THE INFLUENCE OF BLACK GREEK MEMBERSHIP ON THE ACADEMIC
ENGAGEMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS

By

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, first to my wife Melanie, thank you so much for all of your support and sacrifice during the Doctoral journey. I love you so much! To my children Jonathan and Morgan, I hope this shows you that there is nothing you cannot accomplish, as long as you put your mind to it. The sky's the limit. I would also like to give a huge THANK YOU to my parents Tommie and Mae Shelby, who always taught me the importance of education and doing my best, even though at times I did not. "Daddy I wish you were here to watch me walk across the stage, but I know you will be smiling down from Heaven."

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the experiences of Black male students who are members of Black Greek Letter Fraternities (BGLF) while attending a large institution. This study examines the academic practices of the fraternity members, and the effects fraternity membership has on their academic progress. For this study, four Black male undergraduate fraternity members and five graduates shared stories of their undergraduate experiences and how being in a fraternity impacted their academic progress. Semi-structured questions were used during the interviews to explore the student's academic engagement and they focused on the following research question: 1. How does membership in a BGLF contribute to persistence at a large institution?

Findings reveal that there is evidence that Black Greek membership has a positive effect on the academic engagement of its members. Participants indicated that membership in their Greek fraternity, had a positive impact on their academic engagement while in college. This narrative study examined the relationship between membership in a BGLF and the overall academic experiences of African American male college students attending a large institution. The findings from this study can be used to develop programs for students in their first year of college to help foster a sense of belonging that may lead to increased retention, persistence and increased graduation rates for students who may struggle early on. These programs can be designed to fit a number of different demographics.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Recent research demonstrates that social interaction is beneficial to student retention (Rasco, Day, & Denton, 2020). Indeed, when there is a nurturing environment for African American students, there is a positive impact on their retention and graduation. When students feel unwelcome, it can affect graduation rates. Flores (2017) notes that there is a large racial gap in college completion rates. These low graduation rates are due to the myriad of academic and personal issues that hinder the success of Black men (Quaye, & Harper 2007), and the resulting education gap may lead, in the long term, to issues that can contribute to the lack of opportunities for Black men.

African American males are increasingly enrolling in college, but their persistence to graduation decreases significantly when compared to other groups of students (Musu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, KewalRamani, Zhang, & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2016). These students have not always had equal opportunities, nor did they have the opportunity to receive a formal education. Although African American males can access higher education today, their college completion rates have not been as strong as their White counterparts. Students that graduate experience higher employment rates and increased earnings over students without degrees, thus African American males continue to face greater challenges in lifetime achievement (Rasco, Day, & Denton, 2020).

African American males in higher education have been studied extensively. Studies have examined the effects of campus engagement on the academic success of African American male undergraduate students (Harper, 2005, 2008b, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008, 2010, 2012), as well as the role student involvement plays in the overall development of Black collegians. While the

majority of the research has focused on the overall collegiate experience of African American men, the research is scarce when it comes to the academic progress of African American collegiate men who are members of Black Greek-letter fraternities (BGLFs). Several factors lead to graduation rate disparities, next we explore some of the statistics that prove a need for this study.

Degree attainment for African American males is a critical concern in higher education. The number of African American male students enrolled at large institutions has increased over the years, but the challenge has been to keep them engaged and involved in university life (Kimbrough, 1995). Out of the total number of male students enrolled in college, 9,046 in 2010, only 36% of African American males continue to complete a bachelor's degree (NCES, 2017). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2013, about 48% of Black men 25 and older attended college. However, half of them did not complete a degree compared to 58% of all men who attended college. These numbers have led to a feeling of inferiority in some African American males in higher education (Kimbrough, 1995). Those in minority groups can often feel alienated from their peers, especially if few others share their ethnic or cultural backgrounds on campus. More specifically, African American male students sometimes feel alienated and isolated on a college campus, especially at large institutions (Quaye & Harper, 2007). Social engagement with others from similar backgrounds can be critical in making these students feel at home on a college campus and a crucial factor in whether or not these students, some already at risk, will continue through to graduation.

For decades, research has pointed to student engagement as a critical factor in helping improve student retention. Student engagement is the tendency to be behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively involved in academic activities. It has a foundation in two critical factors:

student satisfaction and the quality of the student experience (Holmes, 2018). These factors are essential as they serve as indicators of how a student's collegiate experience will be. Engagement is also associated with positive student outcomes, including higher grades, retention, and persistence. When looking at comparisons in college engagement rates among different ethnic groups, the numbers are not equal. While the practices of thoughtfully easing students into the college experience, supporting them in new experiences, and encouraging students to engage with their peers have improved student retention rates (Seidman, 2019), there is still much more to do.

One strategy to improve graduation rates is to foster engagement on campus. Student engagement connects to academic success, retention, learning, and student experience (Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010). While prior research has emphasized the significance of a student's academic and social engagement (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006), few studies have examined African American male students' engagement experiences attending large institutions. In many cases, the lack of engagement comes from a feeling of not belonging. One way that may help to minimize this feeling could be by joining a fraternity. Over the years, fraternities have fostered a sense of family and belonging (Quaye & Harper, 2007). When students join a brotherhood, they not only become a member of that fraternity, but they join an entire community.

Statement of the Problem

While the higher education achievement gap between African American students and White students has been well documented, research on best practices to retain and graduate African American students at large institutions is needed. One area where research is emerging is on Black Greek letter fraternities (BGLFs). Recent studies have documented these organizations' effects on African American students' experiences at large institutions (Hevel, Martin, Goodman,

& Pascarella, 2018; Harper, 2008a, 2008b; Harper, Byars, & Jelke, 2005;). Several scholars have

examined low rates of black male college success (Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010). Missing however,

is research that documents the influence of fraternities and sororities on student persistence, a

positive result from increased student engagement (Reason, 2009).

Purpose

BGLFs have the potential to serve as an essential form of support and social networking

for African American students (Harper, 2008b; Kimbrough, 1995). The purpose of this

qualitative narrative study was to examine how African American male students, who are also

members of Black Greek Letter Fraternities (BGLF), are more engaged both socially and

academically. It also explores how they describe their experiences that lead to increased

engagement. This study illuminates the influence that BGLF membership has on the leadership

development and academic engagement of African American male students in higher education

and review the role that student organizations play in that engagement and growth. This study

also addresses whether the fraternity experience assists the college environment with retention

efforts, especially as it pertains to African American males.

Theoretical Framework

This study builds on the theoretical framework of social capital. Readers will view it

through the lens of how social capital gained through BGLF involvement influences the

persistence of African American male students attending large institutions. Social capital refers to

the concept that the social relationships a person has, has productive benefits academically.

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) is a French sociologist who is instrumental in the development of social

capital. For this study, I have focused on Nan Lin's related research (1999a), which questions

how social media plays a role in the development of social capital.

Research Question

This study utilizes qualitative research methodology to examine the influences of BGLF membership on African American Males. The research relies heavily on the participants' interpretation of their fraternal experience by utilizing broad questions that allow them to make meaning of their experience as a member of a BGLF (Creswell, 2014). To understand the effects of BGLFs on the persistence of African Americans at large institutions, the following research question shaped this study:

RQ1. How does membership in a BGLF contribute to persistence at a large institution?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as there is a deficit of knowledge regarding what inspires African American male students within the collegiate environment. This study adds to the body of knowledge and provide additional insights into the validity of fraternity organizations on the college campus. Although an abundance of literature has examined African American college students, little exists in studies specific to issues impacting African American male college students (Harper, 2013). Research on the higher education experiences of Black men primarily focuses on Blacks in general or the failures of Black men, rather than successes.

Less than 50% of Black men graduate from high school, and even fewer enroll in college. When they do register, Black male undergraduates tend to concentrate more at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), 2-year community colleges, and less-selective 4-year colleges. Once in college, Black men face additional challenges that, without support, may compromise their academic success. These challenges include difficulty seeking help, becoming involved in clubs and organizations, and establishing supportive relationships with faculty members, administrators, and peers (Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010). Knowledge gained about how

Greek membership impacts its members can be beneficial as it can help explain how leadership skills gain strength among new generations of Black Greeks. The research can also give insight into how minority-focused organizational structures like Black fraternities facilitate Black males' academic success and engagement. This study benefits society as a whole as it can help inform program development which includes a more diverse population through higher education.

Personal and Professional Positionality

As a young impressionable 18-year-old African American male I started my higher education journey at the University of Southern Mississippi in the Fall of 1995. College, which was my first real experience being away from home, proved to be an eye-opening introduction to how my future was to be. University life turned out to be an interesting experience initially, with my grades not being an accurate representation of my academic abilities. Growing up in a small town, I had very little knowledge about Greek life. While I had family members that were members of Greek organizations, my interaction was limited. Fast forward two years, I made some terrific friends and was acclimated to life as an African American male student attending a large institution. I was introduced to fraternities and decided to become a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated.

After becoming a member, I became flooded with different expectations and responsibilities. Whether it was chapter meetings, hosting events, representing the university, or the chapter at various events, occasionally, these events got in the way of my studies. When I did struggle academically with all the things I had to do, I remembered the fraternity's motto, which is Achievement. Recalling the lessons, I learned and the relationships I formed always got me back on the right track. My brief experience as an undergraduate member, current interaction with a graduate chapter, and my role in higher education as an on-campus advisor sparked my

research interests. This activity subsequently led me to research the influences that Black Greek Letter Fraternities' membership has on African American male students attending large institutions. Specifically, the impacts membership has on their academic engagement and progress during their undergraduate years.

