Clubs and the Campus Racial Climate: Student Organizations and Interracial Friendship in College

Julie J. Park

Journal of College Student Development, Volume 55, Number 7, October 2014, pp. 641-660 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: 10.1353/csd.2014.0076

For additional information about this article

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/csd/summary/v055/55.7.park.html
Clubs and the Campus Racial Climate: Student Organizations and Interracial Friendship in College

Julie J. Park

This study uses data from the National Longitudinal Study of Freshmen to examine the racial/ethnic composition of student organizations as well as the relationship between student organization participation and close interracial friendship. White students were the most likely to be in majority White environments in fraternities and sororities, while religious groups were the environments where Black and Asian American students were most likely to gather with same-race peers. Participating in Greek life, religious groups, and ethnic student organizations were negative predictors of having at least one close friend of another race/ethnicity. Students of color had higher rates of close interracial friendship than White students, and students attending racially diverse campuses were more likely to have close interracial friendship. Implications for student organizations and their impact on the campus racial climate are discussed.

Many students grow up in segregated environments (Orfield, 2009); college may be the first time that they have the opportunity to live, learn, and work in a racially diverse environment. Accordingly, positive cross-racial interaction and interracial friendship are key indicators of a healthy campus racial climate (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). Simply put, a campus can be racially diverse, but if students are not engaging with one another, it is unlikely that they will reap the benefits of engaging in a diverse student body. Such benefits include positive learning outcomes, critical thinking, and overall satisfaction with college (antonio et al., 2004; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002; Tanaka, 2003).

The picture that emerges from large-scale quantitative studies is that cross-racial interaction and interracial friendship happen in a fairly linear matter: generally speaking, the more racially heterogeneous the student body, the more likely that engagement across race will occur (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Fischer, 2008; Sænz, 2010). Other between-college predictors of cross-racial interaction and interracial friendship include region, size, selectivity, and institutional control (Chang et al., 2004). While we know something about the variables that account for variance between institutions’ levels of cross-racial interaction, we know less about the peer environments of a university that contribute to variation in cross-racial interaction within campuses. Even on a racially diverse campus, not all students will experience diversity in the same manner because certain students may spend more time in racially homogeneous peer groups (Milem, Chang, & antonio, 2005).

Student organizations are peer environments that potentially influence cross-racial interaction and interracial friendship. Research suggests that at least three types of student organizations—Greek life, ethnic student organizations, and campus religious groups—tend to be racially homogeneous. Fraternities

Julie J. Park is Assistant Professor of Counseling, Higher Education, & Special Education at the University of Maryland, College Park.
and sororities are often racially isolated, majority White environments (Milem et al., 2005; Park, 2008; Sidanius, Levin, van Laar, & Sears, 2008), even on racially diverse campuses (Chen, 1998). Ethnic student organizations tend to be racially and/or ethnically homogeneous, which is unsurprising given the mission of these groups (Sidanius et al., 2008). Finally, campus religious organizations are often racially homogeneous communities (R. Kim, 2006). While numerous single-institution studies of these student organizations highlight their tendency to be racially homogeneous, no study to date has examined the racial composition of these groups with national data, leaving unanswered questions about these environments. If students spend the majority of time in such groups, participation may affect student involvement in the broader diversity of the institution. Beyond ethnic and Greek organizations, research is scant on how other types of student organizations might affect the campus racial climate.

In this paper I examine how a range of student organizations (ethnic, Greek, religious, career, service, arts, and intramural sports) may hinder or facilitate interracial interaction and friendship. Specifically, three questions guided this research: Does the distribution of students of different racial/ethnic groups vary significantly between different student organizations? Are students of different races/ethnicities more or less likely to spend time with same-race peers in certain student organizations? Finally, is participating in a certain type of student organization a significant predictor of having at least one close friend of another race/ethnicity during the fourth year of college? Given both the rarity and relevance of interracial friendship in broader society (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006), findings will provide educators with critical information regarding conditions that appear to support or deter interracial friendship in the collegiate environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Overview of Interracial Friendship

Allport’s contact hypothesis (1954) states that interracial interaction reduces prejudice when individuals have equal status contact, institutional support, cooperative interdependence, and are in pursuit of common goals. Adding to Allport’s work, Pettigrew (1998) asserts that there must be opportunities for friendship in order for healthy intergroup contact to occur, underscoring the role of interracial friendship in facilitating healthy intergroup relations. Interracial friendship is associated with a number of benefits, including empathy for a different racial/ethnic group, positive racial attitudes, and reduced prejudice (Levin, van Laar, & Sidanius, 2003; McClelland & Linnander, 2006; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Powers & Ellison, 1995). Interracial friendships can facilitate intergroup relations by creating bridges between various sectors of society. Racial diversity in social networks are a valuable source of social capital given that “ties to dissimilar others provide access to non-redundant information, resources, and opportunities” (Wong, 2009, p. 1).

Additionally, research on the processes involved in cross-group friendships suggests that there may be particular benefits associated with close interracial friendships. Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, and Wright (2011) define cross-group friendship as “an ongoing, meaningful relationship with a specific outgroup member or members that was closer than that of a mere acquaintance (in which the relationship is based solely on familiarity)” (p. 334), and interracial friendship is one type of cross-group friendship. In their meta-analysis of studies on cross-group friendships, they found that the benefits were most pronounced when friends spent more time together and had higher levels of self-disclosure. They suggested that these behaviors
Clubs and the Campus Racial Climate

reflect strong emotional bonds, which assist individuals in ascribing positive traits from the specific friendship onto the broader outgroup (Pettigrew, 1998). This dynamic suggests that close interracial friendships hold special potential for contributing to positive intergroup relations in broader society.

