often seek affiliation with culture-specific groups with identity salience and strong cultural backgrounds that have high esteem about their membership in that culture (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). As SIT researchers Ethier and Deaux (1994) argued in their study on Hispanic students at an Ivy League school, it is predictable that students with strong cultural backgrounds “would be more likely to engage in activities relevant to their ethnic identification.” (Ethier & Deaux 1994 p.244) One of the theories proffered by Ethier and Deaux (1994) is that when an individual who has high group-esteem encounters a change in physical location (for example, going to a predominantly white or highly diverse university) that person would seek to strengthen his identification with that group upon encountering that new environment. This may describe the black student who joins an HBF.

On the other hand, if that student does not have strong self-esteem toward his race and/or cultural group or does not have strong group esteem, “the need for stability of the identity should also be weaker” when encountering a new environment (Ethier & Deaux, 1994 p.245). In this case a black student might then select a TWF. The results of the Ethier and Deaux study indicated, among other results, that;

Students with a strong cultural backgrounds were more likely to become involved in their ethnic group at college and subsequently, to show increases in identification with that group. In contrast, students without a strong cultural background were more likely to perceive threats to their identity, to have lower self-esteem associated with that identity, and to lower their identification with that group. (Ethier & Deaux, 1994 p.249)

These findings speak to the unexpected nature of the decision made by the participant. However, Ogbu (2003) adds a different perspective by noting that black students coming from affluent white suburbs who feel uncomfortable being the only black students in large groups of white students may in fact turn to the black fraternity in order to attain a new sense of connectedness. It is likely that at least a portion of the population in question would hail from affluent white suburbs, therefore the comparative comfort and need for a sense of connectedness based on race are powerful factors.

Turner, in his explanation of his views on SIT and joining behaviors suggests that:

The first question determining group-belongingness is not ‘Do I like these people?’ but ‘Who am I?’ What matters is how we perceive and define ourselves and not how we feel about others. (Turner, in Tajfel, 1982 p.16)

This point may be at the very core of my question. The precollege experiences of the participants in this study reflect an answer to the question “Who am I?” and should affect Greek choice - a reflection of self that may then alter the answer to the question “Do I like these people?”

So, if TWFs function as ethnic enclaves, how does one explain both the interest of a black student in the fraternity and the acceptance of that student by the fraternity?

Fordham describes such socialization choices as “(rejecting) membership in the fictive kinship system.” (Fordham, 1988 p.56) Fictive kinship is defined as;

“a kinship-like connection between a group of people within a given society, not related by blood or marriage but who maintain a sense of peoplehood or collective social identity resulting from their similar social, political and or economic status (Fordham as described in Harris & Marsh, 2010 p.1244)

Race is an example of fictive kinship. This concept is rooted in both SIT and CRT and the suggestion noted earlier that black males are consciously aware of their membership in a group that is made up of people of their race, and that this awareness is heightened when immersed in a majority white culture. Rejection of a race-based fictive kinship, or perhaps

substitution of a race-based fictive kinship with a kinship based on some other criteria may be at the heart of my questions.

As Fordham notes;

“One can be black in color but choose not to seek membership in the fictive kinship system. One can also be denied membership by the group because one’s behavior, attitudes and activities are perceived as being at variance with those thought to be appropriate and group-specific, which are culturally patterned and serve to delineate ‘us’ from ‘them’” (Fordham, 1988 p.56)

Black students who demonstrate behaviors such as “talking proper,” involvement in “white sports” such as skiing, tennis, golf, or lacrosse, and other activities deemed as “acting white” are often subject to in-groups scrutiny, isolation, and scorn (Carter 2005, Ogbu 2003). These behaviors and reactions to these behaviors may result in a de-emphasis of the fictive kinship between participants and other blacks. Studies examine the need many blacks feel to adopt a “raceless” persona to counteract the in-group black bias against academic achievement and immersion into white culture and society (Fordham, 1988, Harris & Marsh 2010). Fordham suggests that blacks in this category attempt to minimize “their relationship to the black community and to the stigma attached to ‘blackness’” in order to adopt this raceless identity (Fordham, 1988 p.57).

Rejection of fictive kinship, both intentional on the part of participants and insinuated upon participants by both black and white peers, schoolmates neighbors etc. resulting in a comparatively raceless persona may be an important theme in the identity development of these men. If one feels internal or external rejection of a kinship based on race, other criteria may be utilized in finding a kinship that feels more natural for participants.

Critical Race Theory and the Nigrescence Theory - Expanded

Although the research encapsulated in this work will be examined vis a vis the tenets of Social Identity Theory, there are two theoretical frameworks that must be examined as theoretical contexts for the purposes of this study – Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Nigrescence Theory - Expanded (NT-E) of black identity development (Cross 1991/2001).

Critical Race Theory was developed “as a counterlegal scholarship to the positivist and liberal legal discourse of civil rights” (Ladson-Billings, 1998 p.7). Theorists argue that there exists an inherent inequity in society and that “race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995 p.47-8). As a result, critical race theorists argue that from the earliest days of education in a predominantly white system black students, and in particular black boys, are marginalized, assumed to be unintelligent, and pre-categorized as disruptive, dispassionate and educationally incapable (Harper, 2009 p.698). CRT scholars suggest that racism “is not a series of isolated acts, but is endemic in American life deeply ingrained legally, culturally and even psychologically” (Delgado, cited in Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p.52). The experiences and attitudes of the parents of participants as well as participants themselves may all be presumed to be couched within a seemingly inescapable condition of inherent racism. Under these presumed conditions, a black male’s selection of a predominantly white fraternity is unusual indeed, and worthy of closer examination.

Worrell, Cross, and Vandiver’s (2001) “Nigrescence Theory – Expanded”, which includes (1991 and 2000) updates and expansion of Cross’s original Black Identity Development model (1971) describes the development of black identity in three phases;

1- Preencounter, in which identity is described in terms of “assimilation, miseducation and self-hatred.” (Worrell, Cross & Vandiver, 2001 p.202). As noted by the authors in a later work;

“Assimilation reflects pro-American attitudes; nationality rather than race is central to views of the self and others. Pre-encounter miseducation attitudes emphasize negative stereotypes about African Americans as a collective (e.g., Black people are lazy and engage in criminal

behavior). Pre-encounter self-hatred, however, focuses on the self and reflects self-loathing on the basis of one's race." (Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell, & Cross, 2010 p.166)

2- Encounter Immersion-Emersion, in which identity includes "anti-White" feelings and "Intense black involvement." Immersion/emersion involves;

"either strong anti-White attitudes and/or intense pro-Black attitudes. These identity attitudes are marked by feelings of extreme emotional valence. Anti-White attitudes reflect strong disdain for European Americans and/or White people. Immersion/emersion intense Black involvement attitudes reflect an uncritical and romanticization of anything related to Black culture and people. (Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell, & Cross, 2010 p.166)

3 – Internalization, which is characterized by bicultural and/or multicultural attitudes and behaviors (Worrell, Cross & Vandiver 2001 p.202). Internalization;

"involves an acceptance and embracing of Blackness and a more nuanced view of all cultures. In theory, internalization attitudes are reflected in four identity types: Afrocentric, bicultural, multiculturalist-racial, and multiculturalist-inclusive. Afrocentric identity attitudes center on Black empowerment and the use of African-derived principles of living and interpretation of one's environment. (Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell, & Cross. 2010 p.166)

An important presumption of Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell, & Cross' enhanced model is that "any one individual will manifest a combination of these racial identity attitudes to varying degrees." (Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell, & Cross, 2010 p.168)

Patterns of racial identity are what matter as opposed to an attempt at defining a specific unalterable identity. The enhanced model of Nigrescence Theory presumes "a universe of racial identity attitudes among African Americans, and these are fostered by the *environment in which African Americans grow up*." (Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell, & Cross, 2010 p.177) (my emphasis) Their study found that African Americans;

"from suburban communities were found to endorse attitudes that (a) emphasize negative stereotypes about African Americans as a collective...and (b) reflect pro-American attitudes that emphasize nationality rather than race as central to views of the self and others." (Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell, & Cross, 2010 p.177)

These tenets are important contexts to consider when examining the lived experiences of the participants of this study.

The concepts of identity development, self-esteem and group-esteem and salience of those factors over time, “racelessness,” “acting white,” pressure within the black peer group to make compliant or discrepant decisions about personality, interests, and academic success, as well as the level of recognition and adaptation of blackness and black identity within an inherently racist white-dominant society may all be factors that affect the decision to join a TWF in college. These concepts provide contextual frameworks for the research discussed herein.

Consistent with the assertions of Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver Worrell & Cross’ work in Nigrescence Theory, Rowley, Sellers and Chavous (1998) caution researchers of black identity that “the use of paradigms that presume a monolithic Black identity for all African Americans simply because of their phenotypic obscures the true relationship between racial identity and self-esteem.” (Rowley, Sellers & Chavous, 1998 p.722) The authors’ study on black identity and self-esteem in black high school and college students found that due to the overwhelming importance placed on race in the US, “most African Americans are able to report feelings about being African American” regardless of how strong their identification to their race may be (Rowley, Sellers & Chavous, 1998 p.722). But they also note that, “the extent to which these attitudes influence their self-concepts is dependent on the subjective meaning that an individual places on race.” (Rowley Sellers and Chavous, 1998 p.722)

Therefore, if a black student feels an innate comfort or association with populations not based on race descriptors or racial identity, the decision to join a white fraternity may not be seen as innovative, whereas to outsiders, in-group members with stronger biases, and

individuals of differing cultural and racial backgrounds the decision may be seen as exceptionally unusual, ground-breaking, or even misguided.

Employing both the original theoretical works of Tajfel and Turner and their associates, as well as findings of the authors cited above who have utilized SIT to focus their own studies, I have framed my research and evaluated my findings through the lens of Social Identity Theory. However, the contributions of Critical Race Theory and the Nigrescence Theory - Expanded model also heavily influence the findings and analysis of this work.

Chapter Four - Methodology

This phenomenological study utilized qualitative, narrative data obtained primarily through semi-structured interviews (See Appendix A for interview protocol) (Babbie, 2005; Creswell, 1998 & 2007). Interviews were modeled in the Interpretivist-Constructionist (IC) theory of qualitative study. According to Rubin & Rubin (2005) IC researchers:

do not need to drop their cultural assumptions and assume those of the conversational partners, but do need to be cautious lest they fail to hear the meaning of what interviewees have said because their own cultural assumptions get in the way. (Rubin & Rubin, 2005 p.29)

Creswell (2007), in describing the similarly named Social Constructivism viewpoint explains that such researchers “focus on the specific contexts in which people live in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants” (Creswell, 2007 p.21). I was inherently an outsider in this process, therefore bias and reflexivity on my part were unavoidable, but care was taken to ensure these concerns did not affect the telling of my participants’ stories. Therefore the Interpretivist- or Social-Constructionist, qualitative interview method was most appropriate since I was interested in understanding the unique experiences of my participants and attempted to find thematic connections between social and cultural experiences and group choice while acknowledging my own subjectivity.

I employed non-probability or “criterion” sampling to locate appropriate participants, since there are several specific characteristics that each must possess in order to be eligible for involvement in this study (Babbie, 2005; Creswell, 1998, 2007). In particular, both purposive sampling (Babbie, 2005; Creswell 2007) and snowball sampling methods (Goodman, 1961; Creswell, 2007) were employed. I identified and interviewed nine black men who were current or alumni members of TWFs by these methods. Purposive sampling

was employed by asking my peers if they knew of current or former fraternity members who fit the criteria for the study. My associates were able to utilize social media outlets such as Facebook and LinkedIn to reconnect with those individuals and introduce them to my study. Once those men were identified, several agreed to participate in the study. Once consent was obtained and the interview process was completed, I then implemented the “snowball” sampling method by asking each participant if they knew of other current or former black members of TWFs. Several more participants were obtained via this method.

One of my primary interests in this study was to look for changes in views, attitudes, and motivations on the part of these participants. To this end, I sought to include both current students as well as individuals who made this choice as a college student in the 1980s or 1990s to provide a longitudinal perspective across participants. This was of particular importance to me, since similar studies have been completed in which the experiences of black males who join white fraternities were examined (Newsome, 2009; Hughey 2010). However that research was confined strictly to current and very recent graduates. My study provides further perspective by examining experiences and views of a population that reflected possible changes in racial attitudes, motivations and priorities over the past 30 years. However, both Newsome’s and Hughey’s works have been quite influential in providing a comparison between participant attitudes.

Specific methodological tools that I implemented included on-line demographic data collection via a simple questionnaire, preliminary participant journaling, and a semi-structured qualitative interview. Each of these steps provided necessary information in the most applicable formats. Each step supported acquisition of contextually meaningful data

collection, allowed for discovery of “unanticipated phenomena and influences,” and provided ample opportunity for member checking and triangulation of data (Maxwell, 1996 p.19).

Once informed consent was obtained, I asked participants to spend a few weeks journaling at their leisure on topics applicable to the subject matter. These topics included recollection of influential experiences in high school, feelings and attitudes about race and identity, blackness and cultural experiences, and preconceived notions and pre-existing knowledge of Greek groups prior to coming to college among others. The subject matter of the journaling exercise was of course varied by each participant and several chose not to journal prior to our interview.

I employed a preliminary demographic questionnaire to collect data on my participants’ high school and home life experiences. I collected data on items such as name and age of participant, year(s) of fraternity membership, hometown, household income, type and demographics of high school. The questionnaire was provided via an online service for the convenience of both the subject and the researcher (See Appendix C for questionnaire and results).

Each participant then completed an approximately 90-minute semi-structured qualitative interview in which the bulk of the pertinent data regarding the issues surrounding the main questions of the study were addressed. Topics included such diverse ideas as the emphasis placed on blackness as a part of their culture and upbringing, high school peers, academic co-curricular and athletic interests and activities, experiences of racism, and the process of rushing and fraternity selection.

Data Analysis

Since interviews took place over the course of many months, each participant's interview data was reviewed, transcribed, coded, and evaluated throughout the process of data collection. As new data was generated, existing data was reexamined, reevaluated and recoded as new and/or unexpected themes arise. During this processing and analysis phase I adhered closely to the ordered operations of management, reduction, interpretation, and representation of my data (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Although basic, these four steps provide a heuristic that allows for interplay between each step while employing recursive and ongoing methods of coding and analysis.

As suggested above, the management phase included collection, transcription and coding of multiple sources of data. Using the pre-developed etic codes I determined would be applicable to my study based on theory and literature, I employed an open-coding strategy (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995); reading the interviews and journals line by line and noting themes, connections to the literature, negative cases, new ideas/areas of inquiry and unexpected relevant data. Examples of these are descriptive in vivo codes such as the process of rushing and pledging as described by my participants, as well as inferential codes such as the type and location of the participants' homes, high school demographics, prior knowledge/experience with Greek organizations via family, friends, and media among others.

I then sorted my data in order to begin the process of data reduction. As I sorted through the data collected, I sought what Creswell (2007) refers to as "clusters of knowledge" - seeking info that both speaks to my anticipated codes as well as themes, topics, issues, and views that may reflect my anticipated codes or bring rise to codes I had not

expected. In reducing data, I sought not to simply compartmentalize data I deemed valid and eschewed that which is not (although that was part of the process) but also to “sharpen, sort, focus, discard and organize data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn.” (Miles & Huberman, 1984 p.23-4) Summarizing, paraphrasing and chunking my data into sensible “buckets” allowed for an organization of themes based around my coding structure which in turn allowed for analysis of my participants’ views within the conceptual framework and theoretical literature I am relying upon for this study – primarily Social Identity Theory (SIT). An important subset of the literature on SIT is the studies that apply the theory to other populations. These studies will allow for triangulation within my theoretical analysis by providing a comparison between results of other studies and my own data. Another value of literature-based coding is the opportunity to seek rival explanations for my participants’ observations as opposed to my immediate interpretations based on SIT (Patton, 1990).

My efforts to interpret my data were be guided by what Patton refers to as extrapolation (Patton, 1990). Patton warns that “speculation” is not what we seek, but a “modest speculation” – extrapolation – in which we go “beyond the narrow confines of the data to think about other applications of the findings” (Patton, 1990 p.489). Since I am applying a constructivist lens I do not seek to determine “truth” but instead interpret the phenomena that are described by my participants to develop a rich description of my participants’ experience (Patton, 1990).

Role of the Researcher

The research conducted in this study is multicultural in nature. Banks (2006) describes multicultural research as “transformative research that emerges out of nonmainstream cultures or from empathetic outsiders who try to describe the values, perspectives and experiences of these groups in accurate, valid and sympathetic ways.” (Banks, 2006 p.774) Banks goes on to explain that multicultural research “pursues questions that are related to the lives of groups that have historically been marginalized and discriminated against in society.” and that it “asks questions that are of concern to groups in the margins.” (Banks, 2006 p.775)

Banks (1998, 2006) described the role of the multicultural researcher as separated into categories based on the qualities of the researcher as compared to those of participants.

The categories include:

Indigenous- insider – This individual endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her indigenous community and culture and is perceived by people within the community as a legitimate community member who can speak with authority about it.

Indigenous-outsider – This individual was socialized within his or her indigenous community but has experienced high levels of cultural assimilation into an outsider or oppositional culture. The values, beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge of this individual are identical to those of the outside community. The indigenous-outsider is perceived by indigenous people in the community as an outsider.

External-insider – The individual was socialized within another culture and acquires its beliefs, values, behaviors, attitudes and knowledge. However, because of his or her unique experiences, the individual rejects many of the values, beliefs, and knowledge claims within his or her indigenous community and endorses those of the community studied. The external-insider is viewed by the new community as an “adopted” insider.

External-outsider - The external-outsider is socialized within a community different from the one in which he or she is doing the research. The external-outsider has a partial understanding of and little appreciation for the values, perspectives and knowledge of the community he or she is studying and consequently often misunderstands and misinterprets the behaviors within the studied community. (Banks, 1998 p.8, 2006 p.778)

I see myself as an “external-outsider” in this study. My role was strictly that of data collector and evaluator. Although I was an undergraduate “brother” in a TWF with a very small population of black alumni and undergraduate members, I can in no way have a full appreciation of the experiences and attitudes of my participants. A concern for me was the fact that as a white male, the perception on the part of the interviewee that I was somehow intentionally or unintentionally injecting bias into my questions or my interviewing style may impede the interviewees’ interest in being completely honest with me. I may unintentionally bring further bias in my assumptions and interpretations as to what the true factors and influences are that affect their decisions.

However, I maintain that as an individual who is innately ineligible to be considered a member of the in-group, my bias is limited and my view is objective. I do not purport to understand or empathize with the backgrounds, struggles and unique challenges of my participants. I will rely entirely on participant views, opinions and stories in order to tell mine.

Throughout this process I attempted to create both implements and an environment that limited threats to validity. My primary validity concerns stemmed from three main areas: reflexivity, bias, and the reflective/evaluative abilities of my younger participants.

As noted earlier, I had some preconceived notions about the precollege experiences of individuals that would be eligible for this study; images of white schools, white friends, and suburban living all combined in my mind to make up such a candidate. As such, I attempted to develop an interview protocol and coding process that attended to these issues and allowed for my participants to explain their views and experiences without feeling led toward certain answers based on my questioning or my questioning style.

Since several of my participants were current undergrads and recent graduates, it is possible that some of them may not have been mature enough, nor sufficiently removed from the experience, to fully reflect upon this recent time of their lives and understand the interconnectedness of culture, experience and choice; the precise motives and motivations that have driven their selection. For the purposes of this study, I was willing to accept this potentially limiting condition from some of my participants because I feel that the recentness of their experiences better reflected current high school attitudes and on-campus environment and provided crisp data from recent memories of events. In contrast, the subgroup of more mature alumni members provided a way to draw some comparisons and contrasts between the influences of these younger members and those further removed from the experience.

Chapter Five – Participant Profiles

The participants of this study ranged in age from 19 to 45 and reported high school graduation dates from 1986 through 2011. Seven out of nine reported growing up in suburban/rural areas while the other two grew up in urban areas. One participant reported spending his youth split between urban and suburban locations. Seven out of nine also reported growing up with both parents in single-family houses. One participant reported living primarily with his mother, while another reported splitting time between parents. Seven out of nine participants reported attending predominantly white suburban high schools, six of which were public. Two participants attended urban high schools both described as having mixed populations. (See Appendix C for answers to specific demographic question provided via online survey.)