Definitions

National Pan-Hellenic Council- there are nine international Greek-letter sororities and fraternities within the National Pan-Hellenic Council, Incorporated (NPHC) (National Pan-Hellenic Council, 2017). The fraternities that hold membership are Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (National Pan-Hellenic Council, 2017).

Black Greek-letter fraternities (BGLF)- refers to any of the five organizations mentioned above that hold membership in the National Pan-Hellenic Council, Incorporated.

Black and African American- these terms were used interchangeably throughout this study to describe participants in the research study and individuals in previous studies.

Student engagement- refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education (Tinto, 2006).

Persistence- refers to a driving force to help students achieve their academic, as well as personal goals (Tinto, 2006).

Academic progress- defined by using each participant's interpretation of the term and how it relates directly to their personal experience within their fraternity.

Divine Nine- refers to the whole group of nine African American Greek organizations (Ross, 2000).

Large institution- refers to a college or university that has an enrollment of over 15,000 students.

Limitations and Delimitations

For this research study, nine participants were interviewed to give a personal account of their fraternal experience and its effect on their academic engagement. Considering the study was conducted during the Covid-19 global pandemic, it cannot be used as a definitive correlation to all Black males' experiences that are members of BGLFs in the United States. The pandemic restrictions also made it more challenging to have in-person interviews with the participants. I used virtual interviews, but in-person interviews would have been preferred. In-person interviews make it easier to pick up on the non-verbal cues from the study participants. Additionally, the study examines this phenomenon solely from the perspective of Black men who are members of historically Black Greek letter fraternities; it does not highlight those who are members of other Greek-letter organizations. Further research on the Black male experience at a predominantly White institution could focus on the perspectives of Black men who are members of non-traditional Greek letter organizations at a large institution.

Organization of the Study

In this research paper, Chapter 1 has presented information to introduce the study's purpose and significance. It also gives reference to the research questions and some possible limitations and delimitations to this study. Chapter 2 contains the review of the literature that relates to student engagement, the African American male experience at a large institution, BGLFs, and the theoretical framework that this study uses as a lens for interpreting the findings. Moving into Chapter 3, I present the methodology and data collection procedures. Chapter 3 will also refer to the study limitations. Chapter 4 contains the results of the data analysis as well as

the research findings that came from the study. The summary of the findings and the study are

presented in Chapter 5. It also contains conclusions from the findings and possible

recommendations for future research studies.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to understand and analyze how Black Greek letter fraternity membership influences the academic engagement of its members. There is a disparity in graduation rates and persistence for African American male students and White students. This chapter serves to present a review of the literature focusing on the college experiences of African American male Black Greek members at large institutions. The function of these organizations will be presented along with any research that has been done concerning the members' experiences.

 For practitioners in higher education student affairs, student engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they must learn and progress in their education (Tinto, 2012). The student engagement model breaks down into four different categories, behavioral, psychological, socio-cultural, and holistic (Kahn, 2017). Both the number of Black students attending colleges and universities and the retention/attrition rates of those who attend have become significant issues of concern to the higher education community.

Several practices improve student engagement that specifically benefit African American males. First, development and student engagement provide the social and cultural capital that African American male students need to succeed on any college campus. Relationship building and the accumulation of cultural knowledge are keys for African American men to earn a degree while in college. Engagement with minority faculty is of particular importance for African American males in their academic experiences (Simmons, 2013).

Fostering student participation in Greek-letter organizations on campus also improves African American male engagement. While Greek-letter organizations combat bad reputations,

BGLF's have worked to transform the typical 'frat boy' stereotype. The media portrays BGLF's as allowing cruel and unjust acts of hazing, social clubs, for the vibrant strolls and steps, and utterly barbaric actions. Each organization uses specific calls and infamous sounds when shouting out to other members, completely erasing the identity and all that they stand for. Steps, strolls, chants, and calls all have historical links dating back to slavery, a way to keep African Americans uplifted and connected (Ross, 2000).

BGLFs fundamental purposes are usually based on leadership and achieving success (Quaye & Harper, 2007). BGLFs also are centered around leadership development, which leads to increased participation in classes. Students who are members of these organizations are the same students that are the leaders on campus. Many of the members are role models on campus due to their presence and how they carry themselves (Harper, 2007). Once a student joins a BGLF, they become a different person. No longer are they just an individual, but they will forever be associated with their organization. Joining one of these organizations brings an enormous sense of pride and reverence for the members who have come before (Kimbrough, 1995). With all these feelings compounded together, the BGLF member feels that they have a standard to uphold and by not doing their best, they are letting down those men who have come before them. The fear of disappointing the older brothers may lead the BGLF members to focus on being engaged at the university. Although the BGLF members get involved at their universities, the experiences of college life are different depending on where the student enrolls.

In order to consider the role of student engagement in college success, the literature review first introduces the concept of student engagement and the literature associated with it. I also looked at the effects that BGLFs have on that engagement. There is a great deal of research regarding African American male experiences at large institutions. This chapter examines some

of that research. I also introduce data associated with the African American male collegiate

engagement. I then address BGLF organizations in general and their role in the involvement of

the African American male higher education student. Keeping in line with student organizations,

I discuss each Black fraternity specifically, as this gives insight to an even higher level of

engagement. Finally, I discuss the concept of social capital, which is the theoretical framework

used for this research study. First, and before examining student engagement specific to African

American males, it is crucial to discuss what student engagement really is in the context of all

students.

Student Engagement

Student engagement is the tendency to be behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively

involved in academic activities. It is participation in educationally effective practices, whether

they be within the classroom or outside of it (Harper & Quaye, 2015). Being engaged has also

been associated with positive student outcomes, including higher grades, higher retention, and

increased graduation rates ("Student Engagement," 2016). When looking at student engagement,

there is a connection to student satisfaction (Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014). Student engagement

is recognized as a significant influence on student achievement and learning in higher education.

Student satisfaction is a contributing factor to student engagement. Two other important aspects

of student engagement are campus engagement and academic progress. We now examine these

two components as they relate to student engagement.

Research examines the effects of campus engagement on the academic success of African

American male undergraduate students (Harper, 2005, 2007, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008, 2010;

Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010). While the majority of the research has focused on the overall

collegiate experience of African American men, there is very little research when it comes to the

academic progress of African American collegiate men who are members of Black Greek Letter Fraternities (BGLFs) (Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011).

While studies show progress in working toward easing students into the college experience, supporting them, and getting them active with their peers, there is still more to do. Social engagement can be a determining factor in whether a student stays in college to finish his studies. When looking at college engagement rates among different ethnic groups, the numbers are not equal. In 2002, Black men comprised only 4.3% of students enrolled at institutions of higher education, the exact same percentage as in 1976 (Harper, 2006a; Strayhorn, 2010). White and Asian students completed their programs at similar rates to each other – 62 % and 63.2 %, respectively – while Hispanic and Black students graduated at rates of 45.8 % and 38 %, respectively (Tate, 2017). Black male college completion rates are lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in U.S. higher education (Harper, 2006a; Strayhorn, 2010), thus raising the question of their engagement rates as compared to other student groups.

African American Student Engagement

While there is documentation on the experiences of African American students, the achievement/opportunity gaps between African Americans and their racial and ethnic counterparts persist. Kimbrough (2003) noted how important social integration through extracurricular involvement is for African Americans attending large institutions. In a recent study, Mitchell (2012) qualitatively explored the influences of BGLFs on the persistence of African Americans at large institutions. He found that relationships and connections, increased social lives, organizational work, academic monitoring, and leadership development influenced persistence in positive ways.

An excellent, but mostly ignored, resource is high-achieving Black men on campus (Harper, 2012). Although some studies have documented how Black students are successfully navigating the collegiate experience, the research has failed to show the differences in the unique experiences of Black men (Cuyjet, 2006). Although some research concerning African American males in higher education still demonstrates a deficiency, a specific focus on Black males in higher education began to appear. As opposed to continually giving excuses about why African American males were not succeeding in higher education, attention was turning to select instances where successes were occurring so that more in-depth exploration of those successes might be explored and documented. The groups identified as having the most success in getting Black males involved are Black fraternities (Hevel, Martin, Goodman, & Pascarella, 2018). Kimbrough (1995) finds the majority of men in these organizations view themselves as leaders and feel leadership development is an important skill to gain.

At many of the nation's larger institutions of higher education, African American male students have long felt the need for some kind of organization to represent their interests and afford some means of providing wholesome recreation and social life. Therefore, the introduction of the nine BGLFs signaled the onset of a legacy of leadership that, in many ways, is typical of the leadership qualities possessed by their organization founders. Indeed, these founding members' organizational and problem-solving skills were of a higher caliber, which led to their formation. Most seemed to recognize the importance of being involved in an organization. They believed that forming and joining Greek-letter organizations could be beneficial to them and others, both socially and developmentally (Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011). Next, we will take a look at the research about African American male students within Greek organizations.