Challenges to Promoting Interracial Friendship

Despite the many benefits associated with interracial friendship, they are rare. In 2004, only 15% of US adults stated that they had a friend of another race with whom they discussed important matters (McPherson et al., 2006). Racially diverse universities are an environment ripe for promoting interracial friendship, but findings on rates of interracial friendship in college settings are mixed. Cross-racial interaction is more likely to come from casual socializing and roommate relationships rather than through close interracial friendships and dating relationships (Espenshade & Radford, 2009). Antonio (2001) found that 45.8% of students at a highly diverse institution reported a friendship group that was not dominated by a single ethnic group, but only 19.9% had friendship groups with no majority racial group. Multiple studies have found that White students are the most likely to have homogeneous friendship groups (Aries, 2008; Espenshade & Radford, 2009; Stearns, Buchmann, & Bonneau, 2009).

Why is interracial friendship difficult to promote, even within college settings? First, pervasive residential and school segregation in the US hinders interracial friendship at the K–12 level (Joyner & Kao, 2000; Mouv & Entwisle, 2006). Students’ precollege levels of interracial friendship affect their friendship patterns during college, even when the structural diversity of the institution they attend is controlled (Fischer, 2008). Although college plays a role in breaking this cycle of segregation (Saenz, 2010), it is important to note that students generally do not come to college as clean slates when it comes to friendship: they are shaped by their prior environments and socialization (Park & Chang, in press).

Second, social relationships like friendship tend to form along lines of perceived similarity; the term homophily is used to explain the phenomenon of like attracts like (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Homophily occurs most frequently among racial/ethnic lines because race/ethnicity is known as a “consolidated characteristic” (Blau & Schwartz, 1984). Because background traits such as religion, education, income, and residential background are highly correlated with race, people who share a racial background often share other social attributes, thus increasing the chance that they will perceive each other as being similar (R. Kim, 2006; Park, Denson, & Bowman, 2013). Individual choice also influences friendship networks, and some students may deliberately seek out social environments that are more or less diverse (antonio, 2004); however, beyond personal agency, social forces such as homophily and propinquity affect friendship group diversity.

Proximity Matters: The Role of Propinquity

Propinquity describes how the proximity between people influences the likelihood of their forming a relationship (Sigelman & Welch, 1993). As a result, friendship groups often reflect the demography of the environment where an individual spends most of his or her time (antonio, 1998). Propinquity explains why three elements of the college experience—structural diversity, roommates, and student subcultures—shape the opportunity for and likelihood of students forming interracial friendships. First, propinquity explains why structural diversity—the racial demography of the institution—influences friendship
diversity during college. Simply put, interracial friendships are literally impossible without the availability of diverse peers (Blau & Schwartz, 1984). Structural diversity is a significant predictor of having a close friend of another race during college, even when precollege friendship and high school racial composition are controlled for (Bowman, 2012; Fischer, 2008; Park, 2012). Structural diversity also influences interracial friendship because the lack of a critical mass of students of color can result in tokenization and marginalization, increasing the likelihood that cross-racial interactions will be of a more tense, negative nature (Kanter, 1977; Hurtado et al., 1998).

Low structural diversity increases the likelihood that students of color will spend more time in *counterspaces*, seeking refuge and support from other students of color instead crossing racial/ethnic lines (Levin et al., 2003; Park, 2013; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Propinquity also explains why having a roommate of another race is a consistent predictor of interracial friendship during college (Stearns et al., 2009; van Laar, Levin, Sinclair, & Sidanius, 2005; Carmago, Stinebrickner, & Stinebricker, 2010; Schofield, Hausmann, Ye, & Woods, 2010). Because roommates are highly proximate to one another, having a roommate of another race often facilitates casual or close friendship across racial lines. Also, having a roommate of another race heightens the likelihood of coming into contact with others of another race through one another’s friends, contributing to potential friendship diversity. Most studies on the effects of interracial roommates are single-institution studies (see for example Carmago et al., 2010; Stearns et al., 2009), and most only examine interracial friendships at the end of the first year of college (see for example Schofield et al., 2010; Shook & Fazio, 2008), leaving questions about whether the effect of having a roommate of another race persists through college. However, Carmago et al. (2010) found that White students randomly assigned to Black roommates had a significantly larger percentage of Black friends than White students who roomed with White students, and the effect persisted over college. (The student’s roommate was not included in the friendship count.) Saenz (2010) did not examine the specific outcome of interracial friendship, but he found that having a roommate from a “different background” positively predicted positive cross-racial interaction at the end of the second year of college in a sample with 10 public institutions.

Third, propinquity helps explain why the racial composition of student subcultures that exist within the student body likely affects the formation of interracial friendships. Subcultures are characterized by persistent interaction between members, and there are certain subcultures that tend to promote tighter social bonds and closer relationships for their members (Magolda & Ebben Gross, 2009; Newcomb, 1966). Because such communities generally require high levels of commitment from members, they intentionally or inadvertently discourage students from forming relationships outside of the subculture. The individuals within the subculture are the most proximate, increasing the likelihood that the student will form relationships within the subculture instead of outside of it. Racially homogeneous student subcultures discourage the formation of interracial friendships because there are fewer opportunities for cross-racial interaction, let alone friendship across race (Blau & Schwartz, 1984). Logically, sustained involvement in racially homogeneous environments can result in friendship groups that are racially homogeneous (antonio, 1998). Students generally do not spend time in only one subculture of the university. Still, student subcultures are venues for peer group socialization, wherein groups influence their members by setting normative expectations for
behavior (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Park, 2013). Depending on the norms and values within the group, certain student subcultures may intentionally or unintentionally discourage interracial friendship. Not all student organizations function as subcultures, but some may, especially when they encourage tight social bonds among members.