BRANDON - a mutual associate referred Brandon to me. Brandon's parents are Nigerian immigrants. He was born in a large city in Northern New Jersey. His family then moved to a single family home in a nearby suburb that was racially mixed when he was approximately ten years old. He attended a racially mixed public high school. Brandon's father holds an MBA and his mother holds a Master's in Science and works in healthcare. He estimates that during the time that he attended high school and college his parents earned in excess of \$100,000 per year. Brandon attended a large public university in New Jersey. Although he did not indicate when he graduated high school, or when he pledged his fraternity, it can be estimated that he graduated in 2004 and pledged by or during 2006. He and another member of his pledge class were the only two black members of fraternity at that time.

BRENT - Brent is the only self-described “racially mixed” participant in the study. He identifies primarily as black and stated that other people think he is a light-skinned African American. An associate who knew him during his college years referred him to me. Brent was born in a large city in northern New Jersey. His father is a Harvard MBA and his mother graduated from Boston University. His parents moved from their apartment to a house in a predominantly white New Jersey suburb when Brent was in 7th grade. He attended a predominantly white suburban high school and graduated in the early 90s. He estimates that his family income at that time was in excess of \$100,000 when adjusting for today’s economy. Brent pledged a fraternity during his freshman year at a large public institution in New Jersey and believed he was the only black member to have pledged the organization in its history.

ERIK - Erik is the oldest member of my participant pool. Another member of his fraternity referred him to me. Erik’s parents were divorced when he was young and both remarried. His mother worked for the city in which she resided and lived in an apartment. His father worked in a large city in California and owned a home. He attended public schools and an elite predominantly white high school in California. Erik graduated from high school in the mid-1980s and pledged his fraternity at the beginning of his freshman year at a large urban university on the east coast. He was the only active black member of the group when he pledged. He could recall two black alumni and two subsequent black members who joined while he was a member. He estimates that his parents’ combined income during the years that he was in high school and college at approximately \$85,000 when adjusting for today’s economics.

JAMES - a mutual associate referred James to me. He was raised in a single-family house in a Northern New Jersey suburb with two distinct populations, one predominantly white and one predominantly black, in neighborhoods that were separated by train tracks. James grew up on the predominantly white side of the tracks but in a more racially mixed section. His father works in finance and his mother is a stay-at-home mom. He graduated from a predominantly white suburban public high school in 2005 and pledged his fraternity at a large public institution in New Jersey in 2006. James was one of two black pledges in his pledge class and states that there were “a few” black members. He is a first generation 4-year college graduate. He estimates that during his high school and college years his parents earned approximately \$75,000 when adjusting for today’s economy.

JARROD - an associate who knew his spouse during her college years referred Jarrod to me. Jarrod’s parents were from the Carolinas and moved to northern New Jersey before he was born. He lived in an urban setting and lived in a multi-family dwelling with his mother. Jarrod attended a small racially mixed urban catholic high school with fewer than 100 students in his graduating class. Jarrod graduated from high school in 1986 and did not pledge a fraternity until 1989. He attended a small catholic college in the Midwest for two years before returning to the East Coast, where he attended a public university. It was at this school that he pledged. He was the only black member of his fraternity. Jarrod estimates that his family income in 1986 was approximately \$45,000 *without* adjusting for today’s economy.

KENNY - a mutual associate referred Kenny to me. Kenny was raised in two “rural/suburban” areas in New Jersey, in both instances he lived in a single-family house. Kenny’s father worked in medicine but passed away several years ago. His mother is also in

medicine. Kenny estimates that during his high school and college years his parents made well over \$100,000 when adjusting for today's economy. He graduated from a predominantly white suburban public high school in 2003. He pledged a fraternity at a large public university in New Jersey during that same year. He was one of only two black members in the group at the time.

MARC - Marc was a currently active undergraduate member of his fraternity when he was interviewed for this study. A mutual associate referred him to me. Marc grew up in a single-family home in a suburban town in southern New Jersey where he believes his parents may have been some of the first black residents. His parents are both doctors. He estimates that his parents earned well over \$100,000 annually during his high school and college years. Marc attended a small catholic high school for one year before switching to a predominantly white public school closer to his home. Marc attended a large state university in the mid-Atlantic region where he pledged a fraternity during his freshman year. His fraternity had two active black members when he pledged and one of his 20 pledge brothers was also black.

MICHAEL - Michael was the first participant I interviewed for this work. An undergraduate student member of a historically black fraternity at the university he attended referred him to me. Michael was raised in single-family houses in two distinct suburbs of Philadelphia, one in Pennsylvania and one in New Jersey. He attended both private catholic and public schools during his K-12 experience, including a predominantly white suburban public high school. His father is an engineer and his mother is a school administrator. He graduated from high school in 2005, attended a large public university, and pledged his fraternity in 2006. Michael's pledge class included one other African American member. Adjusting for today's

economics Michael estimates his parents earned over \$100,000 annually during the years that he was in high school and college.

ROBERT – a mutual associate who knew him during his college years referred Robert to me. Robert grew up in a single family home in an affluent central New Jersey suburb. His father is a software developer and his mother is a nurse. Robert estimates that his parents earned over \$100,000 annually during his high school and college years when adjusting for today's economics. He graduated from a predominantly white suburban public high school in 1999 and attended a large state university in the mid-Atlantic region where he pledged a fraternity in his freshman year. He was the only black member of his fraternity.

Chapter Six – Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify the sociological factors that affect a black male's decision to join a traditionally white fraternity at a large PWI and to analyze these findings within the framework of Social Identity Theory. As mentioned, this work is unique in this way as other research on this population focused primarily on experiences within the fraternity (Newsome 2009; Hughey 2010) as opposed to the pre-college sociological and educational experiences that influenced their decision. In this chapter I identify the factors emerging from the participant interviews and then analyze these factors in reference to my conceptual model.

Unlike the similar studies conducted by Newsome (2009) and Hughey (2010), this study focuses strictly on the experiences leading up to the decision to join the fraternity and not on fraternity brotherhood experiences or membership satisfaction. Therefore, the factors identified in this study stem primarily from family influences, high school social factors, and early college experiences. These factors are examined more closely than in the other studies cited. My semi-structured interview protocol focused on geographic, educational, and sociological factors for the time frame up to and including the decision to pledge the fraternity selected. My hypotheses regarding these participants were that they would come from predominantly white suburban homes and schools and find affiliation with white fraternities natural and logical due to that experience. Socialization factors from home, school, and peers all play a role in the participants' views

In the pages that follow I identify the factors that appear to have been most influential in the decision of these participants to join a TWF, provide evidence via direct quotations

from participant interviews, and examine the data via SIT to evaluate the salience of the theoretical concept. The factors identified as being central to the Greek choice made by these participants are divided into two areas; those that are primarily parentally influenced and those that are direct views and actions of my participants.

The Seeds of “Middleness” - Parental Decision-making, Attitudes and Influences

The influence of parents is the most important factor to emerge from the participant interviews. Not surprisingly, parental influence permeates all other factors, opinions and experiences that brought these students to select their particular fraternity. The decisions made by parents; their attitudes towards education, schooling, race, dating, and other social factors are far-reaching and highly influential in this study. For the purposes of this study, parental influences, behaviors, attitudes and decisions can be analyzed into three areas: geography and decisions made about where and how the participants were raised, education and decisions about where and how these men went to school, and parental values and beliefs about race and culture learned, adapted, and applied or rejected by participants. Here I cite some specific instances where the participants describe parental influences and attitudes that were causally related to outcomes these students saw as important in this decision.

Parental Geographic Decisions

Nearly every participant told a story of parental emigration from city to suburb in an effort to have their children raised in a safe neighborhood where they could attend good schools. Although unique in details, of course, in each case the parents of the participant believed they were living in an environment ill-suited for the quality of life they desired for raising their children due to crime, negative peer group associations, and/or lack of access to

quality schools. Therefore conscious and intentional decisions were made to move to the presumably “whiter” world of suburban living. Brandon, Robert, and James are all children of immigrants;

Brandon: I was born in (a large city in New Jersey). My parents were from Nigeria...they got here around 1985, I was born around 1986, so I lived in (that city) til I was about 10, when my parents felt like they needed to raise me in an area that was...less stressful as far as being exposed to the negative aspects of the urban lifestyle so they moved me to a small town (in New Jersey).

Robert: My parents both grew up in Haiti. We are actually Haitian-Americans. They both came over when they were sixteen. They did not know each other at the time. Both came from (Haiti) to New York City, and I think met at some point in their twenties...They moved to (New Jersey suburb) when my older brother was born. So they were probably in the city and wanted to get a suburban place to raise children.

James: I would say that it was a fairly typical suburban life; a very suburban town. A town that I would say...has a lot of pride in itself in the fact that it had great schools, great living, just a great living community. Just, the picturesque kinda’ suburban town that people would wanna’ live there, spend their life there, and then eventually come back there with their own families...that was the type of area that I grew up in...My parents emigrated from Haiti to (a borough of New York City). My parents didn’t know each other then. They actually met when they were here in the United States... Well my parents were looking to move away from (NYC borough). They lived in this small two-family house, we needed the space. We needed to find somewhere to go. So they had checked other towns in the area, and they came upon (New Jersey suburb) and they fell in love. Not only with the fact that it was a great house, but also that there was a great school system available. They wanted to make sure that...because I had gone to private school when I was living in New York. It was very expensive...so they wanted to be able to take me somewhere that it would be not only public and free, but also at the same time...well off. And like, “We know that if my son is going to be going to school here for like fifteen or so years that he is going to get the best education possible.”

Brent and Kenny's experiences were quite different but the results were similar;

Brent: We started out living in (an urban apartment complex in a northern New Jersey city), I think it was just the apartment living. My dad, he saw that we were too close to the projects and he really wanted to get into a home. He grew up in a stand-alone house and so did my mother so they wanted to get us out of the apartment. So we moved out of there pretty early, to a home about two miles away...which used to be in the olden days where I guess the area where the rich people in (the city) used to live...We lived there about 2nd to 6th grade and spent some times in both private and public schools in that time, mostly a private school just because the (area) public schools were just horrendous. And the problems...the social problems...how to overcome those when people are social learners were a major issue with my parents. There was just too many problems, you can't escape it...we ended up moving to (suburb) after looking at (another suburb) and some other places in North Jersey.

Kenny: My father grew up, I think out in like (a city in New York), and my mother in (another city), New York.

Me: And how did you end up in (a New Jersey suburb)?

Kenny: I guess because both of them practiced (medicine) in New Jersey. So my dad's office actually was originally in (town), where we lived. I think we moved to (suburb) because the school system was better. They had my older sister and me in private school before then, so I guess to save money on private school you're better off moving to a town with a better school system.

These intentional movements to suburbia are a key building block in the development of the unique views and perspectives held by these participants. In each case, the suggestion is made that moving away from the urban to suburban is intrinsically "better"; crime free suburbs are better, schools are better in white suburbs, the lifestyle is better. In each case, the parents of participants were fortunate enough to be able remove themselves from what they saw as undesirable elements. Whether intentional or unintentional, in each case the solution

was a movement away from “black” and movement to “white” worlds. This message is inescapable to the children in such a situation, and once entrenched, the qualities and implications of the white environment become a part of the participants’ opinions, views, personalities and more. Judgments made regarding friendships, race and identity are all formed around the location of each participant’s home and the socialization that the geography proscribes. Michael tells a particularly compelling story of intentional parental messaging about their lifestyle versus the lifestyle his father had as a child:

Michael: We lived in (suburb of Philadelphia) (and) I went to Catholic school in Philly. After school I went to my grandmother’s house and waited for my dad to pick me up. And you know, that’s (Philadelphia neighborhood), I’m not sure how familiar you are with Philadelphia, it’s a predominantly black area...It’s on the lower income side...so you know I was able to see extremes. I was able to see a low-income black area and then a suburb, affluent area. And you can definitely see that these people have professional jobs on the affluent side, and the lower income side is more, like working class. So I was able to see that. And my dad would drive me around to different places and I would see run down houses, and then I would see really nice areas. I mean, and you know he would commentate to me. He’d say you know, “When you go to school, you know, you can live like this...like a...like an affluent person.” So that was instilled in my mind ever since I was a young person.

Me: And was that the intent of this driving around?

Michael: I think that was the intent. I mean, we were going home, but I think he purposely took different routes...so I could get a view of what’s going on.

Michael’s mother played an equally powerful role in this discussion:

Michael: (S)he started as a teacher and then became a principal. So she was always for education also, had a good understanding of how to teach kids and what to expose them too. And I can pretty much assume that she saw that the well rounded kids were exposed to a lot

of different things, and maybe that's why I was brought up in the suburbs and exposed to different places instead of being in a quote unquote black community all the time.

Me: Do you think your parents made those kinds of decisions with intent?

Michael: I think they definitely made them with intent. Umm, in terms of why, I'm not really sure. You know they grew up in black areas, and I guess they saw that they made it out. In the black areas there's like a lot of crime there, there's a lot of violence. You know...different things like that. I guess they wanted me to have a good life, basically. You know, a good life doesn't mean that you're staying away from black people; it's just that things, externalities, come with it, living in those communities.

Although Michael notes that living a "good life" is not an anti-black life, he also believes that his parents "made it out" of "black areas." This perception suggests internal struggle on Michael's part regarding his own blackness, what it means to have a "good life," and suggests that although "externalities" are often to blame in "black areas," he sees it as intrinsic, and therefore they were better off not living with that experience.

As the interview evidence demonstrates, parental decisions about where they chose to live, raise and educate their children are major factors in this study. In each case, the location of the family home is possibly the single most influential factor, as all other pre-college factors are influenced by the "whiteness" of each participant's upbringing. Had participants been raised in "blacker" or simply more diverse environments, they may have led quite different lives, and in turn made different choices about Greek involvement. As noted Ethier and Deaux (1994) found that students who enter college "with a strong ethnic background" make choices:

"that continue ethnic involvement and result in a strengthening of the group identification.
(Ethier & Deaux, 1994 p.248)

And add that;

Students with a strong cultural backgrounds were more likely to become involved in their ethnic group at college and subsequently, to show increases in identification with that group. In contrast, students without a strong cultural background were more likely to perceive threats to their identity, to have lower self-esteem associated with that identity, and to lower their identification with that group. (Ethier & Deaux, 1994 p.249)

There are two possible analyses of this finding regarding my participants. One could argue my participants come to college “without a strong cultural background.” However, are these men demonstrating lower self-esteem towards their identity as black men by joining a white Greek organization? Further reading here will suggest that at least in the case of my participants, this is not necessarily the case. However, participants will describe efforts at lowering their identification with race-based *judgments and expectations*. Therefore, might they instead be entering into a TWF with a feeling of a “strengthening of their group identification?” To argue this would require a stance that their “group identification,” or perhaps a “fictive kinship” is based on some other criteria than their race and all that is assumed within the kinds of contexts that race imposes. Participants described experiences in predominantly white schools that support this perspective.

Parental Educational Decisions and Influences

As suggested in the above interview segments a key factor in the parental decision to live in a predominantly white suburb was the quality of schools available in those areas. In most cases, participants came from college-educated, upper middle class, two-parent households in which both parents were employed in professional positions ranging from OB/GYNs and dentists to MBAs, chemical engineers, and school principals. It is presumable then, that parents in this study sought quality education for their children as a path to

maintaining the quality of life they had come to know. Michael's above commentary directly reflects this notion. In all cases, the importance of education is another overarching and important factor in the lives of participants. James, an honors student, notes that his parents made sure that he was academically successful even at extra cost to them:

James: The goal was for me to be sure that I was prepared to go to college for all four years so they made sure that I studied. Whenever it seemed like, early on when I was growing up, that I needed extra help, extra attention in different subjects, they made sure to do that. Like, I remember being really young and having to spend my summer learning and improving my math skills. Whenever there was any kind of issues with me and my grades and stuff like that my parents would be immediately involved. And I would say I was fairly good honor roll student in high school. They wanted to make sure that I had the best chance possible of going to college. At times it was a bit difficult, because you know you'd have to do your SAT preparations and those kinds of things are fairly expensive, out of my parents budget at the time, but it was still of greater importance, so they made sure I studied made sure they knew my scores, knew what kind of schools I wanted to apply to, (and) made sure I set realistic goals for myself. So they had a fairly good influence on that part of my life. A good number of the black students were in special I guess...uhh...learning programs, to kind of like, facilitate...the way our high school had these different programs, to help facilitate them, get them through these certain classes. They'd put them in special classes (for) support. They would have teaching aides and that sort. I was never a part of that. I never needed that. I kinda' just was like the rest of the group in terms of students, where I just learned, taught myself, studied, went to the library. Those kinds of things.... and because of the fact that many of that group of those kids that had them were black, I kinda sectioned myself off, I was like "I don't need that. I don't do that, I just learn like everyone else does." So I felt like that was very noticeable at times.... because of the fact that I kinda sectioned myself off education-wise that everyone else noticed.

Marc explains his mother's influence in his enrollment and academic performance at a small catholic school for the first half of his high school career;

Marc: High School's a little funny...I started out at (name of school), it's actually a catholic school, and predominantly white.

Me: And about how many kids were in your class...like 9th grade what would you say was the population?

Marc: Total enrollment? Maybe 400. So maybe 150 in 9th grade.

Me: So tell me about your experience there. What were your friends like, what were you involved in?

Marc: How I got involved...it's a big basketball program down there. And I got recruited there; it's a big-time school. So that is how I originally got recognized for the school. And my mom started looking into it and saw how great their academic program was...My mom started doing research and she uh, just loved the academic program. It is really good there. And she didn't think my friends were like the best influence on me, so she kinda wanted me to push like.... cuz all my brothers and sisters went to the public school in our area.

Me: So she thought this would be a better fit for you?

Marc: She thought it was a better thing for me. But I just loved basketball so I was like "OK I will do it."

Me: And did they give you a scholarship? Or just recruit you to play?

Marc: I didn't scholarship due to our, uhh...financial situation...

Me: And what kind of a student were you like academically at that school?

Marc: See, there I got away from most of my local friends, like, right in the (hometown) area. So weekends I was mostly just studying...cuz all of my other friends...were like...it's like the whole of South Jersey when they go to (name of school)...even some from like Philadelphia...so a lot of my friends were more toward the Philly area, so I wasn't going to go to their houses on the weekend, so I was more into school then. I was studying all the time.

Me: And academically were you in the highest track? Middle track? No track?

Marc: All honors classes. Things like that. Basically a lot of it was like...the tuition there was like going to college so my mom was like I better be studying like, excuse my language, but “studying my ass off” if I am going to be going there...and I did fairly well there, but after two years I just...she saw that I didn’t really like it because...just the distances traveling forty minutes every day to school.... (thinks) she saw that my brothers and sisters all turned out fine going to (the local public high school), and she saw that I knew how to study and how to get the grades that I needed to get...She thought I was motivated enough since I did two years there, she thought I knew how to study and get good grades. And then I went to (local public school).

Kenny, also an honors student, cites his parents as a strong influence as well;

Me: OK, while you were in school, you mentioned that this was an academically sort-of competitive school, where did you fit in on that spectrum?

Kenny: I would say because my parents...they did push me pretty hard when I was younger, so I was more towards the upper part of that. I was pretty competitive, an A B student... my mother always had to like fight to get me in you know honors classes and things like that

In each case cited here, the importance of education emphasized by their parents had a powerful effect on participants. Geography, school selection, and parental messages regarding the importance of being a good student; all of these factors and influences combined to develop high achieving students in predominantly white school atmospheres where the participants found themselves in all-white or predominantly white academic environments at both the school and classroom levels.

Erik’s experience was particularly unusual. Erik is one of only two participants who were not raised by both of his parents. Divorced at a young age, his mother remarried and his father moved across the country. Erik remained with his mother in a large eastern city where she had him sent to a better quality elementary school far from their neighborhood.

By the time Erik was ready for high school, however, his father felt he might be better off living in a suburb in California.

Erik: I was always a very advanced student even in like kindergarten and preschool teachers would always tell my mother how advanced I was, I could write script before anybody could barely print, and actually my mother would tell me later that my kindergarten teacher or someone told her I couldn't write like that...because it wasn't following the lesson plan. My mother taught me how to do it so I knew how to do it. I was always kinda put in the more advanced classes in elementary school and more times than not that would mean that I was the only black kid in the class. And then when I was in...after fourth grade, because I was a really good student they changed my school and they sent me to a school that was in an Irish Italian neighborhood because it was a better school.

Me: Now was this your mom's choice or was that a school suggestion?