African American Male Greek Experiences

The impact of involvement in Greek organizations on academic performance has been studied less extensively than have the social aspects of Greek letter organizations. Several studies attest to the African American male student's academic success involved in a BGLF (Allen, 1992; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Harper, 2008; Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011). Despite the past and current challenges facing BGLFs (Kimbrough, 1995, 2003), research has shown that membership in BGLFs benefits affiliated students. The research on the benefits of Greek affiliation among Black men indicated that those who participated in Greek organizations developed a greater sense of their racial identity and self-esteem when compared to nonmembers (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). In addition to these benefits, McClure (2006) noted that Greek affiliation within a Black fraternity was central in helping African American men succeed academically in college. Greek letter organizations are thought to provide benefits, such as social connections and leadership skill development (Kimbrough 1995; Kimbrough and Hutcheson 1998). Another recent study using data from one university finds that, compared to non-Greek members, Greek members have higher levels of involvement and gains in cognitive development as a result of Greek involvement (Pike 2000).

Their membership in a BGLF facilitated closer bonding with other Black men, a more reliable connection to the campus environment, and more excellent knowledge regarding Black history. McClure's (2006) findings are consistent with the work of Harper and Harris (2006). They suggested that in comparison to their same race, non-Greek affiliated peers, African American men in historically Black fraternities hold more campus leadership positions and are more involved in campus activities. While other minority student organizations exist on campus and provide leadership development, affiliation in BGLFs tends to be the most popular vehicle

for African American students to become leaders, particularly at large institutions (Kimbrough, 1995). Greek letter organizations traditionally have been identified as critical players in the development of leadership skills among college students. Fraternities and sororities have produced some of the most visible college leaders on campuses worldwide (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). Greek letter organizations offer Black students' unique opportunities for involvement and leadership during their collegiate years. Interviews of Black leaders indicate that a large percentage hold membership in BGLFs (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998).

Moreover, Blacks' membership in these organizations tends to be lifelong, suggesting a depth of commitment not evident among Greeks of other ethnicities (Kimbrough, 1995). Student organizations have long been a way for students to get involved and learn more about the things that happen on campus. Student organizations that allow students to explore their racial identity may have a positive influence on Black males. Ethnic student organizations and cultural centers provide a safe environment for students to learn about and express themselves, gain support, help other students of color, and form a greater connection with other students of color (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Kimbrough, 1995; McClure, 2006; Patton, 2011).

Taylor and Howard-Hamilton (1995) hypothesized that individuals reporting higher levels of anti-social attitudes would be less involved in general campus activity and that those reporting higher levels of internal beliefs would be more involved in total activities. Specifically, they researched if individuals affiliated with Greek-letter organizations would be more engaged with campus activities (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). The study results supported the hypothesis that there was a significant correlation between Greek activity involvement and student engagement (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). Critics argue that these student groups promote racial division and segregation, while supporters instead feel that they facilitate college

adjustment, learning, and growth (Quaye & Harper, 2007). Several students are extremely

willing to participate in these organizations, which can lead to significant challenges when trying

to determine the impact of this form of engagement (Bowman, Park, & Denson, 2015).

African American students on predominantly White campuses often report high levels of

alienation and social isolation as well as pressure to conform to the White ideal (Allen, 1992).

Significantly, African American males have the highest attrition rates than any other college

student population and consistently report higher levels of isolation and alienation than their

female counterparts (McClure, 2006). As African American male college students need to

develop meaningful interpersonal relationships, membership in a fraternity leads these students

to build stronger bonds with their peers and families. It seems likely that these organizations

would play a crucial role in facilitating and improving African American male students'

perceptions of and experiences with the college environment, especially at large institutions

(Kimbrough, 1995).

As students evaluate options for the university they plan on attending, several factors aid

them in the selection process. Factors such as location, tuition, intended degree, and the prospect

of future employment are just a few of those factors. Looking at African American males, race

plays a pivotal role in the college selection process as well. Research has shown that a student's

racial identity can influence their level of engagement in student activities on campus (Simmons,

2013; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). A 2000 national survey

by the Washington, D.C., based National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ)

indicated that African American males at large institutions continue to face a unique set of social

circumstances, leading to the same feelings of social isolation that were prevalent during earlier

times (Sinanan, 2012). Now let us take a look at the phenomenon that is Black Greek Letter Fraternities.

Black Greek Letter Fraternities

The Divine Nine (Ross, 2000) explores the rich past and bright future of the nine Black Greek-letter Fraternities that make up the National Pan-Hellenic Council. In the long tradition of African American social organizations and societies, African American college fraternities and sororities have strong traditions of fostering brotherhood and sisterhood among their members. These organizations are strong African American communities and are at the forefront of civic action, community service, and philanthropy (Ross, 2000).

BGLFs' purposes are generally based on achieving success (Quaye & Harper, 2007). BGLFs also are centered on leadership development, which leads to increased participation of college students in classes. Membership in BGLF's helps Black males foster social and cultural networks, which alleviates the negative impact of exclusion from the majority population at large institutions (Harper & Harris, 2006). Students who are members of these organizations are the same students that are the leaders on campus. Many of the members become role models on campus due to their presence and how they carry themselves (Harper, 2007). Other research has identified potentially positive outcomes associated with Greek membership, including increased opportunities for leadership development, higher levels of student involvement, and higher levels of post-college charitable giving and community involvement (McClure, 2006).

Once students join a BGLF, they experience a shift in their identities. They are no longer just individuals; they are forever associated as one with their organization. Joining one of these organizations brings an enormous sense of pride and reverence for those who joined the organization earlier (Kimbrough, 1995). With all these feelings compounded together, the BGLF

member feels that they have a standard to uphold and by not doing their best, they are letting down those men who have come before them. On-campus organizations allow students to take on responsibilities or challenges to lead and make a difference in the university community and provide students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be a good leader. These are qualities African American males can take with them into life after college.

The fraternity's foundation is to support Black men's academic and social engagement and shape their civic commitments. At the time the fraternity was founded, Black students enrolled in American universities were excluded from White Greek-letter organizations (Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011). Fraternity founders worked to lay a solid foundation for principles of scholarship, fellowship, good character, and human advancement. Since the fraternity's founding, chapter numbers rapidly increased at historically Black colleges first and then later at predominately White institutions. Today, fraternity members are encouraged to represent the fraternity as honorable men and convey the organizations' civic commitments through national programming (Ross, 2000). Next, I take a more in-depth look into the history and background of the BGLFs.

History of 5 Key Male BGLFs

Early on in the 20th century, Black students attending large institutions faced the racial tensions that many Blacks faced across the country concerning their roles in society. There were organizations for White students that did not allow Black students to join. Feeling ostracized at the universities, Black students began looking for ways to combat these feelings and meet up with people who looked like them. There were a few attempts at starting Greek organizations for Blacks, but they failed. Finally, in 1906, a group of Black men on the campus of Cornell College started the first Black fraternity. Soon after, several organizations were founded. Those

organizations are examined next. The men who founded these organizations were visionaries during their time. They devised ways to make sure African American college men could flourish at these universities. Each Black Greek-lettered fraternity has a unique set of founding ideals or principles, yet they all abide by two main principles: scholarship and brotherhood (Jenkins, 2010). These organizations, since their inception, have grown exponentially and chapters have multiplied all over the world.

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

The campus climate at Cornell College (now Cornell University) mirrored that of the American society in the early 1900s (Ross, 2000). During the fall semester of 1905, it is noteworthy that all six of the African American students from the 1904-1905 class did not return that following school term. This extremely low retention prompted students who would become the founders of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. to create a study and support group for the college's remaining African American students (Ross, 2000). This assembly came together to form a support group that became the foundation for what would become the oldest historically Black college fraternity to encourage each other in their academic and professional pursuits. By the fall of 1906, the literary support group evolved into the Alpha Phi Alpha Society (Kimbrough, 2003a). On the afternoon of December 4, 1906, a motion was passed to form the first national college fraternity for Black men, Alpha Phi Alpha, Fraternity, Inc., the fraternity based on the ideals of manly deeds, scholarship, and love for all humankind (Ross, 2000).

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

The story of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. began at Howard University in 1910, where founders Elder Watson Diggs and Byron Kenneth Armstrong were initially enrolled (Bryson, 2003). When Diggs and Armstrong transferred to Indiana University in the fall of 1910, they

found an environment that was not welcoming of African American students. The two men noted

that they could go weeks without seeing another African American on campus. Similar to the

environment experienced by the men who went on to found Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity at

Cornell, these conditions made fitting into the campus culture nearly impossible. On the campus

of Indiana University, Black students were denied the use of recreational facilities and were not

allowed to participate in contact sports. African American students were permitted to display

their athletic ability in track and field (Bryson, 2003). In response to these conditions, nine men

met at the home of Mollie Spaulding to create a temporary organization, Alpha Omega (Bryson,

2003). The group met again on January 5, 1911, the official founding date, and selected officers

for the organization. The group decided that the new fraternal organization would base its creed

on Christian ideals and the fundamental purpose of achievement (Bryson, 2003).

   The new fraternity was named Kappa Alpha Nu Fraternity, Inc. (Crump, 1991).