**Student Organizations and Diversity Outcomes**

Little research exists on the racial composition of collegiate student organizations. Analysis of a dataset of 28 selective institutions found that 80.5% of White students, 14.8% of Asian Americans, 7.9% of Latino/a students, and 26.4% of Black students were involved in groups that were dominated by their own racial/ethnic group (Charles, Fischer, Mooney, & Massey, 2009). Charles et al. (2009) comment: “This pattern substantially reflects campus demographics, of course, but the very skewed nature of the distribution suggests an element of choice as well” (p. 126). A greater amount of research exists on the relationship between participation in certain student organizations and outcomes related to diversity, which I detail in the following sections.

**Greek Life.** The effects of fraternity/sorority participation are well documented. Greek life participation is negatively related to students’ openness to diversity (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996), as well as rates of interracial interaction and friendship (antonio, 1998; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2009; Park & Kim, 2013; Saenz, 2010). One study found that Greek membership did not have a significant effect on diversity-related outcomes (Martin, Hevel, Asel, & Pascarella, 2011), while another study found that for White students, participation was a positive predictor of opposition to increasing diversity on campus and an increased sense of ethnic victimization (Sidanius, van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2004). Stearns et al. (2009) found that White Greek students had significantly fewer interracial friendships than non-Greek White peers. Whether or not Greek letter organizations explicitly discourage interracial friendship is uncertain, but there is evidence that some peer group socialization regarding interracial relationships occurs in Greek letter organizations: Sidanius et al. (2004) found that White Greek students were more likely to oppose interracial marriage after 3 years of membership, even when precollege attitudes were controlled for.

**Ethnic/Cultural Organizations.** Participation in these groups is associated with higher levels of ethnic identity awareness, ethnic activism, sense of ethnic victimization, and commitment to promoting racial understanding (antonio, 1998; Sidanius et al., 2004). Studies on ethnic/cultural organizations have mostly found positive or non-significant effects on interracial interaction and friendship (Stearns et al., 2009). In one study, participation was positively related to interracial interaction for White students only (Saenz, 2010) while in another, it was nonsignificant for students of all races (Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007). One study using the NLSF data found a negative relationship between ethnic student group participation and close interracial friendship (Park, 2012). However, studies using the NLSF that controlled for level of involvement in such groups (and not just participation) have either found non-significant (Park & Kim, 2013) or positive effects (for Latino/a students, see Y. K. Kim, Park, & Koo, in press).

**Religious Student Organizations.** Finally, almost no studies on interracial interaction or friendship controlled for participation in a religious student organization as a peer environment, perhaps because religious student organizations are not commonly associated with racial dynamics in studies of higher education. However, an extensive body of
literature documents the rarity of racially diverse congregations in the US, and religion is the most racially stratified arena of US society (Doughtery & Huyser, 2008; Emerson & Smith, 2000). Less than 10% of Protestant congregations in the US can be classified as racially heterogeneous, meaning that their membership consists of at least an 80/20 split between two racial/ethnic groups (Emerson & Chai Kim, 2003). Existing single-institution ethnographic examinations of “campus fellowships,” the name commonly associated with evangelical Protestant campus religious organizations, suggest that these organizations tend to be monoracial, if not monoethnic, environments, both on highly diverse and more homogeneous campuses (Bramadat, 2000; Bryant, 2004; R. Kim, 2006; Park, 2013).

Few quantitative studies have examined any potential relationship between participation in campus religious groups and outcomes related to diversity. In the realm of attitudes, previous studies have found that having religious peers is negatively related to students’ ecumenical worldview (Bryant, 2011) and that religious engagement is negatively related to students’ commitment to promoting racial understanding (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, al., 2010). In one single-institution quantitative study, participation in religious organizations was not a significant predictor of interracial interaction (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2009). In another study using national data, college students who identified as Protestant or Jewish as well as those with higher levels of religiosity were significantly less likely to have close friends of other races (Park, 2012).

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Building on work examining how peer groups influence student attitudes and behavior (antonio, 2004; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Gottlieb & Hodgkins, 1963), I examined whether membership in certain student organizations is significantly related to the outcome of interracial friendship. As Renn and Arnold (2003) note, quantitative studies of college impact often fail to address how peer culture influences student outcomes. Besides examining if participation in various student organizations is related to interracial friendship, the following section delineates a proposed framework for how some student organizations that function as subcultures affect the dynamics of interracial friendship. Based on ethnographic work on campus religious organizations, Park (2013) proposed that student subcultures work as filtering agents between the macro-level diversity of the student body and actual micro-level cross-racial interaction. As an intermediary between the structural diversity of an institution and the individual interactions and relationships that students have with one another, student subcultures can alternately promote cross-racial interaction and interracial friendship or hinder it. For example, if a student at a racially diverse campus joins an all-White fraternity and spends all of his discretionary time in that group, the fraternity is a student subculture that hinders interracial friendship. Conversely, a student could join a racially diverse sports team and end up with numerous interracial friendships.