Erik: The school said, "Because you're an advanced student you've been selected to get into this program." And of course my mom said, "Yeah!" So I started going to this school, in the Irish Italian neighborhood for fifth and sixth grade. I was for the most part the only black kid in my classes. Now later I found out that it was actually a veiled busing program because there were some kids that were not advanced who got shipped to that school to but they were never in the classes that I was in...they got put in the (remedial, lower track) classes. So it was...the program had a benefit but there was a veiled underlying reason why the program was instituted. Again that was kinda my trajectory in elementary and junior high school. So I've always been the only black guy in the room.

I left (eastern city) after I graduated junior high school. I was fifteen. My dad was in (California) and he wanted me to move out there, and I got into (name of private high school), which was this incredibly great private school in (California), Umm so when that convergence of things, the fact that I got into that school and the fact that I was pretty sure my mother was going to shoot me at some point in time, you know, made me move out to (California). It wasn't her decision, if she had her way I would have stayed in (eastern city).

The result of these educational influences and decisions is that all of the participants in this study found themselves, for large portions of their social and educational

development, in the predominantly or entirely white classrooms of predominantly white schools in predominantly white suburban neighborhoods. Participants report both external and internal affirmations that being smart and pursuing education are white ideals.

Encouraged by their parents, influenced by others both positively and negatively about what it “means” to be both black and smart, and immersion in all-white classrooms due to the levels of courses in which they are enrolled all serve to reinforce conflicting messages about who they “should” be. A portion of the literature on the subjects of blacks and education indicates the desire of some populations of black students to “keep it real” by not engaging in, and often railing against, education and self-betterment as a white ideal (Carter, 2005).

Blacks often find themselves tracked in lower level coursework, assumed to be less intelligent or less engaged, often due to cultural, social and financial influences, many beyond their control (Carter, 2005). Carter’s (2005) study on black and Latino student disengagement determined that these social and cultural factors are often endemic within school systems and not strictly the experiences or “baggage” of students of color, although those barriers existed as well.

Participants in this study were instead positively influenced by their parents to succeed academically, provided the financial social and educational support needed to succeed, and were able to navigate the norms of their schools more effectively. Therefore, in most cases, participants found themselves to be the only black student in advanced placement and honors courses, and socializing primarily with white students in high schools that were indeed predominantly white but with black populations as well.

Michael explains this well in his discussion about schooling:

Michael: I was a pretty good student, you know I always had a good head on my shoulders. I knew I had to get good grades to get to college. I didn't participate in any sports, I actually did like a business program...I participated in a business competition club and umm you now from that experience I was able to go to uhh different parts of the US to compete...that was pretty good experience, it just taught that if you work hard you'll definitely be rewarded.

Me: OK, and what were your friends like in school?

Michael: They were pretty much the same way. You know I noticed that...a lot of the African Americans you know they weren't into the classes I was into, you know I was into a lot of honors and AP classes, advanced courses, and they weren't there. A lot of them were in "modified." "Modified" was, well, the structure of these classes was "modified" which was the lowest, "regular", "advanced", and then advanced placement. And I always fell between AP and advanced. And you didn't find too many African Americans there. So (pause) even though I had a lot of friends that that were from different nationalities, the classes I was in, I was mostly around Caucasian people.

Me: What do you think was the difference in your experience getting there that allowed you, or provided you, or got you into that level of classes when you saw other African American students were not in those classes? Do you think there were differences in their experience?

Michael: This like a recurrent theme through high school. It's almost like, "it's not black to be smart." You know something like that. Uhh like "black people don't study." Or...you know I've seen that a lot. Umm, "only white people are smart" to be in those classes.

It is important to note that these decisions are made with intent. Tajfel and Turner (1986) suggest, "(i)ndividuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem; they strive for a positive self-concept" and "when social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group or join some more positively distinct group." (Tajfel and Turner, in Worchel and Austin, 1986 p.16). In these examples we see black parents making value judgments regarding unsatisfactory geographical and educational situations and

seeking opportunities to enhance those experiences for their children. In each case their actions suggest a situation wherein they move their children from a “blacker” or diverse urban experience to a much whiter suburban experience. SIT would suggest that the parents of these students felt their own self-concepts and that of their children were negatively affected by the social and educational opportunities of urban settings. This assertion can be further supported by the messages regarding race, blackness, culture and experience that participants reported hearing from their parents.

Parental Attitudes and Beliefs about Blackness, Racism and Culture

Intrinsic to these geographically-based decisions and their educational outcomes are the views and attitudes relayed to these participants by their parents regarding race, culture and socialization. The varying ways in which parents viewed their own positionality and their children’s positionality in a predominantly white, inherently racist society, and the way in which those views manifested themselves in social and educational settings had far reaching effects and influences on the views, attitudes, and beliefs of these participants and their decision to join a predominantly white fraternity.

Within this context of predominantly white social life and schooling, we find parents with conflicting, sometimes contradictory stances on their own and their children’s positionality in society. Parents struggle with maintaining a connection to black culture versus downplaying blackness, supporting their children in a pursuit of a color blind equal society versus warning them about things blacks “cannot” do in regard to dating,

socialization and more. Kenny discusses how his parents' views and reactions helped to develop his attitudes;

Kenny: Growing up in a suburban area that's very for the most part very tolerant, I think it has definitely affected me as I have grown because it's kind of like...when you're growing up you don't really notice or deal with racism when you're younger. But once you get a little older it's something you have to deal with. It's kind of funny. My mom was always the kind of person that you know "be careful of what you do because you are judged differently because you are black." So she was the type of mom that you know, during my prom, you know how everyone goes to someone's house, everyone drinks blah blah blah... She's the parent that says, "you shouldn't do that because they're gonna' point at the black kid and you're going to be the first one to get in trouble."

Me: Do you think that's true? Do you think that was sage advice?

Kenny: Yes and no because at the same time it is very true in some situations that you will be the first person to get pointed out, you'll be the first one to get in trouble, but other times you shouldn't allow that to control your life.

Me: OK, and how about your father, was there any of that sort of views from your dad as well?

Kenny: The same thing. They both... I feel like they both were affected by growing up... they're both born in the 1950s so they did have to go through some of the struggles going to colleges and being judged as being black going to college and all of that stuff.

Kenny's descriptions of both his and his parents' experiences are consistent with the tenets of Critical Race Theory. His internal conflict between "being the first one to get in trouble" and not allowing it to control his life speaks to the notion that all of these experiences are couched in an intrinsically racist society. In another instance, Kenny relates a

specific incident that forced him to evaluate these notions, and decide who he was and how he was going to live his life:

Well obviously people deal with racism throughout their lives. I feel like because of how my parents raised me it is something that you just kind of brush off; you keep on going about your business and just make sure that you're doing the best you can. (But) there was one incident from Penn State when I was a junior in high school, taking my SAT course. I come home and develop my pictures and I distinctly remember this...there's a picture of a girl who is white sitting on my lap and my mom's like you know "You shouldn't really do that cuz someone might say something." And that's always been something that's bothered me, that my mom would feel that that is something that's taboo, and maybe that's something that has...I guess you'd say "formed" me in a way that I kind of tried to ignore racism. As I was saying before, there is racism but you just have to live your life...that was an example of how I developed that idea.

Kenny's parents seem conflicted regarding their decision to be geographically immersed in a predominantly white culture. Kenny notes that the location was "tolerant," and he seems to have found a less race-based perspective regarding his social experience within which he finds his parents' concerns to be problematic. However, although his parents made the intentional decision to live a certain way, they worry that his blackness will still be a source of struggle as he cannot avoid a social norm of racism based on skin color. This conflict is one that is reflected in many ways in this study.

Brandon's parents' influence has glaring ramifications and is starkly different from the views of Kenny's parents.

Brandon: So I lived in (town in New Jersey) basically until I graduated college but I was in the uh, the more suburban white area.... so when I entered middle school...it wasn't...I didn't really notice the differences as far as race, but when I got into high school I really noticed that I was hanging out with more white people.

Me: OK tell me about (that town), what's your view on the population...and the sort of experience there.

Brandon: OK when I was growing up it was predominantly white...and black. And the black area was called (nickname for area), because it was located in the more industrial area. And I was located in the more subur (ban)...I think I was the only black person, our family was the only black family on that street. So growing up my best friends were white, just...the whole family...we just associated with more of the white culture. We went to an all-white church...So growing up I've always, in a way affiliated and assimilated in a way to the white culture in a way. But not completely, because, back...in the back of my head I've always associated myself with being Nigerian. Not even like African American, just like.... I'm African. And that was something that my parents really tried to instill in me that "you're not African American" cuz there...there is kind of like a negative vibe between Africans and African Americans. Like Africans feel that African Americans are kind of like usel...I don't want to say useless but like...how they portray themselves is very negative. (Meanwhile) African Americans view Africans as..."they come here because the government helps them, and they go...and they tend to put their kids through college because the government helps them." So there's some kind of animosity between the two...So I, in a way, I...that mentality somewhat is instilled in me. And my father owns a lot of property in Jersey City so we tended to go to Jersey City all the time, and I think when I was growing up, everyday my dad would say something negative about African Americans, just given that environment of where we actually owned property. So he would be like "Look at these kids. They just go around selling drugs, like...instead of going to school and making themselves useful this is what they are doing. Basically ruining their lives." You know, and my father...I remember one time my father ended up renting an apartment to one of his friends in college that was actually African American, and he ended up dropping out and getting a girl pregnant. So my father always reminds me of that story, as far as like "You're not African American you're African. Don't ever forget that." That was pretty.... and my brother.... my father is less strict with my brother, but he still...like certain things he still tries to instill in him...Like my brother's pants are sagging, he's like "Pull your pants up, you're not..." OK in Nigerian culture, the

language itself, Akátá means African American, from “here”, in the US, and he’s like “You’re not an Akátá!”²

Me: So, you feel like there has been an in-your-house culture of difference between your family as Nigerian, and emigrating...as opposed to African Americans.

Brandon: Yeah

Me: And would you describe it as an animosity or do you... or is it just a distinction?

Brandon: Distinction, and somewhat...well the distinction itself creates some kind of tension, you know because it is a negative distinction. But, like my parents, not really my parents...my *father* (his emphasis) sees an affluent African American, he’s...like he still says, “Oh that’s surprising considering he’s African American.”

Brandon goes on to note his family’s struggles with whites as well;

Brandon: Even though my parents, especially my father, tried to separate ourselves from the black community, he would always make it known that, you know, white people will never accept you, in a way, because you’re black so you should try to stick with Nigerians. As far as culture, that was predominantly the driving force that created that distinction between “African Americans” and “Africans.”

Brandon found himself unable to fully immerse in any specific culture other than “Nigerian.” As noted, his father refused affiliation with African Americans yet acknowledges the inherently racist nature of society by believing that whites will assume things about his family based on the mere fact that they are black. Brandon’s father’s views are consistent

² Akátá is a word derived from the Yoruba people of West Africa. It means “jackal” “fox” or “wild animal.” It is used by some African immigrants to the United States to describe African Americans and their descendants, or Africans not living on the African continent. Over time it has come to have derogatory connotations due to perceived tensions between some African immigrants and African Americans. (According to Wikipedia, Nigerianwiki.com and other sources)

both with CRT and NT-E. Although his father emphasizes Nigerian nationality over race, to the degree that they are one at the expense of the other, is aligned with the “Preencounter” phase of NT-E wherein “nationality rather than race is central to views of the self and others,” and individuals “emphasize negative stereotypes about African Americans as a collective.” (Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell, & Cross, 2010 p.166) Missing from this dialogue, however, is the suggestion of self-hate as a reflection of nationalistic preferences. His father acknowledges however, that in American society, regardless of their familial differentiation from American blacks, they will still be categorized and assumed to be black or African American, consistent within the tenets of CRT.

Erik explained that in his house the emphasis was on achievement, and noted that racism and perceptions about blackness are unavoidable in society but were not a major focus in the way he was raised:

Erik: The only thing...and it is something I still carry with me to this day, my mother told me when I was very very young she said, “You have to be...you can’t be just OK, you can’t be average.” She said “Because you’re black you have to be better than the average guy always. So that means you have to work harder you have to...on every aspect of your life because you’re held to a different standard. So you know you getting an 85 on the test that is great for everybody else you gotta get a 95. Because you have to be better because they don’t think you can be better.”

Me: So there was definitely a “they” sensation at least.

Erik: Oh yeah.

Me: And anything on your dad’s side.

Erik: Uhh not really on my dad’s side. I mean...here’s the thing you have to understand. Every black person in America has radar. Seriously, some people will use the radar unwarrantedly, other people have very fine tuned radar and just will note it and keep on

going, some people speak out on it...whatever. Like Al Sharpton and the Jesse Jacksons of the world jump on it and beat the drum...and it's like, "You know what? Relax!" And other people see it and go "OK that's interesting" and then, you know, just go about their business. Everybody's always very acute. Every black person is very acutely aware of it when they see it.

Me: What about, in your family, more of the "celebration of culture" side? I mean was "blackness" an ingrained sort of...it's sort of a stereotypical term to use but was there a sense of cultural...

Erik: No. Nope.

Me: More of a downplay?

Erik: It wasn't even a downplay, it just wasn't a conversation. You knew who you were, you know what the history of our people in this country is. You don't have to talk about it. We know our history. You know what I mean? So you didn't have to.

Like Brandon, Erik's comments also reflect a parental view that is consistent with CRT and suggests through his description of "radar" that regardless of where one is within the culture, the personal sense of blackness and sensitivity to anti-black assertions is always there due to the nature of society.

Jarrold indicated that his family focused more on self-esteem rather than race and cultural vies and influences:

Jarrold: I was always taught that race color and creed didn't really matter. It was all about the individual...I was always taught to just rely on yourself, and be yourself, and don't worry about what others think.

Brent noted a similar parental perspective to Jarrold's:

Brent: I think most of the talk around my house is people do and will treat you differently because of your skin tone and the features of your face; broad lips big nose. But you cannot control what they do. You can only control what you do. So it is up to you to study and be

intelligent so that you can speak and read and write the English language and communicate properly, because ultimately, no matter how dark your skin, people will have to value you for what you can either do for them, do to them, uhh, or do with them. And every relationship that you have even through the chief, the boss, someone's doing something to you, for you, or with you. No one's just in a vacuum and just receives everything. They have to give and if you can prove that you are...trustworthy with regard to your capabilities, if you're consistent, you become dependable. If you're dependable then you become trustworthy.

Me: Right but you do feel like part of that message might have been that this was something you might have to *prove*.

Brent: Oh yeah, and it's...you know, my dad used to say, "In life...it doesn't matter what color you are everyone had pressure everyone had stress. How you deal with it, how you react to it...that's crucial." We didn't spend much time on, "You're black, so expect this or that." more time on, "You're smart you're good looking, you have to forge forward because this world will take advantage of everybody."

Jarrold and Brent describe a parental perspective that is a far less race-based approach than that of Erik and Jarrod. James seems torn, having a bit of CRT influence as well as a less race-based perspective as he explains his father's views and his own:

James: Because of the fact that my dad was in a fairly white corporate world for over two decades, he kinda lived with the fact that "You know what? To everyone else looking at me here? I am black. Not Haitian or anything." I guess depending on where he works and different groups he's with, he's exposed to other people that would be like, they wouldn't say so much that "Oh he's black" they'd be like "Oh you have a French last name!" But at the same time they would never be like "Oh you're Haitian." It doesn't come out like that very often. It'd be like "You are black, that's how we are going to identify you."

Me: Do you think that bothers your parents? Does that bother you?

James: It bugs me a little bit but...it bugs me in a way where it's like...I understand that I am black and I understand that if I want to file it down a little bit I am Haitian. How do I explain that to people? It makes it a little bit difficult. Unless they really know me as a person – they would know the Haitian background that I have because I would expose them to that. I would tell them about the history a little bit, the food, the music, the culture. But because

that's such a small number of people...to the majority it's just "black." So it's like so many different things. And it's kinda like "How do I paint a picture of being black?" "At times it's difficult because not all blacks in my mind are the same. So it's kinda like, "What is black?" as opposed to "What is Haitian?" its...its like...its like straining...you have to strain a lot of things out to be Haitian but at the same time "black" is just like a giant pool of "stuff" that you just have to show people and its kinda hard to do that.

Me: So...and I do not want to put words on your mouth, but I am trying to find this differentiation...so, you're automatically differentiated from whites.

James: Yeah.

Me: Because people look at you and say, "You're black."

James: Yeah.

Me: Whether that's...regardless of their intent, they look at you and say, "You're black."

James: "You're black."

Me: You have a sense, maybe a desire, and if I am wrong please correct me, but it sounds to me like you're saying you have a sense, a desire not to distance yourself from blacks, but maybe to distance yourself from an expectation of blacks?

James: Yeah.

Me: So do you think that's been an overt intentional effort on your part?

James: Yeah.

Although James indicates a strong desire to separate himself specifically from black and black expectations vis a vis CRT, he also notes that his parents encouraged a non-race based outlook for his life.

James: It was more them saying, "I don't care if the people you hang out with are all black, I don't care if they are all white. We just want you to have the best experience ever. When it comes to dating I don't care if you date a black woman, I don't care if you date a white woman, just be happy." It was that kind of thinking where it was just, "Do it for yourself and

enjoy it.” That kinda helped me make a decision of where exactly I wanted...the people that I wanted...to be around.

Robert specifically addresses his parents’ desire to separate themselves from black expectations:

Me: How much of an influence has being an African American had on your life? Internally or externally? Culturally?

Robert: At home we never really had this sort of, “We’re black we have our own black culture.” type of aspect. It was never pushed by my parents. I think they strongly wanted to American-ize me, and my dad you can almost say you know, whiten-ize me. They never took me to any cultural events, never took me to any sort of thing that would give me an identity as a black male. They never had me participate in any of that. The only caveat to that is that my dad forced us to watch *Roots* as a kid, outside of that nothing.

Like Brandon, Robert’s comments about his family reflect the NT-E assertion that blacks in “Pre-encounter” attempt assimilation by reflecting, “pro-American attitudes” wherein “nationality rather than race is central to views of the self and others.” (Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell, & Cross, 2010 p.166) However, unlike Brandon, Robert also believes his father made attempts to “whiten-ize” him as well by shunning cultural activity. This is consistent with the tenets of SIT pertaining to “striv(ing) either to leave their existing group or join some more positively distinct group.”(Tajfel & Turner in Worchel & Austin, 1986 p.16)

In this section we see more evidence of parental influences and actions that are consistent with the tenets of SIT. In each case, parents strive for their children to have a “positive self-concept” by attempting to navigate the murky waters of race and racial expectations versus a less race-influenced identity. (Tajfel, 1986) In cases such as Brandon’s the distinction is based on a clear disdain for African American culture, whereas in other

cases the message is less race-based and focused more on self and self-esteem. An overriding message in these parental dialogs is the tenet of CRT that in American culture regardless of where or how you grew up, or how you identify yourself, or with what groups cultures or identities you affiliate, black skin results in the message, “You’re black and that is how you will be identified.” and that how you respond to this message will help to define you. Parents, and as a result participants, attempt to maintain a black racial identity while distancing themselves from negative labels, connotations and expectations.

For a handful of participants, this challenge - this potential dichotomy of middleness - is made concrete in the parental decision to join a unique cultural organization known as Jack and Jill of America.

Jack and Jill of America

Although participants reported that their parents generally demonstrated a philosophy that did not include a great deal of emphasis of “blackness” or black culture, a specific decision was made by some of the participants’ parents that is somewhat counterintuitive and serves as evidence of the challenging situation in which they found themselves as the only black families in overwhelmingly white suburbs; the decision to enroll their children in Jack and Jill of America.

Jack and Jill of America (JJA) is an exclusive, invitation-only social club for affluent blacks. JJA was founded in Philadelphia in the 1930s as a social outlet and “playgroup” for the children of African American professionals (Appiah & Gates, 2005; Barnes, 1979; Graham, 1999). A nonprofit organization, JJA was created by “upper-class African-

American women who wanted their children to have cultural opportunities, develop leadership skills, and form social networks in a society that was racially segregated.” (Appiah & Gates, 2005 p.325)

As Barnes (1979) notes;

Beginning in the late 1950's, while Jack and Jill was attempting to protect its children from discrimination...various civil rights victories in the Congress, the courts and in the streets, were contributing to a lessening of discriminatory practices. As a result, Jack and Jill developed new goals to preserve the association and help blacks adjust in a changed society.” (Barnes, 1979 p.266)

By the late 1960s, Jack & Jill had become a full-fledged national organization, with local chapters throughout the United States (Appiah & Gates, 2005; Barnes, 1979). Today, JJA continues to sponsor educational, health and cultural projects in inner-city neighborhoods, and to support national legislation aimed at improving children's lives (Appiah & Gates, 2005). JJA “has long been one of the defining organizations for families of the black professional class. (The organization) focuses on bringing together children aged two to nineteen and introducing them to various educational, social, and cultural experiences.” (Graham, 1999 p.22)

JJA chapters are subdivided into age groups for age-appropriate activities and such as visits to museums, trips to historically black colleges, and trips and cultural events with an emphasis on black history and achievements (Graham 1999).