A historian for the fraternity recounted that the name was perhaps in tribute to the African

American students who organized Alpha Kappa Nu Fraternity in 1903 to create a better life for

themselves at Indiana University (Bryson, 2003). The fraternity was incorporated on May 15,

1911 and is recognized as the first undergraduate fraternal organization incorporated by African

Americans as a national body (Crump, 1991). From its inception, the fraternity never barred

anyone from membership based on race, religion, or national origin (Bryson, 2003). The name

was later changed to Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. on April 15, 1915. The change was made

as a result of a derogatory racial remark towards fraternity member Frank Summers as he was

competing in a track and field event (Bryson, 2003; Crump, 1991; Ross, 2000).

Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

In response to the establishment of the second chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. was founded at Howard University (McKenzie, 2005). Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. was the first BGLF established on a historically black campus (Jeffries, 2008). On Friday, November 17, 1911, three best friends, Edgar Love, Oscar Cooper, and Frank Coleman, who were Howard University undergraduates, met in the office of Dr. Ernest Everett Just, a Howard biology professor (Ross, 2000). From the initials of the Greek phrase meaning "friendship is essential to the soul," the name Omega Psi Phi was derived (Jeffries, 2008). Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. was founded upon the principles of scholarship, manhood, perseverance, and uplift (Ross, 2000).

Initially, the newly established organization met with opposition from the administration, including Howard President Dr. Wilbur P. Thirkield, when the university refused to recognize the fraternity as a national organization. (Ross, 2000). The men continued to push to make their vision come to fruition and gain recognition of their fraternity. After meeting with the administration and implementing suggested changes, the administration agreed to recognize the organization on the concept it would remain a local fraternity and not expand (Ross, 2000). After subsequent meetings with the administration, the fraternity was finally recognized as a national organization and incorporated in 1914 (Ross, 2000).

Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

The concept to create another fraternity at Howard University began in the summer of 1910 in Memphis, Tennessee when future founder and high school senior Abram Langston Taylor discussed Greek life on Howard's campus with an alumnus (Hughey, 2008). Taylor had already been accepted to Howard and wanted to organize a Greek letter fraternity that would

truly exemplify brotherhood, scholarship, and service ideals. On January 9, 1914, Phi Beta

Sigma Fraternity, Inc. was initiated by Abram Langston Taylor, Leonard Francis Morse, and

Charles Ignatius Brown. This group of men believed that potential members should be judged on

their own merits and not on their affluence, skin tone, or texture of hair (Phi Beta Sigma, 2009).

The fraternity motto is "Culture for Service and Service for Humanity" (Hughey, 2008).

Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc.

While the establishment of the other organizations in the NPHC happened before the

Civil Rights Movement, Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (Iota Phi Theta) was born within the

movement. Iota Phi Theta began on September 19, 1963, on the campus of Morgan State College

in Baltimore, Maryland (Ross, 2000). The unique factors regarding the founders of Iota Phi

Theta are that each was atypical when compared to the traditional ideal of a college student. On

average, the founders were three to five years older than their peers; some of the founders were

parents while others had served in the military (Ross, 2000). In addition to most of the founders

having full-time jobs during their college careers, most of them knew each other from childhood.

Their familiarity, coupled with the maturity of the founders, provided their different outlook on

the meaning of fraternity (Ross, 2000).

Iota Phi Theta's development efforts were challenging with the fact that they were

non-traditional students. In addition to their limited presence on campus, the fact that Iota Phi

Theta was not a member of the NPHC, caused potential aspirants at Morgan State College to

question the overall legitimacy of the organization. While the members of Iota Phi Theta led by

example with high GPAs and student leadership at Morgan State College, the organization

remained small and local until 1967 when a group, referred to as the Pied Pipers, was initiated

into the organization (Ross, 2000). This new group of young, dedicated college men would

provide the necessary energy and vigor to expand the organization's appeal to other young

college men. The group worked hard in developing the organization by establishing chapters at

Hampton Institute and Delaware State in 1967 and Norfolk State College & Jersey City State

College in 1968 (Ross, 2000). In 1968, the organization was incorporated and later continued its

expansion efforts by establishing a chapter at Southern Illinois University in 1974 (Ross, 2000).

The 5 BGLFs were started to give young Black men a place to belong. At the large

institutions, Black students did not have any type of social groups to join like their White

counterparts. It has already been shown that Black students feel a lack of belonging when

attending a large institution, and BGLFs served to fill that void. The founding principles of the

BGLFs are based on concepts designed to help the members be successful and productive

members of society. Now let us take a look at the concept that is behind this research study.

Theoretical Framework

The motivation to develop and sustain even a minimum amount of social

connectivity is one of the most potent influences in human determinations (Lin, 1999). The need

for social connections shapes self-esteem, cognitive behavior, and an individual's ability to

develop meaningful relationships. Social Capital, as explained by Nan Lin (1999), is a concept

that involves the potential of individuals to gain benefits and produce solutions through their

involvement in social networks. As African American male students transition into their college

experience, their success often depends on the ability to adjust, adapt, and find social

connections within the campus' culture. The following figure (Figure 1) represents a theory of

social capital.
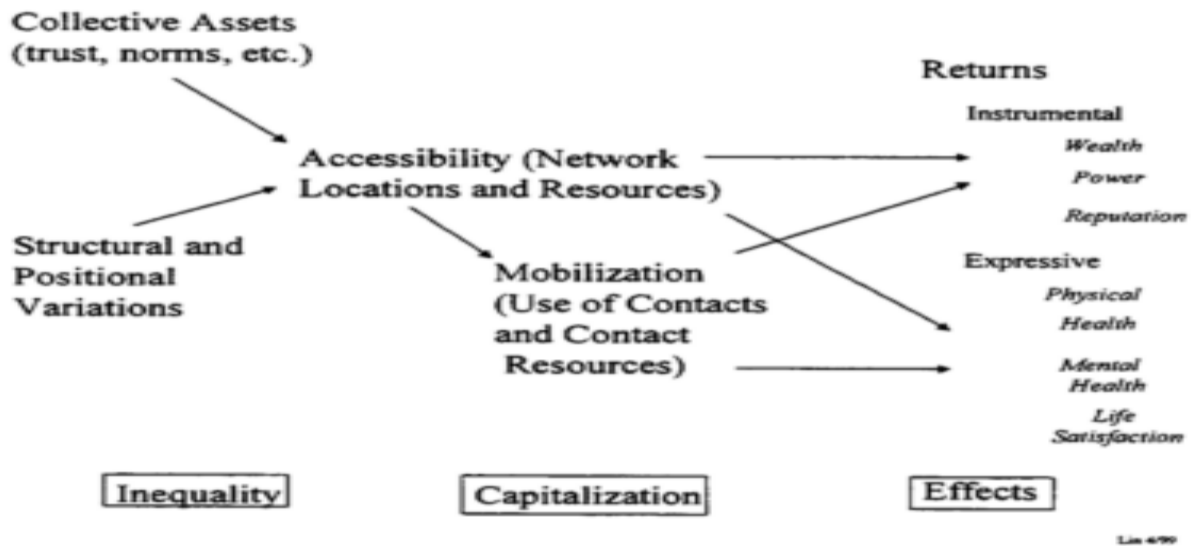
Figure 1. Modeling a Theory of Social Capital. Reprinted from "Building a Network Theory of Social Capital," by N. Lin 1999, *Connections, 22 (1),* p. 41.

Having social capital is equivalent to having a value in a selected community. Social capital can be earned over time by participating appropriately in the community (Dika & Singh, 2002). Figure 1 shows the overall concept of social capital, but for this study, I looked at social development, social cohesion, philanthropy, and social networks.

This study builds on Lin's (1999a) network theory of social capital. It uses social capital as the theoretical framework to understand the possible relationship between BGLFs and African Americans' persistence at large institutions. This framework highlights the idea that social capital connects directly to resources on social networks. I propose that African American male students at large institutions gain some form of social capital when they join these organizations. In turn, I feel that the social capital gained through BGLF involvement may influence persistence towards graduation.

Social Capital contains three main concepts: interconnected networks of relationships, levels of trust, and social participation advantages. The idea of the social capital theory has been in use since 1890 but became widely used by Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, in 1972. The teachings of Karl Marx influenced Bourdieu (Baum & Ziersch, 2003). According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital refers to how some individuals are privileged due to their social network membership. He proposed that the amount of social capital individuals possess hinges on the size of their network. It is also affected by their economic and cultural standing. Bourdieu (1986) noted that social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (p. 248). Although Bourdieu recognized the importance of groups in acquiring social capital, he placed emphasis on the benefits obtained by the individual. As such, scholars have also defined social capital using this emphasis on individual gains. Bourdieu viewed social capital as a tool of control that those in power use to maintain their dominance over the general population (Lin, 2000).

Social capital originates through two overarching ideas — benefits gained by a community and benefits achieved by an individual (Borgatti, Jones, & Everett, 1998; Lin, 1999). Bourdieu's (1986) analysis of social capital shows that the emphasis is on the benefits accrued by an individual. Bourdieu's definition shaped the present study and contributed to Lin's (1999) network theory of social capital to frame the analysis. Lin's framework emphasizes the idea that social capital embeds into social network resources. He defines social capital as an "investment in social relations with expected returns" (p. 30). Lin's theory is broken down into three blocks, the first block represents the inequality of social capital. These are factors found within the social structure and the individual's position in the structure. The second block represents the elements

of capitalization, which provides access to social capital and allows it to be used. The third block

represents the returns that are possible from gaining that social capital.