I propose that the racial composition of student communities is not random. While inevitably influenced by the structural diversity of an institution—for instance, it is almost impossible to have multiple, racially heterogeneous student organizations at an institution that is 99% White—it is also influenced by the values, assumptions, and normative behaviors within a subculture. Encouraging homophily or pursuing common goals across difference are two broad ways that the norms, values, and assumptions of student subcultures can facilitate or deter cross-racial
interaction. As stated earlier, homophily refers to the tendency of like attracts like (McPherson et al., 2001). In the case of ethnic student organizations, homophily is intentional and explicit. Because of the role that these groups play in supporting students of color, they specifically seek to attract other students of color, although generally students of all race/ethnicities are welcome to participate. In other cases, homophily is less intentional but occurs nonetheless. Groups may desire diversity but may unintentionally promote norms that cater to the majority culture; thus, groups stay homogeneous over time as likes attract likes (R. Kim, 2006; Park, 2013). Research suggests that evangelical Christian subcultures and Greek life organizations often nurture a value for colorblindness, which can foster homophily (Emerson & Smith, 2000; Park, 2008). Regardless of whether homophily is unintentional or explicit, its presence affects the racial composition of student organizations, especially those that function as subcultures, which in turn affects opportunities for cross-racial interaction and interracial friendship.

Alternately, student organizations and subcultures can promote interracial interaction and friendship when they work as venues for students to pursue common goals across difference. Allport (1954) stipulates that having diverse individuals pursue common goals is a key precondition for healthy interracial interaction, and student subcultures have the potential to attract students from different backgrounds around a common purpose or goal. Moody (2001) found that interracial friendship was higher in high schools where cocurricular activities were integrated. Cocurricular mixing was the strongest effect of school organization on interracial friendship; he attributed the effect to the idea that cocurricular activities are sites for informal cooperative interaction across race. For instance, sports often brings together people of different races around cooperative goals (Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morphew, 2001). Service activities and arts groups can also bring people of different backgrounds together, and participation in service is significantly associated with higher commitments to promoting racial understanding for undergraduates (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000). While untested in the literature, career organizations may provide an opportunity for students of different races to unite around the common goal of a career path and/or major.

**FIGURE 1. Conceptual Model for the Relationship Between Structural Diversity and Interracial Interaction/Friendship**
Thus, the dynamics of student organizations and subcultures can work to either encourage or discourage interracial interaction and friendship. Due to propinquity, friendship patterns often reflect the demography of the environment where an individual spends most of his or her time (Antonio, 2004). Hence, the demography of student organizations likely influences the racial composition of students’ friendship groups. Finally, structural diversity is an essential condition for diverse student subcultures to exist, although it does not ensure that students will create or spend time in these groups. Figure 1 summarizes this process.

While this model was developed based off of ethnographic work (Park, 2013), it has yet to be tested quantitatively. In accordance with the model, I propose that the structural diversity of the institution will have a direct effect on interracial relationships (far right large arrow in Figure 1) and that engagement in certain student organizations (i.e., those that function as student subcultures with tight social bonds) will also be significantly related to interracial friendship (lower small arrow in Figure 1).* Specifically, I hypothesize that certain types of student organizations will be positively related to interracial friendships (intramural sports, career, arts, service), while others (religious, Greek, and ethnic student organizations) will be negatively associated with interracial friendship.

METHODS

Data for this study came from the National Longitudinal Study of Freshmen (NLSF) housed at Princeton University, which followed a cohort of White, Black, Latino/a, and Asian American students from 28 selective institutions over 4 years of college from Fall 1999 to Spring 2003. While the NLSF originated to test specific hypotheses related to academic achievement for students of color, the dataset was of particular interest due to its inclusion of variables related to interracial friendship. Of the institutions, 23 were private and 5 were public. While the sample is not representative of college students nationwide, it is reflective of institutions where students are affected most directly by affirmative action policies that intentionally recruit racially diverse student bodies. For the purpose of this analysis, I excluded students from the one historically Black college in the sample because their context for racial demography in student organizations differed so much from the rest of the sample. The analytic sample was 3,008 students who participated in all four waves of data collection: 804 White, 742 Black, 710 Latino/a, and 725 Asian American students.

During students’ third year of college, they were asked to select two student organizations that they were involved in. Among other things, they were asked, “Of what race or ethnicity are most of the group’s members?” To test the hypothesis that certain types of student organizations were more racially homogeneous, I controlled for involvement in Greek letter, religious, and ethnic student organizations. Being interested in racial diversity in other types of student organizations, I selected the four student organizations that were most frequently selected by students, which were social service outreach (community service), career, intramural sports, and music/arts/

* The upward pointing arrow on the far left of Figure 1 reflects the idea that interracial interaction shapes intergroup relations on campus, which over time may shape the structural diversity of the institution. For instance, an institution with low structural diversity may have little interracial interaction. As the institution’s reputation for having a difficult environment for diversity grows, the institution’s structural diversity remains low. This interdependence between structural diversity and intergroup relations is discussed further in Hurtado et al. (1998); however, this article does not explicitly focus on this dimension of the model.
Clubs and the Campus Racial Climate

Theater groups. Previous research documents how such groups potentially unite students across common goals (Moody, 2001; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2001). During the students’ fourth year of college, they were asked to “think of the four people at (name of most recent college attended) with whom you have been closest during your college years.” Students were also asked to list the race/ethnicity of each of the friends. I coded the variable 1 if the student did not have any friends of a different race/ethnicity, and 2 if the student had at least one friend of a different race/ethnicity; this was the dependent variable for the logistic regression. Logistic regression was the appropriate analytical method to use due to the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable. Of students in the sample, 75.3% had at least one close friend of another race.