Throughout his work Our Kind of People - Inside America's Black Upper Class Graham (1999) focuses on the importance of JJA as a catalyst for affluent blacks to meet other blacks in an intentional way due to their lack of opportunity to do so naturally.

“Because Jack and Jill is very selective and admits members by invitation only, it provides a great opportunity for professional parents to introduce their kids to *children of similar families*.” (Graham, 1999 p.23) (my emphasis)

Later Graham (1999) notes:

“Black suburbanites have leaned on Jack and Jill for generations because the bucolic streets outside their home *failed to reflect the racial diversity of the cities*.” (Graham, 1999 p.25) (my emphasis)

He also states that;

“Although Jack and Jill’s earliest chapters began in urban areas similar to Philadelphia and New York, the greater trend today is toward developing chapters within suburban communities where black parents are *hard-pressed to find black friendships for their children*, who are reaching a crucial social development stage in their lives.” (Graham, 1999 p.36) (my emphasis)

Further, in a conversation the author had once with former national Jack and Jill president Nellie Thornton, Thornton declared, “Jack and Jill is especially important for children who are *growing up in suburban communities who have a foot in two different worlds*.” (Graham, 1999 p.24) (my emphasis)

Parents of privileged black children see Jack and Jill as a way to stay connected to their black culture and heritage while learning the personal and cultural norms and skills necessary to compete and excel in the most competitive of white-dominated schools and professions (Graham, 1999). However, members have reported in-group discrimination against darker skinned members with “blacker features” and Graham (1999) suggests an in-group bias towards lighter skinned members with more Caucasian-like features (Graham, 1999). Further, out-of-group black friends of members reported disdain for the members, jealousy and a lack of understanding of the purpose of the group (Graham, 1999).

Graham also notes that as society has progressed, the value, meaning and purpose of JJA have evolved;

“I envy the Jack and Jill kids of the 1980s and 1990s because they are more readily accepted as valid representatives of black America by whites and other blacks, thanks to The Cosby Show, Oprah, Bryant Gumbel, and Colin Powell. Because of these TV images, it is now at least believable that black families can be well-educated, intact and articulate.” (Graham, 1999 p.40)

Graham goes on to note;

“Of course (JJA) still sponsors the cotillions, black-tie dinners and student trips that were de rigueur in the 1950s and 1960s, but the organization has also placed a priority on training young people to be unafraid to function outside of their social class...it is developing a greater number of programs that will embolden black youth to participate in and change the surrounding less-advantaged black community.” (Graham, 1999 p.42)

Participants of this study who were members reflect some of the perceived confusion about membership in such a group; expressing passing enthusiasm for JJA and respect for the purposes and ideals of the group but also demonstrate indifference, disdain or even embarrassment about some of their personal experiences and involvement in the group.

Kenny is surprised that I know of the group's existence. When I ask if there is anything else he might add to our dialog, he references his experience in JJA almost as an afterthought, but provides some fascinating insights into his experience and his views about JJA;

Kenny: The only (other) thing I could possibly throw into this conversation was when I was younger, going to the school that wasn't...it was diverse...but there weren't as many black students...my mom did put me in an organization to meet other black kids in the area.

Me: A Jack and Jill?

Kenny: Yes (laughs in a way that indicates he was surprised I knew about JJA)

Me: Tell me about that experience if you can. How old were you?

Kenny: I probably started when I was in like fifth grade.

Me: And what do you think was your mom's impetus was to put you in that organization?

Kenny: Just to meet more African Americans that might be on the same level as you. Some people that.... you know how.... do you know a lot about Jack and Jill?

Me: I know enough that I...that I am very curious about this. I did not realize you could do it as young as fifth grade though. I thought that was more of a high school thing.

Kenny: No my younger sister was in it for a while...you can start like a little kid. It's all if your family is in. As long as your family is in you can start at any age. I think the whole point was to meet other black kids that might be like you. Cuz, from my understanding of the system, you have to pay to be in it, so you have to be a decently well off family at that point to do it. Umm I had an interesting experience with it. Some of the people I was close with others I felt were kinda fake. Cuz it's one thing when you know you're growing up in the Bronx and you don't really have anything and you have to...you know join a gang or do crazy things like that...

Me: You don't have good choices.

Kenny: You don't have good choices. A lot of these kids tried to act like they were tough and they were cool and I just...it was something that just kinda turned me off to some of them.

Me: Ok and how long were you in that organization.

Kenny: (Pause) Junior year of high school I probably quit.

Me: What do you think was the...why do you think your parents would say...I mean what were they evaluating when they said "we want to put you in this organization to meet other blacks?"

Kenny: Probably the fact that there weren't that many in the high school.

Me: And why do you think that was an important distinction for them?

Kenny: I think just to.....(long pause)

Me: Was it because this was something that your family did? Other members had done that and it was just sort of a natural thing? Or do you think it was a decision that was specifically made because we want you to know other blacks?

Kenny: I think it was that.

Me: And why do you think that was a priority?

Kenny: (Long pause) I can't really say, I don't know why it was a priority for them...but my sister and I were put in at the same time. So it wasn't like "she did it first and had a good experience then I did it." I just think it was to meet other people from your culture and hopefully make friends out of it.

Me: Were these mostly suburban...you said these were mostly suburban well-off blacks?

Kenny: Right

Me: So why did you quit junior year?

Kenny: Umm, I stopped doing events. It wasn't really interesting, it didn't really interest me. The two or three people I knew from it I would see outside of it anyway. We would go to movies and things. And it was just a burden on my parents at that point. They didn't...they really didn't have a point in being in it still cuz the only one left in it was my little sister and she really didn't do much stuff either.

Me: Would you say that organization either negatively or positively influences you feeling about your culture about the mix of cultures you know outside of that group? Do you think that had an influence on all of this?

Kenny: I would say it probably did have an influence on it, because again as I was saying before...you do meet different types of people and how they act. And, I've always been a person who has just been myself. So seeing people trying to act cooler than they are, things like that, was a turn off. But that's why I only stayed close with two or three people.

Me: And do you think they felt the same way?

Kenny: Not necessarily. There is a very interesting dynamic with it, because depending on where you're from...in the area, like I was in the North Jersey chapter. Depending on where you're from. I feel like within kids you are slightly judged that way. Cuz some people go to

the same schools so they have common bonds that are already set in place. Others are from farther off, so they are kind of, almost, you wanna say like on the outside of that circle.

Me: Ok and is this like a secret society? Like do people no know you are in this? Or is this a general “Yeah I am in this organization.”

Kenny: No one ever really asked me about it.

Me: But if you were in high school was that something you would talk about with people who were not in the group?

Kenny: Not something I would ever bring up. I found it very strange so it would be something that I would not bring up.

Me: Give me a better adjective than strange. I mean why would you not want to bring that up? Would it make you uncomfortable?

Kenny: I guess you would say it would make me feel slightly uncomfortable bringing it up in front of other people.

Me: Why do you think that is?

Kenny: (Long pause) I think it is something I would be embarrassed about. You have to join this other organization to meet other black kids? That’s what made me feel strange about it or made it embarrassing. I look back on it now and it does seem interesting. It has its merits because again if you’re someone who doesn’t really know your culture and your parents don’t want to ingrain you with stuff like that it is a good way to meet people and network.

Me: Now you said something there, “If you don’t know your culture”, is there a cultural...

Kenny: Aspect of this? Yes.

Me: About Africans and African -Americans and history and culture?

Kenny: There would be museum days, and stuff like that. You’d have a Kwanzaa party. They’d educate you about things like that.

Me: Ok and you think that was one of the parts that were important that your mom felt was a reason to put you in the group?

Kenny: Probably. It has its educational and the social aspect to it, because they do have like a national conference or whatever that you go to and you go to workshops and stuff. So that's always interesting too.

Brent focuses more on the in-group tensions in JJA, the comparisons made to less fortunate blacks, and educational opportunities:

Brent: Umm, it's funny because being around a mix of black and biracial kids, and mothers and fathers the same way...It's funny, and this is like I said if we blinked tomorrow and suddenly everybody is Japanese, same problems? Here we are in Jack and Jill and the same problems exist. "Let's pick on that kid because he listens to ("white" or "new wave" music) he doesn't listen to R&B like we do." Right? And I loved them! So I would stick up for that kid! You know and I think that group...the mothers were really running it and they were forging ahead with trying to expose us to everything from museum trips, trips to Washington DC, stuff that you wouldn't normally get...and expose you to the simple fact that there is more to life than what these other kids, and this is the African American culture, are showing you if you just hang around people who aren't exposed to anything. You know you would say to yourself, say maybe you drive through Camden or parts of Philadelphia, you think to yourself I don't care if your white, black, or Asian you'd say to yourself, "Why the F would you live, why would you stay in this town and raise your kids here?" "Why would you stay?" Cuz there's low income housing everywhere! So why would you stay here and have your kids have a chance to get shot at or be socialized into a violent life where there's an absence of value to the individual and therefore other individuals. So that was something that taught me that umm there's a lot more to life than how cool you are how good you look when you dress. You had to take care of yourself and your family and exposure to other things that you normally would not be exposed to is critical in adjusting your perspective in life and opening things up to you.

Me: Would you say your (Jack and Jill experience) was more Afrocentric or was it more multicultural-centric and less emphasis on the blackness but let's bring black kids together and have them learn that there's more?

Brent: The second...There was emphasis on African American culture, but it was more to the...we'd go to a museum we would discuss how technology in Africa had brought them to a certain point, and then it was really expanded upon by European settlers, took advantage of

gunpowder from China, the whole nine yards. So we learned a lot about that stuff but also about African Americans who were intelligent, and who spoke well, and who did great things.

Me: So a little of both, but with the idea of empowerment.

Brent: Yeah.

Chris describes his JJA experience as “cool” but sometimes “pointless” and seems to feel that he was not fully connected to the experience;

Chris: Jack and Jill... I was pretty young (when I started JJA), maybe about 4th grade I guess.

Me: OK do you think this was your mom’s idea or your dad’s idea or both.

Chris: Oh my mom’s! Completely my mom’s idea.

Me: OK were your siblings in this group as well?

Chris: Yeah we were all in it.

Me: OK so tell me about this experience? Did you like it did you dislike it?

Chris: I think it was cool sometimes and sometimes a little pointless.

Me: What did you think the purpose of the group was?

Chris: To get more in touch with...(long pause, struggles to explain this) to meet other black families similar to you.

Me: Affluent blacks?

Chris: Yeah definitely affluent. All affluent. The whole group yeah. But I think it wasn’t as big for me because my parents, they were doctors and they were always working. So like my mom would never go, she’d always be missing the meetings...she would try, but we weren’t always the most...well attending. I wasn’t attending all events, things like that.

Me: Were any of your friends growing up also in that group?

Chris: Not in the (local) community. It was more like outside the towns. A lot of the kids in my church, I go to a Baptist church, and it's like, umm...like "black", and a lot of the members there were in Jack and Jill...a few of them actually. I would say it was more of the church members than my friends there.

Me: And what kind of activities did you participate in?

Chris: Everything from going to like the Franklin Institute to during Black History Month putting on like...the younger kids would do like umm like a kind of dress-up and create a speech of your favorite famous African American individual. Christmas parties, holiday parties things like that.

Me: And was there always a cultural message there?

Chris: Yeah like going to visit the historically black colleges. That's what the high school kids would do. Things like that. It was always a lot of teaching us a history of African Americans there was a lot based on that.

Me: And how long were you in that group?

Chris: (Thinks) I'd say ninth or tenth grade, like six years.

Me: But not always attending...

Chris: Yeah (laughs)

Me: And your siblings about the same?

Chris: Yeah.

Me: OK so reflect on that. What do you think about that group?

Chris: It was cool, I mean I sometimes felt some of it was pointless, like I... didn't want to take a road trip to the historically black colleges, cuz I just always saw myself going to like (college attended). I kinda just, basically both my parents they went to (same school), well my dad did a part at (same school), my brother went to (same school)... my sister was more interested in going to the historically black colleges, like visiting them. I went on the trip but...

Me: So you toured historically black colleges and that wasn't doing it for you?

Chris: No my mind was kinda set on (school attended).

Me: Now do you think that attending a historically black college was something your parents would have endorsed, or do you think they were happy you didn't do that?

Chris: No they would have endorsed it, it didn't really matter where I went, I mean my dad was always like "money...money" He was always "Go to an in-state college, (school attended) is great."

From a Social Identity Theory perspective, involvement in JJA is a perplexing social phenomenon when considering my participants. SIT suggests that the parents of the participants who were involved in JJA were making a decision to enhance the innate characteristic of being black while also selectively distancing themselves from the same characteristic by endorsing involvement only with blacks "like them" – affluent, well-schooled, well-heeled etc. while approaching the less fortunate blacks as a population to be aided as opposed to being identified with. As noted by Graham (1999) and Appiah & Gates (2005), JJA membership is based on intentional socialization with other blacks due to the dearth of blacks in the areas where members live. Each JJA participant in this study described an intentional parental decision made to live in specific suburban locations, thereby precipitating this need. However they also noted a lack of emphasis on black culture, replaced by an emphasis on self, success and achievement. Herein lies the dichotomy of this unusual decision and may in part explain the participants less than enthusiastic overall perspective of the group. Perhaps other member families were more "Afrocentric" in focus and therefore found membership to be more satisfactory.

As Tajfel and Turner (1986) note, "When social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group or join some more positively distinct group, and/or to make their existing group more positively distinct." (Tajfel & Turner in Worchel &

Austin, 1986 p.16) It would appear that by moving to an all-white suburban experience, and then joining JJA, parents of participants made conscious efforts to do both.

Meanwhile participant members in JJA demonstrate another aspect of SIT. These participants, raised in a white suburban experience, enrolled in an affluent-blacks-only social group by well-meaning parents found membership to be “cool but pointless” “embarrassing” and noted that even within the group there was in-group discrimination regarding levels of blackness. Ultimately, each of these participants left JJA and joined an all-white or nearly all-white social group.

This decision also reflects an aspect of SIT, and is consistent with Ethier and Deaux’s (1994) findings that;

“Students with a strong cultural background were more likely to become involved in their ethnic group at college and subsequently, to show increases in identification with that group. In contrast, students without a strong cultural background were more likely to perceive threats to their identity, to have lower self-esteem associated with that identity, and to lower their identification with that group.” (Ethier & Deaux, 1994 p.249)

Turner’s (1982) suggestion that the “first question determining group-belongingness is not ‘Do I like these people?’ but ‘Who am I?’ What matters is how we perceive and define ourselves and not how we feel about others.” (Turner, in Tajfel, 1982 p.16) is at the very center of this dichotomy. It could be argued that due to their identity development outside of JJA that involvement in JJA actually reinforced in these students their identification to non-black socialization and further solidified their opinions that affiliation with an all-white group was more appropriate.

“Middleness” Refined - Social Outcomes of Predominantly White High Schools

As indicated in study data noted in Appendix C as well as noted in nearly every interview, the majority of participants in this study attended predominantly white high schools in suburban areas. Seven of nine participants reported this result, while two reported attending “racially mixed” urban high schools. One of these two students was Marc who, as noted earlier, attended both a predominantly white catholic high school and a public high school.

High school experiences of participants in this study are rife with descriptions of being “the only black guy in the room;” the one black person participating in a certain social activity, or academic courses, and the subject of racial commentary both serious and sarcastic. They describe feeling socially not fully accepted by other blacks due to their stronger ties to white friends and experiences, yet not fully immersed into the white culture with which they identified due to their sometimes glaring racial difference and an inherent inability to be an “insider” in white culture.

Brandon’s explains that although his high school was somewhat diverse he found himself gravitating towards white peers and friends yet not feeling fully accepted by white students. At the core of this struggle are the academic expectations of blacks and whites;

Brandon: (In the) beginning of high school and (even) towards the end of middle school I hung out with everyone, and (pause) towards high school I was on the football team and I tried to hang out with mainly white people.

Me: Do you think that was intentional?

Brandon: No it was more like I was comfortable....as far as.... because African Americans and my...the culture I grew up with...they have a certain distinction as far as like values and like education and stuff like that ...Like I still keep in contact with a lot of my uhh....I knew a couple of African Americans, I was friends with them so I still keep in contact with them, and most of them are...they haven't graduated college, some dropped out...had kids...so it's kinda' like, that particular, uhh, population of African Americans in the (not as nice) area (near where I lived) weren't as ...successful. So I guess that added to the negative...

Me: So tell me about this high school. Primarily white? Or well mixed?

Brandon: Ok when I was going there is was uhh white black and Indian...and a little Spanish but basically white black and Indian. I would say 30 percent black, sixty percent white and ten percent Indian... well like 8 percent Indian and two percent Spanish.

Me: And what were your friends like?

Brandon: My best friends were uhh Asian, Spanish, white (pause) that was it pretty much. And I had like one black friend.

Me: And what were your experiences like with your friends in school?

Brandon: As far as the African American or...

Me: Well, in general.

Brandon: Oh in general...There was actually ummm (pause) a small group of white guys that I was somewhat friends with, and their fathers were like the head of the uhh...public teacher association and all that stuff. So I was friends with them...but I never really *felt* (his emphasis) like I was friends with them. I don't know if it had something to do with race...as far as like, I kind of separated myself from the black, but I never could really associate with the white group, so I was kinda in between...so...

Me: So tell me about that. I think that's an interesting phenomenon.

Brandon: I think that carried on into the fraternity too.

Me: So while you're in high school and your feeling like you're not completely in one group or another, what kind of feedback did you get from those groups (emph)?

Brandon: OK...with the...with the African Americans they would be like, "Why are you hanging out with those white guys?" You know like, "They're wack...they're corny." or whatever. And then from the white guys they would be like...they were more like...when the black people weren't around they would make fun of them in a way, as far as like "Yo yo yo" stuff like that. But it wasn't really anything too negative.

Me: OK now did you feel that that was offensive to you?

Brandon: No...because it goes back to...my parents...like, "You're not African American."

Me: Right. You're not associated with that?

Brandon: Yeah. Umm, (but) I think in high school I was just trying to fit in.

Me: With?

Brandon: See that's the thing. I wasn't really sure. Initially I was trying to fit in with the African Americans but just, just the way we were brought up is just totally different. I wouldn't get what they were saying, they wouldn't get what I was saying, so that...the contexts weren't always fluent. Umm (pause) and then towards the end of high school and then when I headed to college, I don't know I just.... (pause) the whole aspect of going to college has always, in a way, leaned towards white versus black, so I guess, I equated college with success, so I tried to integrate myself with the white population more.

Me: So is that success ideal a white ideal?

Brandon: That's another thing I am starting to realize. That that seed, that mentality, has probably been input in my dad, in the past generations as far as the African American community, and when they came over they tried to put that inside the children heads, so yeah. In a way...it's been linked in a way. And I tried to associate myself with the Divine Nine, but just certain things; their whole lifestyle is totally different. It's interesting because my cousin, he's actually in the Divine Nine, but they grew up in (city in NJ), so it's like...it's hard for me to even form strong bonds with my cousins based on their upbringing, depending on where they were born, you know? And where they were raised.

Brandon's views are consistent with much of the research regarding black students and the perception that achievement is a white ideal (Carter, 2005; Fordham, 1996; Feagin,

Vera & Amani, 1996 as examples). In Brandon's case this message is made clear not only by students but by his parents as well. This is a powerful message, one that certainly has influence on race and cultural esteem (Tajfel, 1982, 1986; Ethier & Deaux, 1994).

However, Brandon's comments also highlight the sensation of being "in the middle." As he notes, he had friends of various races yet never felt fully accepted by any. As he states, "I kind of separated myself from the black, but I never could really associate with the white group, so I was kinda in between."

Michael's views about his high school experience are consistent with Brandon's perception of education as a white idea as well as not feeling fully a part of any one culture:

Michael: You know at school, well my school was pretty diverse even though it was mostly Caucasian. Most of my friends were white, black, Hispanic, Asian, I uhh I really didn't see color. I had different types of friends. My girlfriends were all different types of uhh, demographics and nationalities also.

Me: What were your friends like? What type of activities were you involved in? What kind of student were you academically?