In summary, social capital can be possessed by any group, provides benefits for

individuals and groups through the relationships established, and can be more or less beneficial

depending on the social context. This theory was chosen due to the fact that it expresses the

benefits that are gained by increasing social connections. Lin's (1999) network theory of social

capital, predicates that social capital is embedded in resources in social networks. As such, social

capital may be gained through the social networks established in BGLFs and could logically be

presumed to affect the persistence of African Americans at large institutions.

Lin's (2000) social capital concept centers around the importance of using social

connections and relationships to achieve goals. I use Lin's network theory of social capital to

explain investment in a college group, in this case, BGLFs, that may offer African American

students instrumental returns. The theory highlights the idea that social capital embedded itself in

resources gained through social networks. The theory stems from Karl Marx's concepts of

capitalism and socialism; subsequently, the term social capital was derived (Lin, 1999b)

and is now recognized as a fundamental concept in sociology and political science (Borgatti,

Jones, & Everett, 1998).

I chose to use social capital as the theoretical framework due to the nature of my study.

Fraternities are considered by some to be social organizations, so it makes since that the theory

that explains the benefits of social connections is the best fit. I also feel that with this generation,

social connections are of the utmost importance, which also ties my study to social capital. To

determine the relationships, emphasis was placed on social capital that may be gained through

BGLF involvement. Researchers have also documented that social capital could be presumed to

be gained through the social networks established in minority student organizations and BGLFs (Harper, 2008a; McClure, 2006) and social capital appears to be positively linked to academic achievement (Dika & Singh, 2002).

Conclusion

BGLFs at large institutions serve as hubs for men of color to find themselves and connect with like-minded individuals. Those members have the opportunity to utilize the space within a BGLF not only as a social opportunity but also as an academic support system. BGLFs provide space in which men of color can build learning communities while encouraging one another to seek assistance through the usage of campus resources. Chapter 2 provided a foundation for understanding African American males in BGLFs and the issues affecting their achievement. Social Capital theories were discussed along with models of persistence, engagement, and involvement to develop the theoretical landscape. I performed a comparison of the literature to identify the similarities and differences in persistence and participation and how Greek letter affiliation regarding African American males plays a role in that comparison. Chapter 2 has given some background to the BGLF phenomenon and college life. It also examines the prior literature and research related to this subject. Chapter 3 explains the methods used to collect and analyze the data from the research study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research method I used is the narrative research approach. Narrative research captures stories, a common form of data that is familiar to most people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used this format to seek out individuals that would be willing to share their stories and experiences with me regarding their membership in a Black Greek Letter Fraternity (BGLF). The narrative approach examines the academic and social practices of African American male students that are also members of BGLFs attending large institutions. This study answers the following research question:

RQ1. How does membership in a BGLF contribute to persistence at a large institution?

Analysis of data is from a social capital theoretical framework. Social capital refers to resources found in specific social relationships. It relies on the social networks a person has to help them with specific academic outcomes and student organization involvement, especially BGLFs. Relationships and social networks built through BGLF involvement may possibly increase a student's social capital.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Participants for this study were from a group of African American male students who were also members of BGLFs. Criterion sampling is the method I used to ensure quality within the study. I also used snowball sampling to help recruit additional study participants, as discussed below. Study participants met into the following criteria:

- Male Member of a Black Greek-letter fraternity
- At least in their 2nd year of college up to graduates of no more than three years
- From a large institution

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest one or more individuals participate in a narrative study. I initially submitted IRB paperwork to reflect study participants that were between their sophomore to senior year to be eligible. I then expanded recruitment to include graduates within the last three years in order to achieve saturation. The final group of participants had graduated within the last three years and thus had recent memories of their experiences.

After receiving IRB approval, I emailed the Greek life offices to have my introduction letter sent out (See Appendix B). The Greek life offices then forwarded my letter to the chapter presidents, who in turn sent the letter to their respective chapter members. The e-mails sent out to the Greek life offices asked them to identify participants that fit within the criteria. After a month of no responses, out of concern of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic was limiting participation, I submitted an IRB modification to add recent graduates of no more than 10 years (in the end, participants were within three years of graduation). This modification was approved, and I began recruiting recent graduates. Once making the modification, and sending a reminder email, through the Greek Life office, I recruited an initial round of participants. I used criterion and snowball sampling to recruit nine individuals to participate in the study. This number was sufficient for the purposes of this study, as I reached saturation of information by the seventh interview. Additionally, I explored the experiences of two more participants through one-on-one interviews to confirm saturation.

All personal information was encrypted, and pseudonyms were used to conceal the participants identity, so there are no risks to privacy or confidentiality. The study protocol was designed so that the questions were open-ended, as discussed in the pilot study section. The open-ended questions were used to prevent any risk of perceived coercion/ undue influence. Clear and concise communication with the study participants ensured there were no risks

associated with the study. The interviews were scheduled on an individual basis, so they were

confidential and anonymous. They were conducted in a manner so that no interruptions occurred

for the duration of the interview. For confidentiality and data security, all data collected was

password protected and encrypted. It will be stored securely and disposed of properly per IRB

protocols, to protect the privacy of the study participants.

Site Selection

Sites in this study include three large universities in the southern United States. For a

university to be designated a large institution, there has to be an enrollment of at least 15,000

students (College Data, 2020). Current students attended ABC University (pseudonym), a

research institution with an approximate enrollment of 58,000 students, between traditional and

online. One of the graduated participants graduated from XYZ University which is close to ABC

in geographical region. XYZ, has an approximate student enrollment of 32,000. One additional

student graduated from EFG University. EFG is another large university with close proximity to

ABC and has a strong research background.

Seven of the study participants currently attend or graduated from ABC university. The

ABC is a large institution committed to life-enhancing discovery, innovative instruction, and

caring community engagement. The university is a comprehensive research, teaching, and public

service institution whose mission is the advancement of knowledge and the pursuit of excellence.

There are more than 300 campus organizations at ABC and more than 10,000 students live on or

adjacent to campus.

All three of these institutions contain charters from each of the five fraternities within the

National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC). The NPHC serves as governing body for all of the male

and female BGLFs and Black Greek Letter Sororities (BGLS). It acts as an advocate for issues

that affect member organizations and promotes unity among all of the Black Greek fraternities and sororities. These universities serve as optimal locations in which African American males have the opportunity to participate is BGLFs.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted interviewing three members of a BGLF at a large institution to obtain a deeper understanding about the social and professional benefits of BGLF membership. The interviews took place (pre Covid-19) in a private office because it was a convenient and quiet meeting place for the participants, where there would be no interruptions. These three gentlemen were members of the same BGLF that were active on the campus of a large institution. Two of the participants were registered for their fourth year at the university, while the third participant was in his third. I want to acknowledge that these individuals were not selected to represent their entire BGLF or the experiences of all BGLF members who attended large institutions. My interest was only to understand the different perspectives of their personal BGLF experience.

The results were not expected, which caused a change in the research protocol. The results showed that the protocol questions were too specific, meaning they were more closed ended. Closed ended questions do not offer the participants the opportunity to express their true feelings (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The questions were written in a way that led the participants to a designated answer. I revised the questions to make them more open ended which allowed me to correctly capture the participants stories for the research study. Open ended questions can be problematic in qualitative research if the participants find the questions too difficult to understand. Thus, the protocol includes follow up questions for use as needed.

Data Collection Procedures

Before data collection, I received IRB approval for the study. The data collection process for this study was a two-step process. The first step consisted of recorded interviews conducted through one-on-one virtual sessions. During the meetings, I used questionnaires and a digital voice recorder to capture all responses accurately. The interviews took place through Zoom; before the interview, I reviewed the informed consent form and obtained their verbal consent through the zoom platform. I recorded the Zoom interview using both Zoom and a digital voice recorder. I had nine meetings that lasted between 40 and 60 minutes with each participant, in a quiet virtual location that ensured privacy and prevented any interruptions. The second step was the transcription process, in which the conversations were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy.

The nine study participants described their experiences, perceptions, and personal perspectives as they remembered them as a means to identify elements identified as positively influencing their persistence to graduation from their respective universities. The study was designed to understand how membership in a BGLF enhances the retention and persistence decisions of its African American male members. Specifically, the protocol questions examined the positive impact and influence that membership in a BGLF has on African American male members and the way in which their decisions to obtain their college degrees was positively impacted and influenced.

As the interview concluded, I also used snowball sampling, a nonprobability sample technique whereby existing study subjects help to recruit more participants from among their acquaintances (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004). Most often researchers use snowball sampling in which the sample pool is rare or limited to a small number of potential members. With snowball sampling, the researcher asks the initial subject or subjects to help identify or

locate people who fit the study criteria (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). This referral phenomenon

helped to provide a larger pool of study participants. With this study, I received four interviews

from participants responding to my emails and five interviews came from snowball sampling.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis requires the researcher to look at the data, which consists of

words, not numbers. The data analysis included several methods to ensure the accuracy of the

results and understanding of the findings. I analyzed the responses of each participant one at a

time. Creswell and Clark (2010) suggest that while analyzing the data, the researcher takes the

data apart to determine the individual responses and then puts the data back together to

summarize the information. I used inductive coding to analyze the data and describe the narrative

from the study participants' point of view. I conducted three rounds of coding during the analysis

stage of this research project. The first two rounds were used to identify the codes and in the

third round, the codes were grouped and reduced to themes. While working through the analysis

process, manual coding was used as opposed to using a computer and electronic based coding.