Four blocks of independent variables were entered into the logistic regression equation, roughly reflecting Astin’s (1991) Inputs–Environments–Output model, with Blocks 1 and 2 including input variables and Blocks 3 and 4 including environmental variables. Block 1 included background variables (sex: female, mother’s education: college degree or more, race: Black, Latino/a, or Asian American). Block 2 included controls for students’ precollege experiences with racial diversity. At the beginning of college, students were asked to list their 10 closest friends from high school and the race/ethnicity of each friend. Using the formula developed by Moody (2001) and used by Fischer (2008) with NLSF data, the heterogeneity of the high school friendship group was calculated: the number of friends of a certain race was divided by the total number of listed friends and then squared. The sum of each squared proportion was added and then subtracted from 1. Thus, if a student had 10 friends of the same race, their total would be 0; and if a student had 2 friends from each racial/ethnic group and listed only 8 friends, the total would be slightly under .75. I used a similar formula to construct a variable measuring the heterogeneity of the student’s high school racial/ethnic composition, based off of students’ estimates of the percentage of White, Black, Latino/a, Asian American, and other students. The higher the value, the more heterogeneous the high school population. Block 3 contained a continuous variable capturing the racial heterogeneity of the student’s undergraduate institution. Finally, Block 4 contained controls for the student organizations.

LIMITATIONS

As with all studies, this study carries several limitations. First, the variable for having a roommate of another race in the NLSF was missing a substantial amount of data (over 30%), and thus I was unable to control for it in the analysis. Second, it should be taken into account that this study captures a specific facet of interracial friendship: if a student had at least one close friend of another race within his or her four closest friends. Some might argue that this measure is too stringent to capture the concept of interracial friendship, but 75.3% of the sample had at least one close friend of another race. Third, data are based off of student self-reports. While reporting specific friends is known as a valid approach to collecting demographic information on relationships (Campbell & Lee, 1991), some of the other measures in the descriptive analysis portion are less precise. For instance, in order to collect data on the racial composition of student groups, students were asked if their student organizations were “mostly White,” “mostly Black,” etc. These measures capture students’ perceptions of their demographic environments, but they fail to distinguish, for instance, between a group that might be 70% White and a group that is 95% White,
although students did have the option of reporting groups as being “biracial or other.” Fourth, the analytic method being used does not indicate causality. Finally, the sample consists of students attending 28 selective and highly selective institutions and may not be generalizable to other collegiate contexts.

RESULTS

First, Table 1 shows the breakdown of the dependent variable, having at least one close friend of another racial/ethnic group, across racial/ethnic groups.

White students were least likely to have a close friend of another race out of their four closest friends, while 92.3% of Latino/a students in the sample had at least one close friend of another race. To note, students did not have the option of marking their friends’ specific Latino/a or Asian American ethnic subgroup (e.g., Mexican, Korean).

To answer the first research question of whether the distribution of students of different racial/ethnic groups varies in different student organizations, cross-tabulations and chi-square statistics were run. Table 2 shows the percentage of students from each racial/ethnic group that participated in each type of student organization.

Chi-square statistics indicate that the distribution between different racial/ethnic groups varied significantly for Greek letter, religious, music/arts/theater, ethnic, and intramural sports organizations, while it did not vary significantly for service and career

### TABLE 1.
Distribution of Having at Least One Close Friend of Another Race by Racial/Ethnic Group (N=3,008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has at least 1 close friend of other race</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latino/a</th>
<th>Asian / Asian Am</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has at least 1 close friend of other race</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No close friends of other race</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 2.
Percentage of Students Within Racial/Ethnic Group Participating in Student Organizations (N=3,008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latino/a</th>
<th>Asian American</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fraternity or Sorority</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>34.70***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Organization</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Organization</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Organization</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>37.20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music, Arts, or Theater</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.70*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Student Organization</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>124.93***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intramural Sports</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>39.37***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. 

Journal of College Student Development
### TABLE 3.
Percentage of Students Within Racial/Ethnic Group Reporting Racial Composition of Different Student Organizations (N=3,008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latino/a</th>
<th>Asian American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fraternity or Sorority, n = 386</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly White</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Black</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Latino/a</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Asian American</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial or Other</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Organization, n = 584</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly White</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Black</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Latino/a</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Asian American</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial or Other</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Organization, n = 367</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly White</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Black</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Latino/a</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Asian American</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial or Other</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Organization, n = 254</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly White</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Black</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Latino/a</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Asian American</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial or Other</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music, Arts, or Theater, n = 433</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly White</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Black</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Latino/a</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Asian American</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial or Other</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Student Organization, n = 420</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly White</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Black</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Latino/a</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Asian American</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial or Other</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intramural Sports, n = 358</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly White</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Black</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Latino/a</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Asian American</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial or Other</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
organizations. Compared to other groups, a greater percentage of White students were involved in Greek life and intramural sports, a greater percentage of Asian American students were in religious organizations, a greater percentage of Black students were in music/arts/theater, and a greater percentage of Asian American students were involved in ethnic student organizations. Greek life was the most common student organization participated in by White students (14.1%), while being in service organizations was the most frequent affiliation for non-White students (15.3% to 17.0%). The next question was whether students were more likely to spend time with students of the same race in certain types of organizations. For students of each racial/ethnic group who participated in each type of student organization, Table 3 shows the racial/ethnic composition of the groups in which they were involved. After marking the student organization they were involved in, students were asked to mark if each group was “mostly White,” “mostly Black,” and so on. Students had the option of marking “biracial or other,” presumably if the group had no majority racial/ethnic population.