Michael: I was a pretty good student. I always had a good head on my shoulders. I knew I had to get good grades to get to college. I didn't participate in any sports. I actually did like a business program...

Me: OK, and what were your friends like in school?

Michael: They were pretty much the same way. You know I noticed that a lot of the African Americans you know they weren't into the classes I was into, you know I was into a lot of honors and AP classes, advanced courses, and um they weren't there. A lot of them were in "modified." "Modified" was um, well the structure of these classes was "modified" which was the lowest, "regular", "advanced", and then advanced placement. And I always fell between AP and advanced. And umm you didn't find too many African Americans there. So

(pause) even though I had a lot of friends that that were from different nationalities, the classes I was in...I was mostly around Caucasian people.

Me: What do you think was the difference in your experience getting there that allowed you, or provided you, or got you into that level of classes when you saw other African American students were not in those classes? Do you think there were differences in their experience?

Michael: Umm this is like a recurrent theme through high school. It's almost like, "it's not black to be smart." You know something like that. Uhh like "black people don't study." Or...you know I've seen that a lot. Umm, "only white people are smart" to be in those classes.

Me: Ok now who was giving you this message?

Michael: Oh uhh you know my friends who were African American and also some of my family members... You know, so I definitely saw that from a home perspective too. (Pause)

Me: And what other activities were you involved in other than the business activities.

Michael: After school...it's interesting because I did something like, uhh it's called aggressive skating with the half pipes and everything...and not to many people...not too many black people do that, also. So umm, so even with the sports I guess you can see...

Me: So like a skateboard half pipe but on roller blades?

Michael: Right, exactly, uhh also like jumping off of ramps and things like that with my bike. You don't find too many black people doing that. You know, stereotypically we're more basketball or football oriented.

Me: OK. And how did you get involved in those activities?

Michael: Umm from my friends, and you know X-Games, you know watching ESPN so...(laughs)

Jarrold's high school experience was affected by his role as an athlete. He notes that he had black peers and friends both through sports and in general at school, but that he was set apart from some of these peers due to where and how he was raised;

Jarrold: As far as stereotypes, you know “Because you’re tall you play basketball,” I was always around all of the athletes but as far as like...because the way that I spoke was different than maybe some of the black guys that were from (city in New Jersey), so they said like “You’re ‘white Jarrold’, you’re not ‘black Jarrold.’” Because of the way that, you know I didn’t have that heavy voice or you know the “ebonics” tone as some of my counterparts. So that was kinda different for some of them coming and meeting me.

Me: OK, so tell me about this high school population, was this a pretty well mixed school? I mean...

Jarrold: I would say yeah it was pretty well mixed. You know, racially, which you know “black and white” but I think probably prior to my coming in it may have been more heavily white than black.

Me: Now you touched on a phenomenon that is widely studied and certainly an interesting part of my study. You said people said you were “white Jarrold” at least partially because of the way you spoke. Tell me about how that sort of fit into your high school experience.

Jarrold: Well primarily because in (my hometown) you know a lot of the guys that lived close to me were white so I predominantly hung out with a lot of them. One of my good friends in high school, his mother was my nurse in elementary school, so I always hung around their house because she knew me and she knew my family. But I did hang around with some of the guys that were from (nearby town) but not very much as the guys in (my hometown). I was pretty much more close to them than the guys in (nearby town).

Me: Would you describe it as primarily white or pretty well mixed?

Jarrold: I think it was pretty well mixed depending on you know where you lived, like I’d say my block was very diverse, but then you had section that were primarily white in the uptown area and primarily black in the downtown area, depended on where you lived, but all in all everyone did get along.

Erik’s experience was unique in a number of ways. Here, Erik describes a very progressive high school experience in terms and notes that the population was somewhat diverse and that within that population there was a less emphasis on race and difference due to the progressive open-minded nature of the school;

Me: Tell me about your high school experience.

Erik: It was very progressive, they had very uh...like you called all of your teachers by their first names and it was very...you know, they really pushed you to debate things. Like you'd read the textbook...I was reading shit in high school that when I got into (college) I was like, "I read that already! In tenth grade I read that, why do I have to read that again?" So it was really progressive and really advanced. Then they really pushed you to debate things and you had ethics class and you also had you know, they had meditation.... all kinds of crazy shit. And I played basketball and tennis...I was pretty active.

And what kind of student were you academically in high school?

Erik: I was a pretty good student in high school, although by senior year there had definitely been a turn. The focus had become a little less acute...senior year, as I think it is for most seniors. Particularly for us because we were all kind of nuts but...

Me: OK let me ask you this...in your recollection how many black kids do you think were at (your high school)...ballpark?

Erik: All told, probably (thinks) maybe about 20...

Me: Out of a total population of maybe...

Erik: Well my graduation class was 80...and there were maybe 20 black kids at the school, maybe 25...out of call it 500 kids...

Me: How would you describe that phenomenon as far as black students involved at a predominantly white high school? Was it pretty clique-y? Was everybody kind of friends with each other?

Erik: Everybody was friends with each other.

Me: OK so you wouldn't necessarily say that you were different than the other black kids at that school because everyone was immersed?

Erik: Yeah. First of all you didn't get into that school unless you had the academics to get in. So on that level everyone was equal anyway. Plus the school was so progressive it didn't...people who sent their kids there didn't raise their kids with that kind of a mentality...that because someone looks different they should be kept separate...had I went to

the more conservative (nearby) prep school, you would have seen that a lot more because it was a much more conservative environment. My school was so progressive it didn't factor in. The kids were not raised that way. I mean there were a couple assholes and you knew why they were assholes but for the most part, people just didn't ...kids didn't think that way...because they weren't raised to see that.

Brent discusses his experience in high school as it related to having recently moved out of a mixed area and into a very white neighborhood;

Brent: We were in private school anyway (in the previous location) so moving from a very mixed area to moving to a 95 percent white area was not a big deal for really any of my brothers and I. We made that transition pretty quickly and easily and just kinda assimilated into the new environment pretty quickly and just uh...We were fine. That was cuz you know being in private school we had a decent education so there was no problem there. And we made friends pretty quickly because again my parents were good people so they were teaching good habits. So we weren't like uh, you know if you hear kids from (city) just moved into your suburban school you're thinking thugs or some kids who are real bad-asses and we were just the opposite (laughs). High school was kind of interesting. I got along well with pretty much everyone. I fit in with a small group where we actually might have a sleepover or make efforts to hang out, maybe four or five kids there. Grade-wise I was like a B track kid, I wasn't in like AP (classes) I was just kind of a college prep kid who I think when I left high school I had taken precalc. But I played football, and I volunteered in things like we had a group called Cultivation of Black Awareness at the high school where we came together to discuss issues that the small number of minority kids saw or felt that maybe other people in the high school that maybe other people in the high school including the faculty didn't see. So there was an awareness of who I was then, and a willingness to participate in it but nothing like...I always rejected the idea that I am minority and I am going to complain and you gotta fix it. That's the role of a victim. I realized later as an adult, I do not like the role of a victim.

Me: Tell me a little about your peer group and your friends at that school. Who did you spend most of your time with?

Brent: Uhh the kids whose academic profile was most similar to mine, they were in my classes. Umm the one fella (name), his dad was a lieutenant at the (nearby) police department and the other fellow (name) his dad was some kind of financial manager at a big bank. They were my main group of friends up to about I'd say sophomore year, then there was kind of a transition, they had family problems they started to gravitate to other people who were having similar problems I guess. And I picked up with a couple other kids, one of whom is an information technology guy now. His parents were, one parent was a chemistry instructor, I think at (name of) University and his mother also worked at the university somewhere and the other fellow's dad was a CPA and we used to just laugh and have fun all the time. So the peer group was one African American male and the rest were white males.

Me: OK, let me ask you about that. You said in the questionnaire part that this was a predominantly white school. How predominantly white? I mean you said you were in a group that was sort of representative of the minorities in the school. What kind of a breakdown was it at that school?

Brent: I would say there were about 650 kids in the high school, I would guess about 20 of them plus or minus were African American.

Robert describes himself as different from other blacks in his high school but also indicates that he was not immune to racism and racist comments;

Me: Tell me about the demographics of your high school.

Robert: It was mostly white, uh...but there were some black people. I wasn't actually very close with any of them, maybe one, for part of my high school career. But I found that even before high school, maybe in like middle school or before that, I didn't really get along with a lot of the other black kids in school. They weren't in my classes, a lot of them were taking remedial classes and they sorta' hung out...I forget the name of the place, it was in the middle of the hallway, that everyone passed through, it was about four classes, two on each side, where I assumed they had the remedial English classes and other classes like that, and it was just mostly black kids who had classes there. I never had any of their classes or their teachers, never really even had the chance to know who they were. In my student days I was

like pretty much the only black kid in the group of people I hang out with. That's just been pretty much throughout my entire life.

Me: And what kind of student were you academically?

Robert: Academically I was a B+ to A student... I never tried throughout high school. Actually I probably developed a lot of bad habits because class just came easy to me so I never tried to exert myself about it. So I didn't take...I think I took...did I take any AP classes? (thinks) I don't think I took any AP classes but I was in honors English, I did Algebra, Discrete Math...I did some honors classes but mostly just regular levels.

Me: During high school, did you experience what you would consider racism or stereotyping of judgmental comments or attitudes from peers other students or faculty staff at your school?

Robert: Umm, never from faculty or staff. I don't think...but sometimes from my peers, my friends would be picking on me and people who weren't my friends also made a lot of black jokes at me. If I was ever eating any kind of chicken dish, I would hear about it. Especially if it was fried chicken which everybody loves. It's the most ridiculous stereotype in the world. But if ever I was eating that I would hear about it. I mean I did like grape soda, so if I was ever having grape soda I would catch shit over that too. But in terms of outright racism that was open and not subtle, that was obvious to me...not so much. In fact most people would never make a racist comment towards me. Most of them were friendly to me.

Me: What do you think the intent was?

Robert: The majority of people were just busting my balls. I was friendly with most of them and it was just, it was sort of like a thing...I guess they would see me and see something different about me and that would be a thing to make fun of. So because I was black, everyone else was white, insults would mean a lot of them were racially based. In terms of just outright racism, it was only ever in passing and not from someone I knew directly. Like I'd be walking down the street...I remember one time I was walking with my little sister I guess I was like sixteen so she must have been like fourteen or so...at the time. We were outside a supermarket, it was late at night, and uhh I heard some, a bunch of guys in pick-up truck drove by and yelled out like "Nigger!" at us and sped off...and that happened, you know a few times, pretty intermittently throughout. I do remember at one point after like senior prom all the people go to (a beach town) after senior prom for like after party people rent hotels and apartments and houses down there. And we went down to visit. A lot of

people I knew who aren't the closest of friends, but a lot of people I knew were at this like one massive party house. It looked like a fraternity house, probably had like 15 rooms in it all rented out. And the owner of the place was this sort of old maybe Filipino-looking woman who was just sort of hovering around. She'd like walk around outside making sure nobody was destroying anything. And she wouldn't let me in. And she said like "Get out of here nigger! Get out of here!" Like this tiny old woman! And I almost punched her. It was surprising, it was shocking, cuz most people aren't apt to say that at your face.

Me: And there were a bunch of your friends at this event?

Robert: They were all inside so I was like alone outside with this woman!

Discussion with Robert then focused on comments about not "really" being black;

Me: You touched on, and I asked you about it a little; this idea of being teased about stereotypes and things about being black with this sense of the people doing it feeling it doesn't really apply to you even though you're black. "We're giving you a hard time but, you know, you're 'Robert'." Did you ever feel that you got that kind of treatment from your friends?

Robert: Oh yeah, definitely. Umm people would sort of have this idea of what I guess a black person should be like or talk like or act like and I guess because of the way I grew up, it almost makes me more culturally white and more similar to them than the truth of my skin color or my race. So they sort of see me as this guy who was black, "But he's not really black." In fact I definitely heard that. Sometimes they would use the stand in words of like "ghetto" or sometimes "urban" even. (laughs) But yeah mostly a lot of people I am pretty sure still think of me as the whitest black guy they've ever met. For a while I was introduced to people like that 'til I actually threw a fit. It's a pretty shitty thing. So some people would maybe hear me speak or hear of me and they would be like "You're not *really* black" because I don't speak with a...I don't know a "black accent" whatever that might be. Or I don't drop my Gs or say, "Ain't" or whatever, and you know I dress the way that I dress.

Chang and De Angelo (2001) suggest that their selection processes reinforce the homogenous nature of Greek organizations. They note "members tend to share a common set

of beliefs, values, behaviors, and attitudes, which are often developed before entering college.” (Chang & De Angelo 2001, p.810) As their high school experience comes to a close, the development of a kinship based on familiarity with white students, as well as activities, academic courses, and socialization described both by participants and peers as “whiter” has been adopted. Scorn from and for other blacks who reinforce the message that these men are not “black enough,” enhances their identification with social identity characteristics that de-emphasize race (Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell & Cross 2010; Rowley Sellers and Chavous, 1998). Negative reinforcement from whites, insinuated in comments about participants being “not really black” or “the whitest black guy I know,” are deemed less offensive and serve to enforce their immersion into the whiter socialization experience. As Ethier and Deaux (1994) suggest, this de-emphasis of cultural identity combined with a lack of strong cultural background may cause an individual to seek “to lower their identification with that group” when social contexts change (Ethier & Deaux 1994, p.249). It is therefore presumable that participants would find ways to perpetuate these salient identity characteristics when transitioning from high school to college. As these men entered college they brought with them the “common set of beliefs, values, behaviors, and attitudes,” (Chang & De Angelo 2001, p.810) to their college experience and found membership in a TWF to be consistent with these qualities. Participant views about black Greeks and their “rush” experiences serve to validate this assertion.

“Middleness” Decisions - Transitioning to College

Up to this point I have focused on pre-college social factors that I see as driven by parental choices and influences. In this section, I change focus to address the specific

personal views of my participants as well as peer influences that were pivotal in the decision to join a TWF. In the following pages, discussions about HBFs, views about Greeks in general and the specifics surrounding why they chose the group they pledged are addressed. Participants expressed lack of knowledge regarding black Greeks, a disdain for HBFs due to their reputations for extreme hazing and branding practices, and found membership in TWFs consistent with their precollege socialization, a feeling of belonging, and the opportunity for social capital on campus.

Knowledge and Opinions of Black Greek Organizations

In developing a study on black Greeks and their selection of membership to a white fraternity, I felt it important to include information on my participants' experiences regarding HBFs prior to their fraternity selection to provide a fuller context of their decision-making process. When making such a decision had other options been explored? Were HBFs considered and rejected? Not in the dialog? Were my participants aware of this option?

Lack of knowledge of HBFs combined with concerns regarding hazing and abuse among HBFs, as well as the sense of camaraderie felt at TWFs and their reputations for partying and social mobility are prevalent throughout the discussions;

Me: What knowledge and or opinions did you have about fraternities and Greeks in general before you came to college?

Brent: Very little exposure to that. Very little. Someone had mentioned about joining a black fraternity if you join a fraternity at all, that was my dad's dentist. I think he was an Alpha, a black dude. But umm I didn't like the idea of someone telling me in order to join we're going to kick your ass and torture you and fucking brand you like an animal. I rejected the idea outright. I didn't like the attitude, it's barbaric, you know? It's not that I am an angel, don't get me wrong, but you know, just the idea of branding and no matter how these guys, no

matter how smart they are, whether they are football players doctors or dentists, if you're branding someone, if you're mutilating the human body in that fashion you've got a problem and you just can't see it! And I knew it back then so they were off the chart for me. That was never going to happen. OK, like all approach you nicely in a tie and then all the abuse that they suffered at someone else's hands...they would turn upon you, which tells me they haven't learned their lesson.

Me: So...while you were rushing, did you consider black fraternities?

Brent: No.

Me: Were you approached by anyone from black fraternities?

Brent: No.

Me: OK so that was not in the equation at all during your rush process.

Brent: Not at all.

Me: OK since then, you've never considered what might have been different had you joined a black fraternity?

Brent: Absolutely not.

Later in the conversation I asked Brent about his parents' reaction to his decision to join an organization of entirely white members;

Brent: I think my mom being from Birmingham may have asked (why), but I told her flat out. I said, "look ma I don't get treated like.... umm...a token member. I don't get treated like I am special. No one tells me I am 'articulate' no one tells me anything. Guys hang out with me and they treat me like I want to be treated and I can't get that anywhere else." And you get that where you can find it and you find it where it falls on you. In the black fraternity I would not have those relationships. And that was my experience in life because when I was around most... I'd say... darker skinned African-American males, if you were light skinned like me you didn't understand. You know? It is not that I didn't get along with ANY but a lot of the ones I did looked at me as...you know... my dad was white collar so I wasn't coming from the tracks, I didn't live on Martin Luther King Boulevard so to speak so there was a bit

of an issue there, when they hear me talk you know.....most of my racism was from black people. "You talk like you think you're so good." That was the overt racism.

Brent's experiences are consistent with the SIT assertion that individuals seek to enhance positive esteem characteristics and de-emphasize negative factors (Tajfel & Turner 1986). As noted above, Brent feels black peers who cannot accept his identity and personality characteristics have judged him more harshly. He also refers to the stereotypical remarks of whites referring to intelligent blacks as "articulate" in his explanation of his comfort with white friends who do not label him in such ways. This suggests a connection to the fictive kinship of blackness and indicates Brent's acknowledgement that full acceptance by whites may not be possible.

Erik tells a similar story regarding his views, but knew little about HBFs and suggests that the feeling of camaraderie felt at his TWF was the key factor;

Me: When you were in high school what did you know about Greeks and what were your opinions about Greeks?

Erik: It was pretty much Animal House. I am not kidding, that was it .It was pretty much like Animal House.

Me: That was your knowledge of Greeks, that there was this sense of something that happens at college and hopefully it is something like Animal House?

Erik: Exactly, and I didn't know about the black fraternities and white fraternities, I just didn't know there was a separation. As far as I knew Animal House was the way it was.

Me: So you did not you know that black Greeks existed as a separate entity?

Erik: I had no clue.

Me: So did you consider at any point joining a black fraternity?

Erik: Nope.

Me: Did you know when you were rushing that there were separate organizations that you could join?

Erik: The only reason I knew was you'd see the guys walking around wearing their colors. And you had, "OK those guys are the black fraternity." And then, I feel like they started their pledge program earlier than we started ours. I don't know if that is right or not, but you'd hear them...marching around campus in the middle of the night, canes and boots and all that. I was kinda like "Whatever." The night before bids went out the (Rush and Pledge masters) pulled me aside and they were like "Listen we want you to rush (our fraternity)" but there was this other black guy...he was a free loader. So they said "Listen we want to give you a bid but we're not going to give a bid to that kid but we want to make sure you're okay with that." I was Like "I don't even like that kid, I don't (care)." They were like "OK, good because we really want you to be at our house." I was like "OK, cool. I'm good." And that's how it started.

The fact that the fraternity felt it necessary to seek Erik's approval to not invite another black "rushee" to join the group suggests his inextricable connection to his blackness as a basis for external influences of his identity and well as his distancing of himself from a black fictive kinship. As a black man, Erik is seen as someone who might be upset if another black "rushee" is not accepted based solely on the fact that he too is black. Erik's lack of concern is likely a relief to the group and indicates Erik's concern more toward his own positionality within the group as opposed to feeling the need to defend another member of his race. He goes on to describe the culmination of his experiences with black Greeks through an experience he had soon after pledging the TWF;

Erik: So then after the bids go out I am walking across campus and we have our things and our little pledge pins and that (stuff). So one of the guys from a black fraternity came up to me and he said, "So you're pledging one of the (white fraternities)?" I was like "Yeah." And he goes "How come you didn't rush us?" I said, "You guys never even talked to me." And he was like "Ohh..." I was like, "Well there you go!"

Marc's father was a member of a well-known HBF but that history was not influential in Marc's decision;

Me: What knowledge and or opinions did you have about fraternities and Greeks in general; the Greek system overall, prior to coming to college.

Marc: Before I came to college I knew...what you saw in the movies. Animal House, just...streaking and... It just wasn't something I was going to do, I just...didn't think...I thought that all they did was just drink and they didn't really do to well in school.

Me: Did you have any knowledge about black Greeks? Before college?

Marc: Well my dad, he was actually a Kappa. He was a member of a black...

Me: Kappa Alpha Psi?

Marc: Mmmhmm, but I didn't really talk to him about it. So, I knew I just...going into college I never thought I was going to join. And uh...I dunno I guess I just got it from the movies. They depict the black colleges, they step and things like that. Another aspect was some black fraternity did come up to me, and they actually did pursue me, but not the way this group pursued me. So I think that was probably one of the big things.