While electronic coding may be more popular than hand or manual coding, electronic coding

comes with a host of advantages as well as disadvantages. Some of the advantages of electronic

coding are organization, ease of locating material, produces visual representations, and enables

collaborative analysis. The disadvantages of electronic coding are time investment, hinders

making changes, and hinders creativity. (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For the data analysis, all nine interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional

transcription service.

Once grouping the data into themes, I considered the findings in light of Lin's social capital

framework. First, I looked at factors of inequality (Collective Assets) the participants brought

with them into their college experience. Next, I looked at the accessibility that membership in the BGLF provided. Following accessibility, I looked at how participants used contacts and resources from the BGLF. Finally, I considered the effects (returns such as reputation, health, and life satisfaction).

<div align="center">**Trustworthiness**</div>

Trustworthiness was established by the use of member checking throughout the study. All study participants were asked to provide feedback as to the accuracy of the collected data. Member-checking was offered to each study participant, which gave them the opportunity to review their transcripts and make any necessary corrections. Each study participant's individual interview was examined for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. After conducting the three rounds of coding, the research team reviewed the codes, and the themes were developed from that data. To ensure that I bracketed my bias during the coding process, I made sure to follow my protocol questions and sought clarification from the participants. The fact that there is a big age difference, I was careful in not agreeing with what the participants were saying or giving any personal feedback.

Validation strategies included the following, triangulation of data sources, participant feedback, and investigations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation is the collection of data helped to compare and contrast data that was collected at different times and different locations (Simmons, 2013). The data was viewed from the researcher's lens as well as from the participant's lens.

I also implemented steps to ensure that the study was also done in an ethical manner. The study includes honesty, trustworthiness, permissions granted, materials, and identities protected. I ensured my research is honest by making sure all the IRB steps were followed precisely. I

received IRB approval and any approvals from possible gatekeepers before the interviews began. During the interviews, I read the consent form and was given verbal consent from each participant and ensured the virtual interview site had the necessary protection for the participant's anonymity. After each interview, I adequately secured all data and materials to ensure protocols to protect the privacy of the study and the participants, as outlined in the IRB procedures.

Researcher Positionality

As a Black male working in higher education, this is a topic that I have a lot of passion toward. In 1998 as an undergraduate student at a large institution, I became a member of a BGLF, and I remember how that affected my collegiate experience. I understand and am aware of how my college experience was affected by joining a fraternity over 20 years ago. Many changes have taken place over that time, and I wanted to understand how those societal changes have impacted BGLF members in the 21st century. I understand that I have some biases as to how these students may be affected by joining these BGLFs, but I ensured that my biases did not impede upon my research. To ensure that I bracketed my bias during the interview process, I made sure to follow my protocol questions and sought clarification from the participants. The fact that there is a big age difference, I was careful in not agreeing with what the participants were saying or giving any personal feedback.

Conclusion

Chapter three serves as a detailed description of exactly how the research study was designed and carried out. I discussed how the participants would be recruited and selected for this study. This chapter describes the site selections used for this qualitative research study and why those sites were chosen. Also within this chapter were detailed descriptions about how the

data was collected during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Chapter 4 goes in depth and discusses the

findings from this research study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to describe and understand the influence membership in Black Greek-letter fraternities (BGLFs) has on the academic progress of Black male college students. While gathering data, I asked the participants a series of questions about their backgrounds, experiences as college students, and membership in their respective BGLF. The study sought to answer the following research question: 1. How does membership in a BGLF contribute to persistence at a large institution?

The information collected from participants provided context about their experiences as college students, motivations for joining their fraternity and how membership influenced their lives as college men. In this chapter, I describe the participants, the themes that emerged from the participants' stories, and present representative quotes to illustrate each theme. The findings demonstrate the influence membership in a Black Greek-letter fraternity can have on the academic progress of undergraduate members.

Participants

The study consisted of nine African American male students who are members of a BGLF and attend or graduated from a large university. There were five recent college graduates and four undergraduates. These nine young men represent three of the five Black Greek Letter Fraternities, as seen in Table 1. The participants are listed in the order they were interviewed.

Table 1: Study Participants

Participant	Classification	University	Organization
James	Senior	ABC	Kappa Alpha Psi
Matthew	Junior	ABC	Alpha Phi Alpha
John	Graduate (2020)	ABC	Phi Beta Sigma
Mark	Senior	ABC	Alpha Phi Alpha
Luke	Graduate (2019)	ABC	Kappa Alpha Psi
Paul	Graduate (2020)	XYZ	Alpha Phi Alpha
Jacob	Graduate (2019)	ABC	Kappa Alpha Psi
David	Graduate (2018)	EFG	Kappa Alpha Psi
Jeremiah	Senior	ABC	Kappa Alpha Psi

James

The first man interviewed was James, a senior attending ABC University. James is a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. and served in various leadership roles while in college. James has a strong family connection, and those connections led him to attend a university close to his family. While he had aspirations to go a different university, he felt it was best to stay close to home. James attributes a great deal of his success both academically and socially to joining a BGLF.

Matthew

Next up was Matthew, a junior at ABC University and a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Matthew's reason for attending ABC University were a bit different from James. Matthew entered ABC with little excitement and low expectations. He mainly saw college as a

means to an end on his way to law school. Unlike James, Matthew did not have any family ties to a BGLF, so his knowledge of the experience was limited to what he saw on television. Matthew's perspective did eventually change, and he has gone on to experience a number of successes due to his decision to join a BGLF.

John

The next interviewee was John, a recent graduate of ABC University and member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. John's background with Greek Life was also limited to what he had seen on television and social media. He was unaware that there were Greek organizations specifically for African American males. His motivation for going to college was to better himself and make his family proud. Once he joined his organization, his eyes were opened to the numerous benefits of Greek membership. John was the most enthusiastic of the participants in describing the benefits of his Greek affiliation, both academically and professionally.

Mark

My interview with Mark was very enlightening, he is what most people would consider a non-traditional student. Mark came to college from another field, so he was a little older than the other students. He had a clearly defined path to get to graduation that really did not involve many outside activities that could take time away from his studies. Meeting the fraternity members and subsequentially joining Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. caused a paradigm shift that changed his whole perspective.

Luke

Luke is a recent graduate of ABC University and a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. Similar to some of the other study participants, Luke had been introduced to Greek like by some of his family members. Luke, unlike others, did not have a clear

understanding of Greek life but did a good deal of research to find out which organization was

the best fit for him. He also had intentions of going to school elsewhere, but family

circumstances caused him to remain at home. Luke was very excited to speak about all that he

had gained from joining his organization.

Paul

Paul, a recent graduate of XYZ University and a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity,

Inc., would be referred to as a legacy, one of only three in the study group. The term legacy

refers to an individual that is the child of a member of the organization. Paul's father is an Alpha

and his mother is also in a Greek organization. Paul went into college with the stance that he

would not join any Greek organization, despite the fact that he grew up learning a lot about the

organization through his father. He met some "dynamic" Alpha men, who became his mentors at

college and decided to join the organization. He calls it "one of the best decisions I have ever

made," and attributes his college success and his professional growth to the decision of joining

his organization.

Jacob

Next to be interviewed was Jacob, another recent graduate of ABC University and a

member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. Jacob, like a few of the study participants, had plans

to go away to college but he instead stayed close to home for college as a matter of convenience

and family support. Jacob had distant family members that were Greek but none in his immediate

family. Once getting to ABC, Jacob had plans to transfer to another university, but he made

some good friends and made the decision to stay at ABC. Joining his organization gave him the

drive and desire to be "the best version of himself." This translated to his academic and social

time while at ABC and made his college years an important chapter in his book of life.

David

David was the second of three legacy study participants. David is a recent graduate as well as a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. David chose EFG University because he had family in the area and knew he would have some support if he needed it. David was a good student coming out of high school but felt that the rigors of college would be difficult for him. As previously mentioned, David was a legacy, but he was also affiliated with the organization's national mentoring program while in high school. He felt he knew a lot about the organization but noted that what he knew was "just the tip of the iceberg." Once he joined the organization, he mentioned that he was able to see and experience things he never thought possible. David noted that there were many doors opened for him after joining the fraternity, both on and off campus.

Jeremiah

My final interview was with Jeremiah, a senior at ABC University and a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. Jeremiah was the third study participant that was a legacy. He talked about always seeing fraternity interactions between his father and the fraternity members that were always around his father. Usually, a legacy member follows in his father's footsteps, but that is not always the case. Jeremiah did his research to make sure the organization was a good fit for him before he made the decision. Like many of the other study participants, Jeremiah felt this decision was the best one he ever made. Jeremiah was already a good student coming out of high school, so he felt college was going to be relatively easy. Although he did struggle at first, joining a fraternity gave him the desired skills and drive to excel in his academics and has him on track to graduate on time.