To summarize results, Greek life was the most racially isolating environment for White students. Of White members of sororities or fraternities, 97.1% stated that their organizations were majority White. Relative to other groups, religious organizations were the least racially isolating for White students; 81.1% reported that their religious groups were majority White. Across the board, students of color were less likely than White students to participate in racially homogeneous student groups; they tended to be divided between groups where they constituted the majority and groups that were majority White. Besides ethnic student organizations, religious organizations were the environments where Black and Asian American students were most likely to spend time with same-race peers: 57.7% of Black students and 69.2% of Asian American students were involved in religious groups with a majority of same-race peers. Besides ethnic student organizations, career organizations were the environment where Latino/a students were most likely to be with a majority of Latino/a students.

The story that emerges so far from descriptive findings is that Greek life seems to be particularly racially isolating for White students. While religious groups are comparatively less racially isolating for them, Black and Asian Americans are relatively more likely to spend time with same-race peers in such groups. It appears that the amount of racial diversity that students are exposed to varies between different types of student organizations.

Logistic regression can show whether engaging in various student groups actually has a significant effect on having at least one friend of a different race. Log-odds were converted into delta-p statistics for ease of interpretation. Delta-p statistics represent the change in students’ probability of having at least one friend of a different race associated with a one-unit change in the independent variable (Cruce, 2009).

In the final model, being Latino was associated with the largest delta-p, raising the probability of interracial friendship by 58% in comparison to White students. Overall, being a student of color was associated with a higher likelihood of interracial friendship (delta-p of 28.78% to 58.03% at p < .001)

While high school racial composition was not a significant predictor, the racial heterogeneity of a student’s precollege friendship group increased the chances of having a close friend of another race during the fourth year of college. Attending a more racially heterogeneous college or university was also significantly associated with a higher likelihood of having a close friend of another
race (delta-\( p = 11.88\% \), \( p < .05 \)). Lastly, being involved in a Greek, religious, and ethnic student organization were all negatively associated with interracial friendship. The effect was strongest for religious groups: students who were in such a group were 16.03% less likely to have at least one close friend of a different race (\( p < .001 \)). While the relationship was still negative for ethnic student organizations, it was relatively weaker (delta-\( p = -7.58\% \), \( p < .05 \))

**DISCUSSION**

Overall the findings support the initial hypothesis that the distribution of students of different racial/ethnic groups varied significantly between student organizations and that students were more likely to spend time with same-race peers in certain organizations. White students were most likely to be with a majority of same-race peers in fraternities and sororities, while religious groups were the environments where Black and Asian American students were most likely to gather with same-race peers. Participating in Greek life, religious groups, and ethnic student organizations were all negatively related to having at least one friend of another race/ethnicity. Besides a student's race, being involved in a religious organization was the strongest predictor of interracial friendship, even stronger than the racial diversity of the college and diversity of the student's high school friendship group. One part of the hypothesis was not upheld: students involved in service, arts, career, and intramural sports organizations did not have higher levels of interracial friendship.

**TABLE 4.**

Results From Logistic Regression Predicting Likelihood of at Least One Close Friend of a Different Race, Final Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Log-Odds</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>( \Delta p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex: Female</strong></td>
<td>-0.130</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>-2.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mother’s Education: College Degree or More</strong></td>
<td>0.221*</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>4.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race: Asian/Asian American</strong></td>
<td>1.766***</td>
<td>.132</td>
<td>40.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race: Latino/a</strong></td>
<td>3.620***</td>
<td>.243</td>
<td>58.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race: Black</strong></td>
<td>1.187***</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>28.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High School Racial Composition: Heterogeneous</strong></td>
<td>0.223</td>
<td>.248</td>
<td>3.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High School Friendship Diversity: Heterogeneous</strong></td>
<td>1.297***</td>
<td>.221</td>
<td>16.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College Percent Students of Color: Heterogeneous</strong></td>
<td>0.792*</td>
<td>.354</td>
<td>11.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization: Fraternity or Sorority</strong></td>
<td>-0.382**</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>-7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization: Service</strong></td>
<td>-0.099</td>
<td>.126</td>
<td>-1.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization: Career</strong></td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>0.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization: Religious</strong></td>
<td>-0.747***</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>-16.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization: Music, Arts, Theater</strong></td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>-0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization: Ethnic Organization</strong></td>
<td>-0.378*</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>-7.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization: Intramural Sports</strong></td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>1.43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \( p < .05 \). ** \( p < .01 \). *** \( p < .001 \).
Several findings merit further discussion. First, a student’s race/ethnicity was a clear predictor of interracial friendship. Being Latino/a had the strongest relationship with the outcome of interracial friendship, which is unsurprising considering that 92.3% of Latino/a students in the sample had at least one close friend of another race. The fact that students of color were more likely to have at least one close friend of another race may be a byproduct of demography, since students of color are generally minorities at the NLSF sample institutions and thus would likely have to branch out and form friends of other races. Still, the finding counters the idea that students of color are pervasively self-segregating and that balkanization is the dominant trend amongst students of color. Furthermore, while participating in an ethnic student organization decreased the likelihood of having a close friend of another race, a student’s race/ethnicity had a considerably stronger relationship with the dependent variable. This finding suggests that while ethnic student organizations are generally racially homogeneous environments, students of color still frequently form meaningful friendships with students of other races during the college years; intergroup and intragroup socializing is a both-and dynamic rather than either-or. Notably, other studies using the NLSF that control for level of involvement in ethnic student organizations have found non-significant or positive effects related to participation (Park & Kim, 2013; Y. K. Kim et al., in press).