Me: How did they pursue you? What was their pitch?

Marc: They were more on (a different part of campus) and they just like, they were giving us their whole history. All of that, and they took my name and number down.

Me: How did this event occur?

Marc: I was just walking on (that part of campus).

Me: Oh really?

Marc: Yeah they just picked me out, saying "Hey man I see you all around, are you new here?" And we got talking that way. He was like "Listen I will give you a text let me get your number." Like that, but they just like didn't pursue me enough I guess. So I guess that was more how I shifted towards going into the fraternity I am now. Plus I knew the kid and so...I grew up with him, so I just felt more comfortable around him. Like he was calling me up to

play basketball, to eat at the dining hall...so I was always kinda around him more than those kids I didn't really know.

Me: So you didn't go to any Greek rush events?

Marc: He texted me once, but it was like, how they texted me, they both occurred on the same night. Their event, he texted me like maybe an hour before it. It was a little late, so... (Marc is saying the two groups - the one he joined and an HBF - had a rush event on the same night and the white group was diligent about getting information early to have him there and the black group was very last minute with their invite.)

Marc also noted his concerns about black Greeks after speaking with some peers about joining a TWF;

Marc: I talked to these kids that were actually like, "Are you sure?" and I was like "Have you heard anything about the *black* fraternities?" And they told me stories like they, they beat you up and things like that and he told me that his freshman year his friend used to come home really late at night and he'd always be all bruised up. And he go, "Why are you always like so messed up and hurt?" and he's like, "Yeah cuz they usually hit you with a paddle." Things like that. Don't know if it's true or not but...that's just not...yeah...so that's mostly the thing I heard about them. And like when I saw them it was always like, four guys. And they're like, they weren't really too big, I mean I am sure there's some that are some that are like a decent size, but every time I saw the one's recruiting there wasn't too many guys out there. They don't have houses also.

Michael's view was unique in that his pre-college understanding of Greeks was predominantly of HBFs;

Michael: Umm, the fraternities that I always understood was just the black fraternities, you know, the Alpha Phi Alpha, Omega Psi Phi...that's what I knew about. I actually didn't know that there were white fraternities. Umm, you know I just thought it was just all black.

Me: What was the origin of that education?

Michael: Umm, just, it's actually in the black community. Because these people actually come to the black community and help out. And there's a Philly Greek Picnic...

Me: Yeah I know about that.

Michael: And my sister, she used to want to go. She wasn't allowed to go. And uh, the reason why is cuz there was always, like violence happening there...

Me: Right.

Michael: Like it got out of hand after awhile. You know so I understood that too. You know, you're trying to better the community but...umm...that wasn't happening at these picnics for some reason.

Me: How were you getting connected to these organizations prior to college? Your family?

Michael: Umm, you know my family, talking about it. I didn't understand that a couple of my family members were in these fraternities. I didn't really know that until I was in college. Umm, my uncle, he's actually my great uncle, he was a Kappa Alpha Psi. Umm he was pretty old, he actually died. He was like eighty-something.

Me: So he was an early Kappa.

Michael: Yeah. And then my brother in law, he's an Omega Psi Phi. He did that after he graduated college. And then my sister, she is in umm, umm, she's a Delta...I forget what the entire name is...

Me: Delta Sigma Theta?

Michael: Yeah, Delta Sigma Theta, and she did that after college also. I am not sure why they didn't do it during college.

Me: So you came to (college) with knowledge of black Greek organizations, but not a good understanding of white Greek organizations.

Michael: Not at all. You know I'd seen them in the movies. You know the stereotypes of like a lot of the beer and everything. You know like Animal House...Van Wilder (we laugh) but I didn't know the names of those organizations, whereas, you know I knew the names of the historically Black fraternities. And you know, I never found, I always thought they were good people to look up to. That's why it was instilled in my mind that I wanted to be in a black fraternity, and actually thought about doing one but I ended up not doing one at all.

Me: And why is that?

Michael: Umm... Its you know just hearing about the different hazing things...Umm, because like with the Alpha Phi Alphas (black fraternity) I decided to join that...or you know, I wanted to join that, and I knew a lot about the organization, when it was founded, some of the prominent members... But I didn't know much about (name of fraternity joined) at all. You know I don't, I didn't know any about the guys who started it, I don't know any prominent members. I think I just veered off. I don't think the, you know I don't know why. I actually went to a couple of probates, are you familiar with those?

Me: No.

Michael: The probate is at the end of the pledge process for uh, Divine Nine fraternities. They go right out here to (close location on campus) and it's kinda' like a presentation kind of thing, before they cross over. I guess they say like everything that they've learned...it's pretty deep, it's really good. Uhh, I would definitely go to one. It's really interesting. And like they step and everything. But, you know, I thought it was pretty cool to watch but I wasn't looking forward to being into it.

Me: OK, so you decided that although Alpha was something you knew about and you were considering, you decided you were not going to do that.

Michael: No, not at all. And then just like hearing about the stereotypical hazing and everything like that, it's just I just didn't see the point of it.

Another factor for Michael was academics. His concerns about joining Alpha Phi Alpha were affected in that way as well;

Michael: There's a report that you can see of the GPAs of all the fraternities at (name of school) and umm, I think there was 25 fraternities and I remember seeing Alpha at 25. Like they had the lowest GPA. And that's not...the stereotype that the Alphas give off is that they're the smartest out of all the fraternities. And I really didn't see that in that statistic.

Me: Was that pledge class GPA or overall organization GPA?

Michael: Overall organization GPA. And I didn't want to fall into that category. I didn't want to graduate with a low GPA like that.

Like Michael, James considered joining an HBF but decided against it;

James: Yes, I thought about it, I had seriously thought about it, for some time, but I didn't know where to turn. I guess at the time, I guess because of where I lived on campus, because I lived on (specific part of campus) which is very predominantly white, there's not a lot of, at my time there, there wasn't a lot of blacks living (in that part of campus) many of them were living on (other parts of campus), so because of it, HBFs never really had much of an influence on (specific part of campus). You would only see them in passing when they're on (campus) buses and such like that but they didn't have a fraternity house on that particular campus.

Me: What was your knowledge of Historically Black Fraternities prior to college?

James: Umm...it was very, it was a small amount. I was familiar with...I knew that there was a certain number...to be honest I wasn't even sure that they were even at (my college). Coming in.... because of the fact that much of the Greek life that I was exposed to early on was everything on (main part of campus) so it was the predominantly white ones. I didn't really learn too much about HBFs until, during my (rushing) process, til I was actually trying to become a member of Greek life, I was like, "Oh we do have black fraternities and Latino fraternities here, what are they all about?"

Me: And you had limited knowledge of black Greek organizations going in.

James: Right.

So during the rush process you differentiated? Was there a comparison of that social experience that you made between what you thought about black Greeks and traditionally white Greek fraternities? Or did you look around and say, "This is where the action is, and I want to be where the action is."

James: "This is where the action is that's where I want to be." At the same time going through it that's all I kinda' knew. Umm because of the fact that I didn't know about a lot of the other events that were going on during rush by the black fraternities, I didn't have a chance to participate in that. So, because of that I kinda was just like OK...I will just continue what I am doing right now.

Me: Any point at which you said, "Maybe I should have looked more into that." Or did you think "I did the right thing."

James: (Thinks) "I did the right thing." I guess it was one of those things where that was kind of my, um, the decision I had between doing that or a black fraternity, I wanted that diversity because I knew that one of the reason why I had come to college and decided to live on campus as opposed to just commuting to school was because I wanted to be able to see what the world was really like and be able to meet different people, and I felt that kind of diversity was advantageous.

Kenny's response is brief yet may be the most telling as he shows very little interest in black Greeks;

Me: Did you have any knowledge of black Greek organizations before college?

Kenny: Uhh, (pause) I believe so...my uncles were in um...Alpha (pauses)

Me: Alpha Phi Alpha?

Kenny: Yes. So I probably had some knowledge of it but again, very naive, didn't think about it. Never crossed my mind.

Me: And you said you had an older sister. Was she Greek?

Kenny: No

Me: And were your parents Greek?

Kenny: Nope.

Me: So you had limited understanding of fraternities except for media.

Kenny: Except for media...and...yeah pretty much except for media.

Me: And Alphas who were relatives.

Kenny: Yeah, and I think someone in my building, or...a friend of a friend was actually pledging one of the black fraternities, and he was saying he went through all this crap...and basically I just said...(shakes his head no)

Me: OK but it was not that you had an interest in the first place.

Kenny: No.

Robert had little knowledge of black Greeks but felt that he would not fit in culturally and was not interested in their activities;

Me: What knowledge did you have about black Greek organizations? Did you know, even in high school that there were specific groups for black students?

Robert: It may have been told to me, I feel like I must have known at least on some level, some surface level, I must have known that they existed but I wasn't ever attracted to them. I didn't think they would have anything for me, and I am so used to the idea of like the people I associate with people who I can culturally communicate with and I can get along with are predominantly white so I didn't think that, you know, a black fraternity would really interest me at all. And when I did get to (college) and I did find out the teensiest bit more about them, which was still you know almost nothing, I just viewed them as, (laughs) sort of like these stepping sororities and fraternities, you know that step dancing? Stepping? And I remember seeing a lot of them black guys and even girls just having like these brands on them, because the black fraternities at (college) still did that at the time. So that was pretty much all I knew about them.

Similarly, Brandon felt he was not connected to the nature of a black Greek organization;

Brandon: I just felt like I wouldn't fit in...I wouldn't fit in.

Me: How so?

Brandon: I don't know (pause) I don't know. I guess I felt like I was an outsider, nothing particular... And I, I was thinking about pledging the white fraternity and my cousin was pledging a black fraternity, and he said why don't you come to one of the.... probates? I think?

Me: Was he attending at the same school you attended?

Brandon: Yeah, and I went to the event and I felt like an outsider as far as like, what they were talking about. Just, I guess they shared certain bonds that I was never really exposed to? So I dunno, I always felt more comfortable in the white aspect.

Growing up in a predominantly white experience and coming from families that downplayed race and culture, the comparative lack of knowledge of and/or interest in HBFs and their style of activities such as “stepping” is not surprising for these participants. It is also understandable that the accompanying lack of connectedness to a black experience would result in disdain for HBFs due to attitudes regarding hazing and abuse among HBFs as opposed to seeing such behaviors as a rite of passage or an honor (Ruffins, 2007; Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, in Worchel & Austin, 1986; Ethier & Deaux, 1994). The lack of on-campus visibility of black Greeks due to the lack of houses for centralized activities and therefore less visible rush activities, their reputation for hazing and abuse all served to make HBFs less attractive to all participant, even to those who were considering membership as part of their rush process.

Further, as reported by several participants, the “Animal House” mentality was often the basis of understanding about what it meant to join a fraternity. The fact that TWFs typically had houses that were seen by participants as centralized social locations, where meeting girls and partying activities take place, was found to be attractive. This is consistent with the notion of the fraternity as an ethnic enclave utilizing social capital on campus as a means by which individuals find membership to be valuable (Sidanius, van Laar Levin & Sinclair 2004; Severtis & Christie-Mizell, 2007).

However, participants do not see their joining of such a group as an intentional anti-ethnic enclave behavior, nor a particularly controversial decision. As indicated throughout this study, due to pre-college socialization via predominantly white networks of neighbors

and peers, the decision felt natural and was consistent with their high esteem for less-race-based characteristic similarities with members of the TWFs. The seemingly groundbreaking decision made by these participants was seen by them as maintaining a social “status quo.”

College Peer Influences, Social Capital, and a Sense of Belonging

A final area of focus, closely connected to the above discussion regarding Greek choice, is the fact that nearly every participant’s story of joining a predominantly white fraternity includes the influence of the on-campus peer group that each individual found themselves immersed in once at school, the comparative value seen in joining a particular fraternity, and the sense of belonging that decision embodied. Predictably, participants found comfort in a mostly white group of students in a residence hall or dormitory on campus - a population that, as a group, went to “rush” events to explore options regarding Greek life. The experience of joining a socially powerful entity on campus with newly made friends, combined with a natural feeling of belongingness to the fraternity pledged by each participant, are the final factors examined that served to influence the unusual fraternity selection made. Michael’s experience is consistent with other participant responses;

Me: So you rushed with some friends? Were you all in a residence hall?

Michael: Exactly, we were all in (the same dorm) and I think that played a huge part, because we all came in to college with each other, and decided to do this, you know, together.

Me: So along the way to finding (name of fraternity) did you go to parties and events of other Greek organizations?

Michael: Not much...not much. Just house parties every once in awhile. You know some people go to parties every weekend. That really wasn’t me at all.

Me: So, so what besides maybe your pledge class and your friends, we started to touch on this, but let's go into this a little further. What did you find about (name of fraternity) that seemed different that you liked so much about it? What was the message you were getting there?

Michael: I don't think the organization was really portraying any message to me. It was definitely just my friends wanting to do this, you know? And saying that we can go from (name of residence hall) like being nobodies, quote unquote, and then uhh going to this house on (fraternity row) and host parties all the time, and be like big guys on campus. That's pretty much what it was.

James acknowledges that the social aspect of Greek life was a driving force in his peer group's decision as well;

James: I kinda decided that when I got to school...when I got to college...when I... oh man it sounds really messed up looking back...but after my first night of college partying I thought...I should do that...laughs just because of, I guess because, I don't want to...yes...the... the... the other aspects of Greek life in terms of the fellowship the community service, that I learned after the fact, OK but when I first got here I was like "I want to party whenever I am not studying...I am doing Greek life." Coming in... because of the fact that much of the Greek life that I was exposed to early on was everything on (fraternity row) so it was the predominantly white ones. I didn't really learn too much about (black fraternities) until, during my pledging process, til I was actually trying to become a member of Greek life, I was like, "Oh we do have black fraternities and Latino fraternities here, what are they all about?" So during all of my umm rushing events that we were required to do through (school), when you meet all... these other groups and hearing about their other events that they were having, that's when I was actually learning about them.

Me: Tell me a little about that process.

James: Ok, so basically myself and a bunch of other kids on my floor that I had become friends with, we were like, "We are gonna join a fraternity!" We were like "OK we gotta rush!" so it's like "Alright so were gonna check out these places and these places and these places and see it out." Because we had known about different events either through word of mouth, flyers emails...any way they could contact us, they were letting us know. So basically

every night I would check out a different place, and I kinda narrowed it down by kind of, just seeing where I actually was going and looking at the make-up of the fraternity. Umm so I kinda narrowed things down a little but...I guess you would say, not only because of events that they were doing but because of the...(pause) yeah the racial make-up.

Me: So did you have experiences where you said “not going there!”

James: Yes!

Me: What were the decisions about that?

James: Sometimes it would be that they’re too crazy. Sometimes it would be like I literally do not look like I would fit in with any of these kind of people. Umm and then, yeah, it was really just a matter of OK which one of these groups are making an effort to actually know me, which one of them just need me to fit numbers, and which one just does not look like I would fit in. So as I kept checking out different organizations kept putting them into those particular groups, until I found one that I could be like, “OK I feel comfortable here.”

Me: And what were the main factors and influences that you found in that organization that made you say “I feel comfortable in this group?”

James: Ok so broad view it was like the racial makeup in the sense that I am not going to solely be the only black member of this fraternity, and just stand out like that. I didn’t want to feel that uncomfortable. Umm I guess it was one of those things where that was kind of the decision I had between doing that or a black fraternity. I wanted that diversity because I knew that one of the reason why I had come to college and decided to live on campus as opposed to just commuting to school was because I wanted to be able to see what the world was really like and be able to meet different people, and I felt that kind of diversity was advantageous.

Me: So an all-white group and an all-black group was equally not attractive to you.

James: Right

Here James suggests his innate fictive kinship with other blacks and succinctly describes how his sense of “middleness” is enhanced by fraternity selection. Although he finds membership in a TWF to be consistent with his interests and seeks to maintain his less-

race based identity and esteem (Ethier & Deaux, 1994), he finds comfort in a group where at least a small portion of the membership is black or multicultural.

Robert's decision was influenced by his friendship with an existing member of the fraternity he joined;

Me: When you graduated and came to (university attended), when you got there were you planning on going Greek?

Robert: No not at all. I still wasn't. I sorta fell into it at (university) like during the first week. Once you get (there) they sort of have you on this orientation drive. They have these new student orientation people and they shepherd you to all these events and teach you how to like get your ID and find your classes, all this team-building sort of boring stuff that I didn't want to do at all. So I lived in (dorm) on (section of campus). So we come to say (main campus area) for I dunno one of those group speeches at the beginning, or to see the cafeteria, or whatever event they had planned. So I slipped away and went to go see my friend who was living in the fraternity at the time. So I'd slip away and go visit him and the fraternity was actually right on (main campus area). So like I'd be walking around as a freshman, new student and there'd be all these like older guys sitting on their porch drinking beer during the day and I was like, "Shit I wanna hang out over there!" (laughs) I'm like, "My friend is over there, they've got a keg...you've got a team building exercise...it is an easy choice for me." So I go hang out with him, meet some of the people he was living with, all the other brothers. Again I wasn't even thinking about joining at this time. I was just looking for, you know a good time. I guess this continued for...however long until rush week. Maybe two weeks after that I guess. And I just put my name on a form and they invited me to a rush party. They have these events where...pretty much its underground illegal parties that they have for freshmen. You know to try and get them to join, have the brothers come down and they tell you awesome stories about how cool the frat is, they bring you downstairs, get you drunk, get you high and tell you about how easy it is to get laid there and basically just talk up the place. So before I knew it I was pledging! I never really thought like, "Hmm..." I never sat down and considered it. I was there and was like, "Oh OK why not?" I put my name on some list and I just kept showing up.

Me: So you didn't rush any other organizations? You didn't do any shopping?

Robert: No...no I wasn't even... I wasn't shopping around.

Robert's focus on the on-campus social capital of the fraternity he joined is consistent with the views of many of the other participants; access to alcohol, meeting women and "partying" are strong influences on many of the participants in this study.

Brent, Erik and Brandon's views also echo this sentiment, as well as the influence of peers on campus;

Brent: I would say (pledging was) truly accidental. We went out looking for a party. We were a bunch of guys and guys go out looking for a party.

Me: Are these roommates, floor mates, guys you knew here?

Brent: Floor mates from (name of dorm), all the guys from that little floor, it was like its own mini-fraternity. We all went out took turns going different places.

Erik's connection to his fraternity began prior to his first semester on campus, and describes clearly the perceived social capital of fraternities. During a summer orientation, Greek organizations held parties to meet interested incoming freshmen and transfers;

Me: So tell me about your rush experience, how did you get to the point of pledging that organization? What were you looking for? Did you go to different places?

Erik: I'll tell you exactly because I remember this very vividly. I don't recall all of the night that vividly but I remember the process very vividly (laughs). When I went for orientation, you had to go for like 4 days of orientation during the summer. (It) was awesome! That's when we found most of our guys who ended up rushing was during orientation. We were at the parties. So (during) orientation I basically went to (fraternity joined), I think I went to (a different Greek org) and to (another different Greek org), and at the end of the night I ended up back at (fraternity joined). Now don't ask me what happened that night, because I have no clue. But when we came back for school in September the first house I went back to I guess subconsciously I remembered it, I went to (fraternity he ended up pledging) house, and I walked up the stairs and went through the door, and at the front door was (two members of

fraternity) standing in the doorway and I walked in and they were like, “Hey (Erik) good to see you again!” They knew me and I had no clue who they were. So I was like, “Wow that’s really cool, these guys remembered me from two months ago from a party that was packed with people!” I’m like, “I don’t remember any of that night.” I just thought, “That’s really cool.” and I hung out that night and it was like we were all best friends. It was like I had found my (hometown) at (name of school), because everybody in that house was pretty much virtually the same, there was a mirror image to my best friends in (hometown). So it wasn’t even for me, as far as where to rush, it wasn’t even a question because I was like, “I’m home, this is it. These guys they like to hang out, they’re into sports they like to drink, chase girls...” Everything that I loved, they were doing, we were brothers.

In Brandon’s case, on-campus social capital was interpreted as the size and quality of the fraternity’s house and the parties they held. He downplays the fact that the group had been suspended for what he believes may have been racially offensive behaviors, and also acknowledges the diversity of the group as an important factor;

Me: OK, so before you came to college, what knowledge of Greeks in general did you have?

Brandon: OK, I associated the Greek life with white, like white people, sororities and fraternities as white. And then when I got to college, my roommate was actually white and he said let’s go to a frat party. So I went and enjoyed myself, and the next day I was thinking maybe I can join something like this.