Findings

This study examined the relationship between membership in a BGLF and the overall college experiences of African American male college students at a large institution. Several themes were identified in the study indicating that membership had a positive impact on the college experiences of African American male college students at large institutions that participated in this study. The themes identified from the interviews were: beneficial relationships, sense of belonging, familial relationships, community influences, accountability, and achievement.

Beneficial Relationships

Membership in a BGLF helped create beneficial relationships not only with members of participants' respective chapters, but also with members from other chapters and other organizations, both Greek and non-Greek. This is evident from the response given by James as he stated,

> "By far one of my favorite things is to be able to come in contact and build a relationship with your Title Nine coordinator on campus, you know what I'm saying? So those different things from, I mean, building a relationship and going to different presidents' meetings."

Participant John also noted that becoming a part of his fraternity connected him with the Greek family, which is what he remembers most about his college career. He further talked about how being a member of his fraternity connected him with the student body and helped him become involved with the student population. He stated,

> "But by the end of my career, I was president of my fraternity. You know, I was in the Order of Omega. I was in Tau Sigma, the national honor society. I was a transfer orientation leader, stuff like that, because that (my Fraternity) sparked me to understand

who I, you know, when I decided to do something, I like giving my all, so I was like,

Hey, I'm gonna join. I'm gonna join and start joining organizations then."

David, a recent graduate commented about the collaborations he has enjoyed even after

graduating. He states,

"Relationships? well you look at professional relationships, meeting people at work. I

mean, people go out in the street or to a store. You never know who's going to run across,

at the stoplight or in a store or at your daily life for now. One's going to try to say, Hey, I

can, I can pull you with the job, which, you know, considering I'm a recent graduate at

this point in my career, that's always a great thing is another, another potential job

avenue, right? You never know who you're going to meet."

Luke mentioned,

"I don't think, there's not another organization I would join. I love my brothers. I love the

networking that I've joined. I love the connections that I was able to connect with. They

put me on so many platforms that I didn't know that I can be a part of, and it sat me at a

lot of tables if that makes sense."

The theme of beneficial relationships was also highlighted by Paul as he spoke about the things

he experienced as a result of joining his fraternity. He beamed as he said,

"… they encourage me to get involved in my campus, plugged me to the right people, the

person who's in charge of student affairs, the vice president for student affairs at my

campus was an Alpha as well. So, all of these offers are plugging me into different places

continuously over and over."

Beneficial relationships were consistently mentioned by several of the study participants in their

interviews. Mark, a non-traditional student mentioned that one thing in particular he liked was,

"the opportunities to speak with other people and stuff like that." He perked up as he described joining a group of "like-minded individuals" in reference to his line brothers.

Sense of Belonging

The most recurring reason that participants indicated for seeking membership was the notion of brotherhood. Participants consistently noted that they joined a BGLF for the social support that brotherhood in the fraternity brought. The terms brotherhood and bond are used on several occasions during the interviews. Luke commented,

> "… when it comes to socially, when it comes to just, you know, a random person, like my car stopped, or my tire is flat, somebody to see my license plate. And they, they say, oh, you know, they fill up whatever I need you know, pull up beside and help me out. And I had that done to me plenty of times. So, it's that and it's just being able to just network and being able to have that bond. And that's the thing that a lot of people are looking for is that bond."

Luke was happy at the fact that he has help whenever he needs it especially since moving to a new location.

Brotherhood, as it relates to the Black Greek Letter Fraternity, provides a life-long support system, or second family, that significantly impacts the college experience of the men that join these organizations. Membership in a BGLF provided the study participants' constant support. Referring to Luke's statement, the bond of brotherhood created an instant network of friends and family in an environment that may not always seen African American men as welcoming. The bond found within the BGLF membership extends beyond age groups and fellow college peers. David stated,

"I was in their Guide Right program (Kappa League). So, it was through national service program mentoring using the community. I was involved in that from consistently high school, all through high school career and parts of middle school. I knew that's what I wanted to do, be like my dad, like his, his line brothers, his chapter brothers, and kind of carried that on. Then when I got to come on the campus, seeing the relationship with [inaudible] head on campus and notoriety, what they could do for me while in school."

John did not feel a sense of belonging at his first university, where he experienced what he called "culture shock." John grew up in an urban environment where there were large concentrations of minorities. His first university was primarily White. He noted,

"I first went to, [a different] university, and it was a little bit of a culture shock as, where I grew up, it was very minority oriented. It was very heavily, you know, African American, Hispanic populations, when I went to [the first university], however, there were things that I was not used to, you know, I, I was, I was called things I'd never been called before. So, I decided to look elsewhere."

John then enrolled at ABC university because they were in the top ten for most diverse universities in the country and there, he developed the same sense of belonging described by the other participants.

Familial Relationships

As the study participants finished their high school career and made their decisions to continue their educational journeys, plans they determined where they wanted to attend college. With their college choices made, they started making plans to begin the next chapter in their lives. James had made his decision to go to [a different university] to further his studies, but sometimes you have to make changes. James stated in his interview, "I was in the [a different

university] system when I first started college, I moved back home to help my mom pay bills due to discrepancies between her and my father's divorce." So, in this scenario, James had to alter his plans and stay in the area to help his family. While Jacob had different issues, ultimately, he had a similar outcome. Jacob applied to [a different university] but did not get accepted. His next step was to enroll at ABC in order to qualify for transfer admission to [a different university]. While at ABC, he had to get braces and the family went down to one car, so Jacob remaining at ABC eased the stress on his family. Jacob was ultimately happy with his decision to stay at ABC. Luke faced similar issues to James. Luke grew up in another part of the country, and his family moved to from Mississippi to Texas before his junior year of high school. As he finished high school his plans were to attend [a different university]. Similar to James, he had to change his plans,

> "Actually, I was originally accepted to [a different university]. I declined that. It was just things kind of happened in life that made me decide the choices around ABC. I didn't see at that time, but later, I did, my mom wound up coming down with breast cancer. So, it kind of made sense to, stay home or so, ABC was the closest school…"

While Luke's circumstances were extreme, his decision to remain close to his family, showed his responsibility to his family and ultimately served as a catalyst of his later decisions. Jeremiah strongly felt that family impacted his decision to join a fraternity. His father was a Kappa and Jeremiah viewed fraternity membership as one of the positive traits that he so respected in his father. In talking about one of the main reasons he joined his fraternity, he stated,

> "I decided to join that fraternity, because first of all, my dad is also a Kappa. And so, growing up, it was straight. I saw a smooth well-dressed man, respectful. I grew up around that. And so, when I finally became of age where I could look into it on my own and research it on my own, I said, Hey dad, I'm interested in this. I want to do this."

Relationships held by the participants all impacted their decisions leading to BGLF membership.

Community Influences

The participants described a variety of influences growing up, both positive and negative. Many of these influences shaped the paths that these young men took and the choices they made. As it relates to their decision to join their fraternity, the influences came from a variety of sources. Out of the nine participants, James benefitted from a significant fraternal influence. When James's parents divorced and his relationship with his father changed, James's older brother stepped in and became his role model. His brother, who is also a member of the same fraternity, had a huge impact on his life. James states,

> "When I was in high school my sophomore year, my parents got a divorce, it really like, completely like my whole relationship with my father like just ceased immediately, so, and that very, that's a very powerful time is becoming into like a young man or a young adult. It's where, for instance, birds and the bees and everything else. My father wasn't there for to have that talk with me. So, the person who really filled those that fatherly role was my, older brother. He's 16 and a half, 17 years older than me. He's also a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated."

James also mentioned how his brother's line brothers played an important role in his life as role models.

James's experiences are reminiscent of many other fraternity members, where a close family member has a profound effect on their early life and that translates to following in those footsteps. Jacob's fraternity introduction was slightly different from James's experience. Although he did not have any immediate family members in the organization, he was influenced by an uncle and a deacon at his church. Jacob also mentioned he has some cousins that are

members of Black Greek Letter Sororities, and they mentioned fraternities and sparked his curiosity. Jacob then began to research the fraternities, and mixed with talking to his uncle, his interest in Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. grew.

Luke's introduction to the fraternity, on the other hand, came while he was still in high school. He had close friends that were already in college joining different organizations. Luke explained, "I have friends who were obviously transitioning from high school to college their first year or have people who crossed sororities and fraternities within NPHC." Based on his friends' examples, Luke began to do some research on the different fraternal organizations and found that Kappa Alpha Psi was the organization that most closely aligned with his character and morals. As he said," Kappa Alpha Psi was the only thing that stood out from 2012 all the way up until I crossed in spring 17…"
The people from Luke's community were definitely instrumental in him choosing the BGLF that he joined.

The similarities among Paul, David, and Jeremiah are that they not only have that familial connection, they grew up in households with fathers that were also in fraternities. They each mentioned seeing their fathers interact with members of their respective chapters and how that interaction affected them. Their introduction to the fraternity happened prior to college and played a large role in their decisions to join a BGLF.

Accountability

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was that the BGLFs provided accountability for the participants, which in turn encouraged their success. Jacob is a prime example of utilizing fraternity membership to hold him accountable. He recounted,

> "I think it really put me out of my comfort zone. It allowed me to just see things differently and of course, having those, those brothers, you know, that you're closely bonded to, you know, they are there to cheer you on and support you and things you do. So, it really helped me to socialize more, speak up more and just having that confidence, you know, moving forward after I joined."