Also, ethnic homogeneity in certain organizations—for instance, ethnic student organizations—serves a specific function as part of an organization’s mission. Because there are so few spaces on campus where students of color can be among same-race peers, it makes sense to support student organizations that can facilitate their retention and sense of belonging (Museus, 2008). It is important to remember that despite the existence of ethnic student organizations on most college campuses, students of color still have higher rates of interracial contact and friendship than White students (Espenshade & Radford, 2009). Interracial contact is basically unavoidable for them, although campus educators should be attuned to whether interracial contact is characterized by a positive nature or a more negative, tense state, depending on the condition of the campus racial climate (Hurtado et al., 1998).

Second, the diversity of a student’s pre-college friendship group was a significant predictor of interracial friendship in the fourth year of college. This finding supports previous studies that indicate that precollege experiences and environments influence diversity-related outcomes during college (Fischer, 2008; Saenz, 2010). The structural diversity of the student’s college also shaped the likelihood of having a close friend across race, with attending a more racially diverse institution increasing the likelihood of having a close friend of another race. Both findings demonstrate how friendship diversity is related to social forces beyond individual choice, underscoring the essentialness of structural diversity as part of the campus racial climate. In order for interracial friendship to occur, students must have the actual opportunity to engage with students of other races (Blau & Schwartz, 1984).

Third, this study adds to the research on the influence of student organizations on diversity-related outcomes. Involvement in Greek life, ethnic student organizations, and religious student groups all decreased the likelihood of having a close friend of another race, while service, career, intramural sports, and arts organizations were nonsignificant. Descriptive analysis (Table 3) indicates that students were more likely to indicate that service, career, sports, and arts organizations were “biracial or other” in composition than
they were for Greek and ethnic student groups. While being involved in service, career, sports, and arts groups did not increase the likelihood of having a close friendship of another race, it did not decrease the likelihood, unlike other types of student organizations. The relatively racially mixed composition of service, career, sports, and arts groups suggests that they hold potential for promoting interracial interaction and friendship. Moody (2001) found that cocurricular activities can be an ideal site to actualize Allport’s (1954) conditions for interracial interaction and friendship in high schools, and the same potential exists in the collegiate setting as common goals bring students together (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2001).

This study also uniquely highlights the role that religious student organizations apparently play in inhibiting close interracial friendship during the college years. Being involved in a religious group had the strongest relationship to the dependent variable, even stronger than Greek life and ethnic student organizations. On one hand, this finding is puzzling, considering that relatively high numbers—at least 10%—of White, Black, and Latino/a students marked that their religious student organizations were biracial in composition. On the other hand, considering that religious congregations are overwhelmingly racially homogeneous in this country (Emerson & Chai Kim, 2003) and religious engagement is linked with lower commitments to promoting racial understanding among college students (Astin et al., 2010), the finding is unsurprising and consistent with the qualitative literature that suggests that by and large, religious groups on campus tend to be racially and/or ethnically homogeneous (Bryant, 2004; R. Kim, 2006; Magolda & Ebben Gross, 2009).

To make sense of this finding, it is helpful to remember that like the student subcultures of Greek life and ethnic student groups, religious student organizations tend to promote close social ties among their members. Religious peers can influence individuals’ worldviews and values (Bryant, 2011). In the case of evangelical Christians, who support many of the active religious student groups on campus, such groups often run a parallel universe for their members within the college settings (Bramadat, 2000; Magolda & Ebben Gross, 2009). In order to help students resist the secular forces of university social life characterized by drinking and partying, campus fellowships run their own set of social activities. These tight social bonds reinforce the power of the subculture. Campus fellowships offer Bible studies and small group discussions, an arena that Magolda and Ebben Gross (2009) call the “evangelical cocurriculum.” Greek life and ethnic student organizations also run similar parallel events that promote peer socialization, such as membership education, rituals, and social events for their members.

While at least 10% of White, Black, and Latino/a students were involved in religious student groups classified as “biracial or other,” large percentages of White, Black, and Asian American students were still involved in religious groups where their racial group makes up the majority of members. Like ethnic student organizations, some religious groups may cater to a specific racial/ethnic group, serving as a safe space for students of color. Racially heterogeneous religious student groups are an outlier. Because most students who are religious worship in racially homogeneous environments prior to college, race continues to be a “consolidated characteristic” during the college years as many students choose to worship with co-ethnic peers (Blau & Schwartz, 1984). As the force of homophily works, likes attract likes, and these groups may attract students with similar demographic backgrounds as those who make up the majority of the group (Park, 2013).
Altogether, these findings expand the research on interracial friendship, showing the relevance of student organizations, especially those that tend to foster tight-knit social bonds. More than just a matter of preference or affinity, interracial friendships are embedded in multiple layers of social context and influencing factors.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study demonstrate that students of color have higher levels of interracial friendship than White students, and also that students tend to spend more time with peers of the same race in certain types of student organizations (Greek, religious, and ethnic student organizations). Participation in these same organizations is negatively associated with the outcome of close interracial friendship, while being a student of color, attending a racially diverse institution, and precollege interracial friendships are positive predictors. Findings reflect how some student organizations and peer environments influence the likelihood of students engaging in interracial interaction and friendship, explaining in part why students on the same campus may have varying experiences with diversity.