Me: So what was the root, the basis of your understanding of Greeks...

Brandon: The fraternal aspect of college was white, just...white boys ...whatever...big houses, parties.

Me: So then you come to school, and you...did you come to college planning to go Greek?

Brandon: No, no. Not at all, not at all.

Me: And then how did that process happen? You start rushing Greek organizations freshman year?

Brandon: Yes. The only reason I really joined the fraternity was just to party. That was my main aspect, just to party. Just an outlet for relieving stress.

Me: OK so how many organizations did you look into?

Brandon: One. Just one.

Me: So you and your roommate went to a fraternity party and you said, "I am joining this fraternity."

Brandon: Yeah...yeah.

Me: What were the criteria for that? What about that fraternity made you say, "This is why I am comfortable here."

Brandon: At the time that fraternity was the biggest fraternity as far as party-wise, we had a huge house, and I wanted that...that fun, I guess. Yeah, they were really popular, their parties were crazy, and that was pretty much it. And apparently it is really well-known, and I just wanted that uhh the connections, as far as when I graduate, post grad.

Me: Were there other black members of the group already in the group when you pledged?

Brandon: No. I think they actually got their charter back. Because there was some kind of...they lost it due to some...I don't know if it was a racist or...some inappropriate pledging process. I don't know...and then that class was dismissed, and then a couple years went by and then the new class came in. I remember that, I don't remember the exact details though.

Me: So how would you describe the racial make-up of the members of that group when you were pledging?

Brandon: OK it was predominantly white and Spanish, it was like 80 percent white, 20 percent Spanish.

Me: And were you the only African American member of your pledge group?

Brandon: No there were two blacks, well me and then another pledge brother, and two Spanish.

Me: And how many in that pledge class?

Brandon: Nine?

Me: Nine. How many ballpark members on that group at that time?

Brandon: In that group...(pause) I'd say about 75.

Brandon's apparent ease regarding the suspension of the group a few years prior to his joining is indicative of his "middleness" and suggests that he finds himself in a category where race-based issues and concerns are not applicable to him as an individual. The make-up of the group being somewhat diverse may help to ease this potential discomfort as well.

The influence of on-campus peer groups in the decision to pledge a certain fraternity is linked to the suggestion of Ethier and Deaux (1994) that;

"Students with a strong cultural background were more likely to become involved in their ethnic group at college and subsequently, to show increases in identification with that group." (Ethier & Deaux, 1994 p.249)

As well as Hogg's assertion that;

"(I)f people identify strongly with a group whose norms prescribe certain actions, then they are more likely to do those things than if they did not identify strongly (with that group)." (Hogg in Burke, 2006 p.126)

Because my participants' cultural backgrounds are less race-based, the affiliation with primarily white peers and, in turn, TWFs is predictable based on the pre-college socialization of these participants. It is familiarity based on previous experience. Ethier and Deaux's (1994) further suggestion that if that student does not have strong self-esteem toward his race and/or cultural group or does not have strong group esteem, "the need for stability of the identity should also be weaker" when encountering a new environment also suggests the decision to join a TWF is predictable (Ethier & Deaux, 1994 p.245).

Chapter Seven - Conclusion – “In the Middle”

In his 1903 work The Souls of Black Folk, W.E.B. Dubois noted, “One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” and describes as a “double consciousness” the struggle of a black man in a white-dominant American society. (DuBois, 1903/1989 p.3) He explains the experience of the African American as a “longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the former selves to be lost.” (DuBois 1903/1989 p.3)

This sensation is at the very core of the experiences of both my participants and, to the extent that they have been described by participants, their parents as well. Race-based social categorization is deemed too simplistic, hence participants describe a sensation of being “in the middle.” DuBois further asserts, however, that;

“He would not bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. 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.” (DuBois, 1903/1989 p.3)

Participants, as well as their parents, have in some important ways, attempted to separate themselves from an association with the *expectations* or stereotypes of blacks, and immersed themselves instead in DuBois’ “white Americanism.” This is consistent with the findings of NT-E as well. (Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver Worrell & Cross, 2010)

However, as both DuBois and participants note, this immersion is not complete, as complete immersion is found to be not possible due to their inherent phenotype-based

identity as blacks. Further, and more importantly than the feasibility of complete immersion, it does not appear to be the desire of participants to deny their race or attempt to portray a “raceless” existence – an effort which is arguably impossible when considering the tenets of both CRT and NT-E.

Instead, as noted in discussions ranging from high school experiences to Greek choice to encounters with racism from both whites and blacks, participants all indicated an experience of “middleness;” a less race-based identity and experience within which they did not demonstrate frustration or anger, while finding themselves insulated from being identified by peers as “black” in important cultural ways. This is not to say that they reject their blackness or fail to see it. Instead, they maintain the position that many cultural expectations, behaviors and even stereotypes simply do not apply to them. This message comes from within, from parents, and from friends and associates as well.

Michael’s descriptions of “middleness” arose out of a discussion about his fashion choices and dating criteria in high school and were the basis of utilizing the terminology “in the middle” for this study;

Michael: When I was in high school the baggy clothes were really big, and I wore a lot of baggy clothes, and then...you definitely look in the mirror a couple times and it definitely doesn’t seem right, it doesn’t feel right...

Me: OK, now would you say that was what a lot of people in your high school wore...or was this more a cultural thing?

Michael: Oh, definitely more cultural. You know...the black students... you know it’s the larger style clothing.

Me: OK, so I am sensing that even in high school there was some of this, two-sided nature to your experience?

Michael: Definitely...(pause) it's definitely two-sided, cuz I had uhh..like one of my favorite brands was Abercrombie. And I still wear that now...I really like that brand a lot...

Me: And would you consider that more of a...quote unquote (I make the quote signs with my hands)... white brand?

Michael: Definitely. Definitely a white brand. You know I think they started in like 1892, so given that era right there... and it also is made for like hiking, that something that typically black people aren't doing, so yeah definitely a white brand. And then I had uhh, I wore like Timberland boots, you know a lot of black people wore those...so it was kinda weird. It was definitely two sides.

Me: Do you remember feeling that at the time?

Michael: Oh definitely.

Me: Sort of a pull between the cultures? Where did you feel you were fitting in there?

Michael: its umm...kinda like...in the middle. You know you hear (black) people saying, "Why are you wearing white people clothing?" and then you hear white people saying, "Why are you wearing that really baggy clothing?" You know, so you're definitely in the middle and it was definitely confusing at the time.

Me: OK. And you started to touch on this at the beginning...but (another) part of the sub-question...dating rituals...

Michael: I definitely dated all over the spectrum, it's just personality. If it flowed then I was interested in that person. You know I didn't like white girls more or black girls more, it was just anything. I dated a Korean girl one time...you know I dated plenty of African American girls, I dated a white girl.

Me: Was there ever any fallout from friends, family...acquaintances?

Michael: Because of that?

Me: About your different choices...

Michael: Umm, not from my...my dad and my mom, no. But umm, my uhh, my other immediate family always wondered why I had a white girl, you know, "Why did (you) bring

a white girl to Thanksgiving?” It was definitely not a good feeling...because I don’t see that. You know? I brought them to the dinner so they can see our culture. But, I really don’t know how to answer them. It’s just, I like this person, this person makes me happy.

Me: Now was this a college experience or a high school experience?

Michael: High school experience

Me: Did you experience racism, stereotyping, judgmental comments, attitudes during high school, and...I mean you’ve sort of started to touch on this, but can you think of specific experiences or specific people, or specific contexts within which you being an African American student was the cause of behaviors, attitudes, things like that?

Michael: Um, you know I definitely experienced like, stereotype situations. Uhh, people saying “Oh you talk like a white boy” stuff like that, because my sentences were completed. Umm, it was really interesting though, because you know I can sit down with you right now and speak educatedly. But umm, you know and sound like a quote unquote “white person” but then I can go back to my family and then it’s a totally different vernacular. The words are cut off, a lot of slang, umm...

Me: And do you feel like you fall right into that naturally?

Michael: Naturally. Definitely. Definitely naturally, so umm, it’s kind of like a bilingual thing...It truly is, but you know definitely at school, you know I wasn’t speaking improperly at school, or you know umh slang. And because of that people were saying different things about me. And because of the classes I was in.

Me: Well, that’s what I was wondering. Did you ever have any judgment about classes you were in? Were you “not supposed to be in those classes”? Or was there any sort of experience like that? Or did you feel in general that your school was, was relatively open minded about what you were able to do?

Michael: Well the school was definitely open-minded. The educators were open-minded...but the students were not. I felt as though I should be in those classes, you know the AP classes, but umm, the other students, especially the black students, they felt differently about that.

Me: OK, and were these students your friends?

Michael: Umm, not particularly, umm, you know, some acquaintances. Not enemies, not really friends, just students I'd see in the hallway. It's interesting, because they say we shouldn't be in those classes, because, they were resistant to those classes, because, you know we shouldn't be like white people.

Michael's experiences provide a succinct summary of the assertions of this research regarding internal and external influences on race-based judgments, stereotypes and expectations as well as his unique positionality. Michael sees these influences, adapts and rejects them as he deems fit for his identity, and finds a connection to a fictive kinship based on race to be less influential to his esteem needs, while still maintaining a connection to his black culture.

In describing his sense of "middleness," Brandon relates a story in which he feels removed from an incident of racism involving a fraternity brother. This story, although it occurred after pledging his fraternity, is included here as it describes a culminating moment in Brandon's evaluation of his own identity;

Me: You started to suggest that you are not really in this group and you're not really in that group and your sort of coasting in some sort of...connected area.

Brandon: Yeah coasting, yeah basically just coasting yeah...I think the black and urban community...the idea that I would find black girls attractive, they're like "Oh I thought you only dated white girls?" kind of mentality. And then from the white community they would be shocked that I would like certain things that would be classified under the...not "whites only", but the predominantly white interests...

Me: Do you remember any specific examples?

Brandon: OK one time. We were coming back from a party and my frat brother was driving and an urban black guy just walked past the car...and my friend, my frat brother, almost hit him. And just out of nowhere he said "You nigger!" And he stopped and he's like "I didn't mean it like that." He went through the whole Webster vocabulary and like...he was just

ignorant, kind of. So like the whole semester he's just apologizing and apologizing...but the thing is, when he said that, I wasn't upset or anything like that. So that made me question why I wasn't upset...

Me: Did you feel that that was something that wasn't applying to you?

Brandon: Yeah exactly. Exactly.

Robert also describes his middleness in terms of conflicting messages and a feeling of being insulated from racist attitudes and actions due to his peer group, while still facing the struggles of a black man in an inherently racist society;

Robert: I feel like, umm, (pause) internally, I've thought of myself as just a guy. I always knew that I was a black guy in effectively a sea full of white people. I feel like in my immediate social groups it wasn't an issue. It wasn't a thing that I needed to be aware of. I feel like those around me would almost forget I was black. It would go from a height on the day they first met me to continually downward. But I was always aware that people who saw me who didn't know me would first see that I was black. I remember I was walking up toward (campus) one time, it was real late I was probably going to the convenience store. And a girl was coming out from a sorority house and she had a friend at the door and she was a walking out to the street and the friend who was at the door, I saw her, her eyes flipped to me for one quick second and she called "Watch out!" to her friend, who was like 10 feet from me....

Me: Wow.

Robert: Yeah. Another time I was on like (street near campus), and my friend was leaving, and as she left, someone grabbed her purse and ran off with it. And I chased the guy while we were calling the police, because he was going behind I guess the (name of restaurant chain) on (street near campus), I was chasing him. Well the police officer was nearby and he comes zooming up to the corner and he pulls his gun and he yells at me to freeze! And the guy is like 20 feet ahead crashing through the bushes and I put up my hands and I am getting on my knees and on the ground while we are telling him I am not the guy, it's him up there! So I was always aware that when people first saw me they first saw a black person. And I guess because we live in New Jersey and because it is the year that it is people would never ever

outright for the most part people would never outright say anything racist to you but I would never really know how people felt about me. I only knew about the people that I was closest with, that I would converse with. They wouldn't know that I was cool until they met me...knew me as a person. So I'd wonder if like these people that I was dealing with, especially older people, if they were giving me a fair shake in any way. They wouldn't know me, they would just see me as a black person, and that was the sort of thing that was always in the back of my mind, and it is hard to get rid of, I just knew that it was a truth of society.

Later, Robert focused on this sense of being in the middle as being something he has been aware of for a long time;

Robert: Yeah this is something that started long before high school. When I was younger I had a lot more black friends. Several I used to be friends with and hung out with on like a weekly basis when I was a kid. At a certain point in middle school or a little before that, I would start hearing uhh, I guess some push back as if I was too white for them.

Me: From the black students?

Robert: From the black students, and at the same time these were people who were actually from affluent areas too, they would start changing their speech patterns, they would start dressing differently to perform...to approach more like the black stereotype of you know I think "ghetto person" but your house is worth six hundred thousand dollars...which is just ridiculous to me. So, I never really was able to follow on that trend. So even from back then before high school I would sort of have this increasing separation between me and the other black kids that I knew. So by the time I had gone through high school, I just had it in my mind that...I probably saw it similar to the way my white friends saw it. Just take any black kid out of anywhere and probably I didn't have a lot in common with him and we probably wouldn't get along very well, we probably wouldn't even speak the same way. So that got ingrained in me over time. So by the time I came to (college) I had just been used to it; that I would be the only black kid in a group of white people. Umm, that any other black guy I saw would almost have to prove himself to me as someone that I could even get along with before I would think of them as possible social relations.

Me: And what would you think the criteria for that would be?

Robert: The way they speak. The way they act. Sort of their view. I feel like they'd have to be somehow culturally similar to me. So, if I had to sum it up, I'd say not too "ghetto" not... (pauses) I don't even know what words I would use.

Me "Not stereotypical?"

Robert: Yeah, maybe "not stereotypically black". Probably someone who went through life being told they were the whitest black guy too.

James compares his feeling of middle-ness to being a chameleon:

James: So it's always, it's like "James doesn't fit this one particular mold. He's like a combination of like ten different things." and I think that's helped not only to have me fit in with a lot of people but at times exclude myself. So for whatever role I'll fit in, I'll be cutting these people out of it because of the way I'm acting or the way I do things. I feel like I am chameleon-ing between. If I want to know... if I do fit the certain group of people that act in the same way? I am not sure because I've never met them. I don't think I've ever really seen people act like the same way I do, so it's hard for me to really judge whether or not ...like... people like that exist.

Jarrold acknowledged a similar experience, also using the term "chameleon" to describe his maneuvering;

Jarrold: I was always right in the middle and I could go either way. Didn't matter which way I went, either way I could fit in. I guess I would say a chameleon. I could go anywhere and I felt comfortable and I could fit in anywhere... Yeah it's kinda unique because, if you were going into the projects...for me I felt comfortable going into the projects, but you know somebody white they wouldn't go in there.

Marc's experiences in "the middle" focus on the push and pull of friends of differing races;

Marc: I would say...I've been called like ... I don't really understand it but like, "Yo you're white, dude." And I was like "why because I talk a little proper?" Like, "What does black sound like? What do you mean?" It's all stereotypical...like to be black you have to be like rappers act, or something...It's pretty silly. I think culturally we are supposed to try to uplift ourselves, not bring us down. ...I definitely see things...differently. I mean I don't consider...I always consider myself as being African American but I never tried to...let anything like just affect me just cuz of my race though.

Me: Do you think that there were factors other than race that were as influential? Do you think where you grew up, or the schools you attended, or leaving that high school, or any of that stuff? What other factors do you think were at play?

Marc: A lot of it was definitely growing up where I grew up, and a lot of it was sports too I would say. Because with sports, I grew up in a predominantly white town, but sports I would...more towards...I would go to Atlantic City and things like this town (name of town) next to me that is more predominantly black and I would play there more often. And that is how I met a lot of my African American friends. So whenever I went around, like one of my friends joked around and was like, when we went to...now that we go to Atlantic City since we are 21...he was like "Man you know all the blacks...you know everybody. You know all the black people." And I was like "Yeah I guess...." And I think that a big part of that was just, I played basketball. I met tons of people just from playing basketball in other communities. I'd say sports is how I got probably most of my African American friends, not from growing up...like in those communities like Atlantic City...so that is how it influenced me.

Me: Do you think it gave you...is being black in that experience something that maybe if you had been white you wouldn't have been able to do that?

Marc: Yeah...I would say probably...my friends they probably wouldn't feel as comfortable going there.

Me: So what about the other side, if you showed up as a prom date in Linwood how would that have gone over? Did you have any of that side of the experience? Any of that "but he's black" experience.

Marc: Yeah I would say that. I mean like if I had gone to like a girl's house and she's having like people over for a party or a get together and her parents were there it was a little weird getting introduced...like to her parents just cuz...I don't know...

Marc: Do you think it was weird for them, weird for you, or both?

Marc: I think it was probably maybe both. A little weird for me cuz I was the *only one*, (his strong emphasis) so it was a little weird.

Later in the conversation, Marc describes the sense of being pulled in different directions by white friends and black friends;

Marc: Well the first thing that pops into my mind is when I was at the private high school. It was like the first day, and one of the kids, he was like from my area and the first day for lunch I saw...I was sitting with him and it was a predominantly white table, and then there's the athletes, the black kids, and they are like, "Yo (Marc) what are you doing? Come over here!" and I was like UUGHH...(laughs) I only knew like two of them, but umm...it wasn't really like...nothing...I mean I guess in some certain situations that would happen. You kinda feel in the middle. That's one example...

Marc then recounted an incident that clearly and succinctly illustrates both his sense of "middleness" and his inextricable race-based fictive kinship;

Marc: Yeah like...for one thing one of my friends... we were in Atlantic City, and like he is actually like...he is all into hip hop music, dresses like (a rapper)...this is a white guy...and he's all into that.... and he was a little drunk and he was like...I was coming down the steps in the casino and he was like, "That's my nigga" and another black kid heard him and I was like "Oh my God.." and it got a little ugly...and I was like, "He's cool, it's OK!" And they were a little mad but I was like, "Yo it's alright don't worry he's a little messed up but he cool though" and that chilled it out...I mean things like that happen.

In this moment, a black man previously described as "you're white dude" who is playfully referred to as "my nigga" by an intoxicated white friend chooses friendship over fictive kinship, yet is able to quell the potential uproar by invoking fictive kinship to calm

nearby blacks who overhear the comment. This is a moment that embodies the tension, the push and pull, of the unique positionality of “middleness” in my participants.

In Brent’s case, the recognition of “middleness” stemmed from a discussion with his parents about why he chose to join a white fraternity, his views of black fraternities, and his struggles with societal and cultural labels and assumptions such as the culturally biased assertion that being “articulate” is somehow the exception to the rule for blacks. However, he also notes the forceful intention with which he navigates his experience;

Brent: I think my mom being from Birmingham may have asked (why I was joining a white fraternity) but I told her flat out I said, “look ma I don’t get treated like.... umm...a token member. I don’t get treated like I am special. No one tells me I am ‘articulate,’ no one tells me anything. Guys hang out with me and they treat me like I want to be treated and I can’t get that anywhere else.” And you get that where you can find it and you find it where it falls on you. In the black fraternity I would not have those relationships. And that was my experience in life because when I was around most... I’d say... darker skinned African-American males, if you were light skinned like me you didn’t understand. You know? It is not that I didn’t get along with *any* (his emphasis) but a lot of the ones I did looked at me as...you know... my dad was white collar so I wasn’t coming from the tracks, I didn’t live on Martin Luther King Boulevard so to speak so there was a bit of an issue there, when they hear me talk you know...most of my racism was from black people. “You talk like you think you’re so good.” That was the overt racism, it wasn’t institutionalized...I think that people make value judgments on what they see...So, if you grew up and most of the African Americans you knew were thuggish and weren’t interested in graduating high school because it is generational at this point, then you internalize what you know. And what you hear or see about me before you get to know me, you see a broad nose and big lips but back then when I had hair it wasn’t a tight curl but it was curly enough to give the idea that I’m a mixed race kid. But maybe you’re thinking about the kids *you* grew up with and how *their* families were and what *they* did. And I don’t know who those families were, and everyone had their own set of experiences. And so that transfers on to me before you can make an accurate assessment of who I am. You’re kind of projecting who I am.

Me: So how much of that sensation, just what you said, things being projected on you and you sort of feeling it and sensing it and being in a couple of different camps. How much of that has had an influence on you?