Future research should address how different measures of involvement in student organizations are related to various diversity-related outcomes. Ideally, researchers could control for estimated hours per week spent in such groups. As noted, Park and Kim (2013) found that being involved in an ethnic student organization did not have a significant relationship with interracial friendship when controlling for the frequency of interacting with peers from ethnic student organizations (as opposed to mere membership, like the current analysis). This finding suggests that greater involvement in such groups does not deter interracial friendship, and future studies, both qualitative and quantitative, need to further probe the role that ethnic student organizations play in the broader campus racial climate. Given that students of color have higher rates of interracial friendship overall, future research can investigate the role of ethnic student organizations in students’ experiences with intergroup and intragroup relationships.

These findings also signal the need for campus educators to be especially sensitive to how Greek life and campus religious organizations affect the overall campus racial climate. These organizations tend to be racially homogeneous, with rare exceptions (McCabe, 2008). Many of the assumptions and values within organizational culture, ingrained patterns, are taken for granted. In many cases, students are not consciously aware of how the racial composition of a particular student subculture might potentially discourage cross-racial interaction and interracial friendship. Campus educators should work with racially homogeneous student organizations, asking critical questions about why their organizations tend to attract certain types of students. For example, why might certain sororities be more diverse while others are almost all White in composition? (Park, 2008). They can also brainstorm ways to encourage interracial friendship. For instance, a predominantly White sorority could have some of its members go on a spring break community service trip with a historically Black sorority. Or different religious student groups could host a forum on why religion in the US is so divided by race. The benefits of engagement with racial diversity are well-established, but the challenge of working with students to break the cycle of segregation remains.

In certain cases, predominantly White institutions also need to question the sustainability of Greek life on their campuses. As noted earlier, a comprehensive literature base
demonstrates that participation in historically White Greek life is linked to numerous unfavorable outcomes. Greek life may provide opportunities for students to demonstrate leadership, but one wonders if universities could not create alternative organizational structures with similar opportunities for students. While historically White Greek life may promote community and a sense of belonging for (mostly White) students, it appears to come at a high price: racial exclusivity that is linked to lower openness to diversity, lower interracial interaction, and lower interracial friendship (Pascarella et al., 1996; Saenz, 2010; Stearns et al., 2009). Greek life is not unequivocally negative, yet there are likely contexts such as predominantly White institutions and institutions with higher rates of Greek life participation where campus educators need to ask serious questions about whether Greek life in its current state is counterproductive to the university’s commitments to preparing students for engagement in a diverse democracy.

Regarding the negative relationship between campus religious organizations and interracial friendship, the answer is not to eradicate institutional recognition of such communities, which play an important role in supporting students’ spiritual and religious pursuits. Furthermore, some campus religious organizations provide a critical function within the broader campus racial climate by providing ethno-religious support for students of color (Park, 2013; Strayhorn, 2011). Campus administrators have little direct control over these groups, and given that religious associations are voluntary, direct control or mandates to encourage racial diversity may not be effective or desirable in the first place. However, student affairs educators can challenge campus chaplains and religious organizations to consider how their groups affect and are affected by the campus racial climate; they can also encourage such groups to participate in intergroup and interfaith dialogue and collaborative activities to facilitate opportunities for members to engage in interracial and interreligious interaction. Educators can also encourage student leaders of such organizations to become involved in efforts to improve the campus racial climate, forging collaborative partnerships between different sectors of campus.

The findings further point to the need for universities to invest in cocurricular activities that do not lower the likelihood of close interracial friendship. While service, career, sports, and arts organizations did not significantly increase the likelihood of having a close friend of another race, neither did they lower the probability of it. It may be that in general, these types of groups do not promote the type of sustained, close contact that student organizations that function as student subcultures promote. However, they can potentially attract students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds around a common goal, encouraging intergroup cooperation, interracial contact, and interracial friendship. Linking such groups with initiatives like residence hall communities and alternative break programs could possibly promote tighter social bonds, which might facilitate interracial friendship. Such diverse subcultures could emulate some of the close social bonds that Greek, religious, and ethnic organizations are known for, without the racial homogeneity that these groups tend to have. It may be especially important to start such initiatives early on in college in order to provide students with additional options for student involvement; thus, residential life, commuter centers, and orientation may play special roles in helping students become aware of such opportunities.

Finally, this study affirms the essentialness of recruiting and retaining racially diverse student bodies, for racially diverse student
organizations, subcultures, and peer environments simply cannot exist without diversity in the student body. Oftentimes the dynamics of fostering cross-racial interaction on campus may seem bewildering to campus educators. Highlighting how some student organizations function as subcultures helps demystify how some of the dynamics of diversity are at work within the behavioral dimension of the campus racial climate, how the macro-level structural diversity of an institution filters down into micro-level interactions and friendships.

If universities want their students to not merely coexist in a diverse student body but actually engage via interracial interaction and friendship, leaders should strongly consider the potential of student organizations to facilitate or hinder such relationships.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Julie J. Park, Assistant Professor, Department of Counseling, Higher Education, & Special Education, University of Maryland, 3214 Benjamin Building, College Park, MD 20742; parkjj@umd.edu

REFERENCES