Brent: I think it is a constant. As I've gotten older and been through the schooling and learned about...various aspects of psychology, sociology you pick up here and there you start to really reflect on your life and you look at it.... and I have essentially been fighting, probably since puberty, when I began to recognize when I got to (name of town) in 6th or 7th grade....see that was the big change, (name of city) was so mixed that even though I got a little bit of it there were so many racially mixed kids it wasn't so bad. But when I got to (name of same town as above)...I think that I've been fighting to assert who I am when I walk in the door. That has been the overriding influence, I believe, as I've grown up. I mean obviously having a foundation at home is what allowed me to react to it, you know and I've got my dad's looks so to speak, my mom's tallness, and all that stuff gets passed down. Even to an extent, certain personality traits are passed down. I am sure I am a hybrid of those two and that has allowed me to deal with things and interpret them a certain way and move forward. But umm that...understanding of how I fit in society? Umm I think I've internalized it to an extent that I have to do things a certain way in order for me to be happy with where I am and that is to assert and to umm force an understanding of who I am and what my boundaries are and you know you can accept me either way but this is what is going on. It has forced me to make sure that my words are articulate, and proper, that my vocabulary is up...

Me: Do you think you do that intentionally?

Brent: I know I do it intentionally! First words...what I was always taught, umm when you first meet a person and you walk in the door, they are going to one look at you and make a value judgment on how you're dressed and what you look like, and then when you open your mouth or you go to shake their hand, look them in the eye, they are going to start to really formulate and solidify whatever prejudices they have and whatever understanding of you they have in that first five minutes.

Me: So you talk about earlier in life you have people saying, "Oh you're really articulate," like it's unusual, because you're black, that you're articulate.

Brent: Yes! (emphatic)

Me: But also, that... would you agree that you do have an intentional way of being articulate because you want to break the expectations of people who are making that first value judgment of you.

Brent: Yes! (very emphatic) A great intention because you have to step into the room and I have to shatter their expectations they had formulated when I walked in the door. Before I even open my mouth. Before I even walked in, what they had. And they may not know who I am but when I walk in the door shake their hand and look them in the eye, we have to establish this relationship based on something more than a lesser expectation of me.

Here, Brent describes another area of the tension created by “middleness” in participants. He resents the suggestion that being black and articulate is somehow unusual, yet admits that he focuses with intent on his articulate way of speaking.

In discussion with Erik, who was in college in the 1980s, he recounts his current life experiences and describes his “middleness” as something he feels comfortable with and does not find as intentional or as overt as some of the other participants. He acknowledges his race-based fictive kinship, but explains that ultimately he is not as comfortable in that environment.

Erik: I totally walk in both worlds...

Me: How so?

Erik: Well, my life after college mirrors the same experience; I am usually only the black guy in the room. So my world hasn't really changed, however if in my business dealings I am with the “brothers”...we have an understanding, I know what's going on...it is what it is. I know who I am, I have no illusions. I have a mirror in my house, you know what I mean? I've got the radar I know what the radar says. I can smell stuff out and know what it is...and again it's like, “You know I know who I am.” No misconceptions about that. But I can walk in both worlds.

Me: Did anyone ever give you the sense that the way you were was unusual for what you were? Do you think anyone ever looked at you and said, “You’re different?”

Erik: I don’t think so...I was always aware that, “Yes I am the only one in the room.” but (laughs) I was so accustomed to it, it doesn’t register to me...it started happening to me when I was so young I don’t know any different from that. I feel more uncomfortable in a room full of black people than I do in a room full of white people.

Me: And why is that?

Erik: Because I am not used to that. I didn’t grow up with that.

Erik goes on to discuss how even today that feeling has not changed as he describes a moment of clarity;

Erik: I was on business in New York with a friend of mine. He’s a colleague and we were going to go meet these girls, and they happened to be black. And my friend, this girl, said to meet her and her friend at this club, and we didn’t know the club or whatever. So me and my buddy we go down to this club to meet these two girls...and he’s a white guy... and we walk into this place and there is not a white face in the place. He is just Casper in this sea of darkness. (Laughs) So we go up to the bar, we order our drinks, and everybody was cool, nobody even blinked or anything. So we order our drinks and I look at him and go “Feels weird doesn’t it?” and he is like “What are you talking about?” I am like “Feels a little strange right now doesn’t it?” He looks around and goes, “Yeah a little bit.” I go, “This is my world... what you’re experiencing right now I’ve done all my life.” And he was like, “Ok, I get it.” Now if I didn’t have the upbringing that I had? And I got put in that situation? I am sure it would be uncomfortable. I am sure I would feel differently.

Erik’s assertion that he “walks in both worlds” is central to the socialization experiences of each participant in this study. Throughout their discussions, participants have repeatedly detailed experiences that align with this notion of balancing a life that is both inherently centered in the blackness of their skin and profoundly influenced by a

socialization experience seen as “white” or “whiter”. They “ever see their twoness” (DuBois 1903/1989) as they navigate this experience of being “in the middle.”

Summary

The participants of this study developed identities shaped by parental, internal, and peer influences, most of them couched in a predominantly white suburban upbringing with all of the inherent ramifications and socialization experiences. They adapted many identity characteristics, beliefs, and attitudes formed by internal and external forces - both black and white – that were described as “white” or “not black enough”; white friends, white behaviors, white attitudes, a white way of speaking, academic pursuits as a white ideal, and more. However in a society where racism is inherent in the system, one can never extricate himself from his blackness, or whiteness or Asian-ness or any other of the myriad of possibilities. Participants have accepted this duality, this “middleness” as who they are.

They possess, perhaps, social *identities* as opposed to a social identity; a phenotype-driven inescapable black fictive kinship, and an identity that is developed through immersion in a predominantly white social experience; a modern interpretation of the “twoness” described by DuBois. These identities are shaped by experience and are emphasized and deemphasized as conditions and situations warrant.

When participants with a weak cultural (black) background move to the new environment of “college” they do things that support the salient characteristics with which they have high esteem and seek to deemphasize the characteristics that have less esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, Ethier & Deaux, 1994). As a result of the negative connotations of stereotypes about “blackness” from both internalized beliefs and external forces, they find

themselves often “the only black guy in the room.” Their comfort in this role, and their de-emphasis of socially-defined and externally-applied black cultural expectations and actions, is the result of parenting, schooling and socialization, and is consistent with the tenets of SIT (Tajfel, 1981, Tajfel & Turner, 1986, Ethier & Deaux, 1994, Hogg, 2006).

This result is further consistent with Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver Worrell and Cross’ (2010) assertions of multiple identities for blacks and the attitudes, preferences and behaviors of blacks living within a predominantly white culture in which they “endorse attitudes that emphasize negative stereotypes about African Americans as a collective.” However, as noted, participants did not fully reject their race based fictive kinship or attempt to pursue a “raceless” perspective. As Cross et.al.’s NT-E states there are a myriad of identity characteristics and personalities in black culture (Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell, and Cross, 2010). There is not one set identity that is “black.” The struggle between the inherently racist society and immersion in white culture, and the message given by parents and others that regardless of self-perception you will be judged as “black” in this society, found them oscillating in this “middle.” And it is an ever-changing middle, it is not solid ground. It is a situational middle, and an “over time” middle, as SIT would suggest (Tajfel, 1978, Ethier and Deaux, 1994).

It depends on their environment, for example home versus school, black peers versus white peers. Examples of this are seen throughout the study; participants alter their ways, they adapt, they chameleon. And they do it with intent. They do not attempt a raceless identity, and, as suggested by CRT, racelessness is not fully possible. Instead a less-race based identity is sought; a desire to be seen via other characteristics beyond an immutable phenotype and the stereotypes applied by an inherently racist society. These participants are

navigating through experience, over time and through space, just as we all do. But they find through their socialization, their environment, and their acculturation, a *stronger*, but not all-inclusive identification - a *stronger* social identity - in a predominantly white group that accepts them, although they are different, as a brother.

As a result, the participants of this study made a conscious and intentional decision to select membership in a group that, at least to the casual observer, does not represent their racial identities, their needs, or their interests. Along the way they are breaking stereotypes, rejecting bias from both members of their own race as well as potentially that of the predominant race in the fraternities they have selected, and helping create a more truly multicultural Greek system.

Other Findings

Other findings regarding participant data deserve mention as this study reaches its conclusion. Although the older participants - Erik and Robert and Jarrod - were, as presumed, able to reflect more deeply on their experiences, there did not appear to be a great deal of difference between their actual pre-college and pledging experiences and those of the younger participants. Their reflections on high school experiences, views and experiences with HBFs, and the sensing of their “middleness” were quite similar to those of the men who were more recent graduates.

Significant to the experiences of several participants was the presence of another black member or members in these fraternities. Further investigation into this area may yield pertinent data about the decision making process as well as the in-group experience of these participants.

Suggestions for Further Research

This unique population presents many possibilities for additional research. Participants of this study provide evidence for describing the possibility of developing social identities in between conventional categories of black and white. Beyond a “social identity,” and consistent with Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver Worrell and Cross’ (2010) work, the reality of multiple black identities challenges the mainstream categories of not only “being black” but of race identity writ large. The participants of this study describe a social identity that is malleable, situational, and pragmatic. Further research into such identities, their development and their application both situationally and over time is needed to better understand this unique positionality.

Further research into the parental influence on this phenomenon would be quite interesting. The importance of parental influence on these participants is irrefutable, yet all information in this study regarding parental attitudes, beliefs, concerns, and more, is anecdotal. An in-depth examination of parental influences via interviews and data collection gleaned directly from parents would provide for triangulation validity of the data provided here and would be exceptionally interesting. Newsome (2009) and Hughey (2010) explored the membership experiences of black men in white fraternities, but further investigation into those narratives, perhaps as a comparative study of precollege and in-group experiences of black men who joined HBFs would also be an invaluable contribution to the literature. Of course, a comparative study of black women who joined traditionally white

sororities versus historically black sororities would be a valuable addition to the dialog as well.

Another under-researched and quite compelling area of inquiry stemming from this study is the phenomenon of Jack and Jill of America - especially regarding views, opinions and experiences of members. Studies regarding JJA membership and college and/or greek organization selection, for example, would be exceptionally interesting. A better understanding of the unique population of black youth and their parents who accept membership in this exclusive, invitation-only organization would fill a gap in the literature on blacks, black and white culture, black cultural and educational goals and experiences and more.

Limitations of the Study

Although this paper, and the research within, was prepared and presented with the utmost of care and academic rigor, limitations certainly still exist. There are several factors regarding the nature of this study that limit the breadth of its outcomes. Subjectivity or incorrect analysis of my participants' views and responses to my questions might serve to misrepresent their views. The study relies primarily on a single interview with each participant; more extensive follow up interviews and discussion may also have benefitted this work. Further, this study relies on a small population that may not be generalizable to the larger population of men who made similar fraternity-choice decisions.

Other issues regarding validity stem from facts such as all but one participant grew up in a limited area within the mid-Atlantic region. Studies of similar populations in other regions of the US may provide differing results. Participants joined fraternities defined as

traditionally white but some had nominal minority membership; some participants even noted this in their interviews as a reason for feeling somewhat more comfortable in their decision. A study strictly of solitary black members of otherwise all-white groups may yield differing results as well. Further, participants did not specifically identify as African American, but as “black.” As such, participants included two individuals of Haitian descent, one Nigerian and one “mixed race.” Cultural influences and differences, some of them noted in this paper, might differ greatly from those of a population made up of individuals who identify specifically as African Americans.

Also, although noted in the findings that attitudes and views did not significantly vary between older participants and more recent alumni and current members of their fraternities, views of these younger men may change over time as they have a chance to distance themselves from their experience and reflect further on their own opinions.

Significance of the Study

Universities champion diversity as an important aspect of the educational experience. As the population of the United States continues to diversify in the 21st Century, so too will the college campus. As suggested by Boschini and Thompson (1998) it is in the best interest of the Greek systems at universities nationwide to model that diversity in their ranks. The challenges of further diversifying a system long seen as separated along cultural lines are many, however successfully enhancing Greek diversity to closer reflect campus populations may serve as a reflection of stronger ties to school for students of color, increasing involvement and retention for a vast number of populations. The experiences of these participants serve to inform that dialog. From admissions counselors, to Greek affairs

professionals, to members of Greek organizations themselves, a better understanding of the views and experiences of this population may also serve as a catalyst for a more serious dialog regarding the many unique and diverse populations on campus.

Epilogue

As I prepare to submit this dissertation in October of 2013, four black women have recently been given bids to pledge traditionally white sororities at The University of Alabama (Blinder, 2013b). This marks the first time since 2003 that a black student had been granted a bid to a white Greek organization at the school and represents a landmark event compared by those involved to George Wallace's blocking of the schoolhouse door in 1963 (Blinder, 2013 a & b). The bids were granted six days after a campus-wide protest against the segregated nature of the school and its Greek system (Blinder, 2013b).

Those involved acknowledge that the University of Alabama is a long way from resolving its racial segregation issues (Blinder, 2013 a&b), but this is certainly a step in the right direction. We will, however, have to wait and see if these women are able and willing to persist in pledging the groups in question. Perhaps more importantly, we will want to know why they chose to do so.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Factors Affecting a Black Male's Decision to Join a Traditionally White Fraternity -Matthew J. Winkler

First, I would like to thank you again for participating in this study. As you know, this is the third step in a multi-step process, the first two consisting of your journal comments regarding the research topic and the on-line data collection questionnaire. Today we are going to discuss in more detail the topics that were initially addressed in those first two activities. I will be recording this session to ensure that your views are represented accurately and so that I can maintain accurate information throughout my continued research. I would like to reiterate that your identity and all of your comments will remain confidential throughout my research process. As noted on the consent form, all of your info will be coded to maintain this confidentiality and your info will only be used in the context of my research.

Pre-college Experience

1 – Tell me about where and how you grew up.

(intentionally general, do not lead here, participant knows the topic, let them go, identify what they think is important. Follow-ups are wrapped into second question)

2 – Tell me about your family life.

(This may get folded into first question – mixed together as we sort out the details I seek about family structure, suburban/rural/urban house type neighborhood demographics etc., I may also touch on items from on line survey for member checking)

3a – Tell me about your high school, and your experiences there.

3b - What were your friends like?

3c - What activities were you involved in?

3d – What kind of student were you academically?

(look for types of activities, level of involvement, academic tracking, friend descriptions and diversity, etc.)

4a – Tell me about your musical interests before and during college.

4b – Your fashion and clothing style choices before and during college?

4c – Your dating rituals and criteria for potential relationships?

5- How do you think your experiences during high school, both in school and at home, affected these preferences?

4 – Did you experience racism, stereotyping, judgmental comments or attitudes in high school and, if so, in what contexts?

(might need to clarify personal experience versus witnessing it or feeling it in general at school)

5a – In what ways was being black an influence on, or influenced by, your upbringing and living situation? Can you give me some examples?

5b – How important do you feel your race is/was to your family, how was it emphasized or de-emphasized?

Intro to Greek Life

6 – What knowledge and/or opinions did you have about fraternities and Greeks in general *prior* to coming to college? (Black Greeks? Greeks in general?)

7 – Did you come to college planning to go Greek?

8 – Tell me about your experiences “rushing” fraternities once you came to campus. Why did you want to join? What were you looking for? Things like that.

9 – (If not answered in question 8 above) – Did you consider joining an historically Black fraternity while rushing? Why or why not?

10 – What were the main factors and influences that pointed you toward the specific fraternity that you joined?

11 – (If not answered in number 10 above) - Were there any other black members of that group and if so/if not how did that influence you?

12 – What kind of feedback did you get from you family and friends and others from home and here at school regarding your decision to join a traditionally White fraternity?

Group Identity and Race

13 – Up to this point in your life, how much of an influence has being Black had on your life and experiences, and in what ways? Internally? Externally?

14 – What factors other than race do you feel have been as influential or more influential in your life so far?

Wrap-up and Clarifications

17 – Am I missing something? Are there factors, influences, frames of reference - things about you and your experiences prior to college that had an effect on your choice of fraternity?

18 – Is there anything we've talked about today that you'd like to review, provide additional information about or clarify?

19 – Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you so much for your time and your continued participation in my study.

APPENDIX B

Factors Affecting a Black Male's Decision to Join a Traditionally White Fraternity - Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Matthew J. Winkler, M.Ed.; a Doctoral Student in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University. The purpose of his research is to explore the social cultural and historical factors affecting Greek Organization choices for Black males on the campuses of large state universities and the outcomes of these decisions. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are as Black male who is an alumnus or currently an undergraduate member of a traditionally White Fraternity.

If you do not understand any part of this consent form, do not sign it. Please ask Mr. Winkler to explain anything you do not understand, including any language contained in this form. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and a copy will be given to you. Keep this form, in it you will find contact information and answers to questions about the study. You may ask to have this form read to you.

The meetings required for your participation in this study will take place in a mutually agreeable location. Your total anticipated time of participation will be approximately 4 to 5 hours. The study procedures include journaling, completion of an on-line questionnaire, an in-depth interview, and a follow-up meeting.

-The Journal exercise will include your reflections on the subject matter, more information will be provided by Mr. Winkler.

-The questionnaire will be brief and include only general information about you and your K-12 schooling history, personal family information, and background.

-The interview will be conducted at a mutually agreeable location. The interview will take approximately 1-2 hours depending on the depth of our discussion and the breadth and completeness of your answers.

-The follow-up meeting will be held at a mutually agreeable time and location, and will include a review of your information and Mr. Winkler's analysis as well as follow-up questions from either party.

NOTE: Your interview(s) and follow up meeting(s) will be audio-taped. Audio-taping is performed strictly for future reference and transcription purposes

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be assigned a random pseudonym that will be used in connection with the questionnaire and in the transcription of your interview. Your pseudonym will be used to identify you within all the study materials. Therefore, data collection is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you, such as your name, school you attend(ed) and Greek Organization to which you belong(ed). Mr. Winkler will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. Your name or other info that could connect you to your information will not appear in the research. The researcher and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

There are no costs associated with participating in this study, and there will be no financial payment for your involvement in this study.

(PLEASE TURN OVER)

If you have any questions about the study procedures, you may contact Mr. Winkler at (732) 445-2050 x108 or via email at mwinkler@sas.rutgers.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Sponsored Programs Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Please sign below indicating that you agree to participate in this research study and will allow your answers to be audio-taped. If you have any questions or there is something you do not understand, please ask.
You will receive a copy of this consent document.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Print Name _____

APPENDIX C

On-line Pre-interview information survey questions and charts:**Question 1****Please enter your assigned Study Participant Number: (entered 1-9)****Question 2****Describe the geographic area where you grew up? (Please check all that apply)**

Answer Choices	Responses
Urban	33.33% 3
Suburban	77.78% 7*
Rural	0% 0
Other	0% 0

*(Note: one individual indicated two locations)

Question 3**What type of dwelling did you live in while growing up? (If you lived in/moved to more than one type of dwelling on the list, please check all that apply)**

Answer Choices	Responses
Apartment/Condominium	11.11% 1
Townhouse/Duplex	0% 0
Multi-family house	11.11% 1
Single family house	77.78% 7

Question 4**While growing up I lived primarily:**

Answer Choices	Responses
With both parents	77.78% 7
With my mother	11.11% 1
With my father	0% 0
With a family member other than my parent(s)	0% 0
Other (please specify) One participant lived at times with either parent	11.11% 1

Question 5**What year did you graduate from high school?**

1999

2011

1991

1986

1988

2003

2005

2005

(Note one student misread the question and indicated the name of his high school as opposed to graduation date – this date is estimated in his bio)

Question 6**Estimated annual household income for your family during your high school years:**

Answer Choices	Responses
Below \$29,999	0% 0
\$30,000 to 49,999	11.11% 1
\$50,000 to 79,999	11.11% 1

Answer Choices	Responses
\$80,000 to 99,999	11.11% 1
\$100,000 or more	66.67% 6

Question 7**Describe the geographic location of your high school:***

Answer Choices	Responses
Urban	22.22% 2
Suburban	77.78% 7
Rural	0% 0

*One participant attended both a suburban and urban high school but selected only “urban.”

Question 8**Describe the affiliation of your high school:***

Answer Choices	Responses
Public	66.67% 6
Private	22.22% 2
Religious	11.11% 1

*The same participant as noted in Question 7 attended both a religious school and a public school but selected only “public.”

How would you describe the demographics of your high school?

Answer Choices	Responses
Primarily White	77.78% 7
Primarily Black	0% 0
Equally mixed racially	22.22% 2
Primarily Other	0% 0

Complete transcripts of all participant interviews are available upon request
by contacting the author at matt.winkler@gse.rutgers.edu