Accountability emerged as a very strong theme that each participant mentioned as a factor pushing them to succeed,

> James recently served as the Polemarch or president of the chapter and has a lot more pressure on him. James noted, "As the president, you are essentially the face of the chapter, so if anything happens, all eyes are focused on you." From the interview, it was apparent that James felt that stress at times, as he recalls,

> "…the bloodline of the lifeline of the chapter is literally in your hands because if you make one wrong move, the chapters gone. And that's disrespectful. I'm the 166th person to come into my chapter that's disrespect to the other 165 people before me, especially our charter members."

This feeling leads the members to always try to put their best foot forward. Jacob also touched on the idea that by being in a leadership role, you have to be at the top of your game and leaving a positive legacy for future members. He stated, "Make sure you have your why and there's a purpose behind it cause it's a lifetime organization."

John shared a similar experience as James, as he (John) served as the chapter president while attending ABC university. John mentioned,

> "I felt sometimes that, like, older members were more inclined to be active or talk to you when you messed up rather than, you know, like, hey John, congratulations on winning,

you know, the scholarship for, you know, best male group, you know, not as many people

said, Congratulations, but you end up on Greek Shenanigans, everybody wants to know

why you just messed up…"

This seemed to be a point of interest for John, as he was extremely proud of the good things the

chapter does, but that part is not usually publicized.

Achievement

Achievement is a term that is important to each of the Black Greek letter fraternities. It is

one of the founding principles of each organization and is usually mentioned within the

organization's motto or mission statement. Membership in a BGLF impacted the participants'

academic achievement by developing leadership skills which fostered achievement, by

encouraging perseverance in their undergraduate studies, and by encouraging the pursuit of

advanced degrees. Another noted influence on the participants' college experience was

networking opportunities. Whether it was the opportunity to meet an international network of

fraternal members, influential social and political figures both locally and nationally, or

individuals whose connections could result in career opportunities, networking was seen as a

present influence directly related to membership in each of the fraternities. Participants talked

about how their fraternity experiences helped them to persevere through challenges within their

college experiences. Luke talked about ways in which he was able to persevere while he was still

in college. He noted,

"The connection is there just the, the networking that I've been able to accomplish,

especially with being president of NPHC, you know, president of five fraternities and

four sororities historically. it's a lot and it's humbling because it humbled me in different

areas that I never knew I could be humbled in."

Luke beamed with joy and was very proud as he talked about the accomplishments he had made

after joining Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

Another noted influence on the participants' college experience was leadership

development. Being a leader puts you in a position to achieve goals in numerous aspects of life.

Being a member of a BGLF exposed participants to experiences that allowed them to grow in

their leadership skills and prepared them for their professional careers. David notes,

> "I noticed that academically, you know, when you're interacting with professors that are
>
> also there, there's a word association say patients or Masonic organizations, they tend to
>
> treat you differently. They tend to look up off of you a little bit more than the average to
>
> man you're going out from professional job opportunities…. I don't think I would have
>
> accomplished as much maybe professionally. I think I could have in a sense
>
> academically, with that said they're all kind of wrapped in each other. Right. I think I
>
> would have been limited."

Being a member of a BGLF provided participants opportunities to attend external leadership

development activities and to serve in ambassadorial roles. James noted that by joining his

fraternity, he had the opportunity to travel to Tampa, Florida and attend meetings with the upper

administration of the fraternity.

Participant Luke, as a recent graduate, spoke about how the concept of achievement, has

shown to be in effect even after graduation. He said,

> "So, if I did not have, or I did not join that organization, I don't think I probably would
>
> have had that mindset of being able to achieve everything that I can accomplish literally.
>
> So, I think professionally, it has definitely helped me. It definitely did not hinder me in
>
> any areas professionally. I got a couple of job interviews when it came to people

knowing, you know, what organization mentally, and of course my background as well.

When it comes to my work history, but for sure being able to join that organization,

definitely enhanced everything professionally and personally as well."

Luke expressed an issue that comes with fraternity membership, the lifelong bond that continues

well past college years.

Summary of Findings

This chapter provided the majoring findings of the narrative of these Black male

undergraduate members of Black Greek-letter fraternities. I shared the findings through the

stories and experiences of the participants using narrative inquiry. Themes shared included (1)

beneficial relationships, (2) sense of belonging, (3) familial relationships, (4) community

influences, (5) accountability, and (6) achievement as they relate to the participants' experiences

in college and as undergraduate members of a Black-Greek letter fraternity. This chapter focused

on the participants' interpretation of the values of their respective fraternities, their motivations

for joining their fraternity, interpretation of academic progress and how organizational

expectations of their fraternity had impacted their academic progress. The stories and

experiences of these Black male undergraduate students demonstrated that their fraternity

experience has had an impact on their academic progress and the fraternal expectations have had

a mixed effect on them. Next, Chapter Five discusses the findings of this research study in

greater detail.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to describe and understand the experiences of Black undergraduate men in Black Greek-letter fraternities (BGLF), specifically how being affiliated with the organization influenced their academic engagement. Participants in this study were nine African American undergraduate and recent graduate men who are members of Black Greek-letter fraternities. This study's goal was to bring attention to each participant's story and provide a narrative that describes the experiences of members of BGLFs in their own words. The research study was guided by the following question:

1. How does membership in a BGLF contribute to persistence at a large institution?

The experiences of the participants were captured via one-on-one virtual interviews. During the one-on-one interviews, the participants revealed the reasons that influenced their desires to become connected to their respective college campuses and persist towards graduation. As mentioned in Chapter1, it is introduced that there is a problem of low student persistence for African American males. In fact, African American males have the lowest attrition rates of any gender and racial group (Wood & Palmer, 2014). College completion rates are indeed a challenge for college leaders who are struggling to increase graduation rates for all of their students, including those of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

This chapter is organized into six sections - the first section provides a summary of the findings followed by a discussion of the findings. These findings are then tied to the study's conceptual framework and theory. The remaining sections present an analysis for the implications of the study and offer strategies that can possibly improve the persistence of current African American male students by examining the success of Greek affiliated African American male students. These strategies may be successfully adopted by colleges and universities to aid

them in the elimination of possible barriers to persistence and to improve the probability of their

African American male college students becoming African American male graduates. These

recommendations are formulated

from the key factors and ideas identified by the study's participants as influential and supportive

for African American males as they attend large institutions.

The value of this study is that it offers an inside look at academic engagement and

persistence from the viewpoint of African American male students who are also members of

BGLFs. The experiences shared by the participants represent the phenomenon under study,

which could help to shape policy and develop programming at a range of colleges and

universities. The methods used during data collection allowed the participants an opportunity to

give their perspectives and share their experiences of being an African American man attending a

large institution, and to understand the influence of membership in a BGLF on their academic

engagement.

. The six themes which emerged from the coding of the interviews are beneficial

relationships, sense of belonging, familial relationships, community influences, accountability,

and achievement. The findings from the study may serve to help improve the campus

experiences and social engagement of African American males, and thereby help to encourage

them to persist at higher rates.

Summary of Findings

The findings revealed the important role that BGLF membership held for the study

participants and how this membership strengthened their decisions to remain connected to their

respective campuses. This included, but was not limited to, academics, leadership positions on

campus in other organizations, creating pathways to professional opportunities and influencing

the other African American students in positive ways. The many elements of the initiation

process, such as working together with like-minded brothers on specific projects and staying in

accordance with fraternity principles all teach life skills. It also helped to keep their grades up

having the expectations for their brothers and other members of the fraternity. Given my own

positionality, the participants felt a kinship with me as the researcher and established a high level

of trust as they provided me with very candid responses.

Several of the participants spoke about being exposed to fraternities even before arriving

as first year students via family members, peers, and community influences. These pre-college

connections offered the African American male participants a glimpse of what college could

mean for them. Once on campus and committed to pledging, the participants relied heavily on

their brothers for support, and this support and engagement helped their persistence. The

participants concluded that their membership in a BGLF fueled their decisions to persist. In fact,

their BGLF membership was directly influential in their decisions to persist because it connected

them to their respective campuses in such a way that membership in other organizations did not.

It gave them a substitute family and a space where they could be inspired and provide inspiration

to others at the same time. Their membership allowed them to have access to generations of

Black men who had successfully mastered the rigors of academia. They were immediately

embraced by chapter members, graduate members, graduate advisors, faculty members and staff

and members of the community who were essentially there to cheer them on towards the ultimate

goal of graduation.

Beneficial Relationships

The participants placed a great deal of emphasis on the bond, brotherhood, and networks

created by being a part of their fraternity. Some referred to their relationship as one that others

outside of the fraternity would not possibly be able to understand. They feel connected to each

other and to other fraternity members who joined other places. They also feel more connected to

their campus and become more involved with other organizations. The participants also referred

to BGLFs as contributing to the unification of the African American community on campus.

These relationships are what hold the fraternity members accountable to each other. Their love

for each other and the bond they have allows them to check each other when one is not

performing well.

Participants reported networking as an important aspect of BGLF membership.

Participants were able to connect with peers on campus and at local universities, as well as with

nationally and internationally located BGLF members. Networking provided personal benefits

resulting most notably in opportunities for internships, fellowships, and other career

development opportunities.

Sense of Belonging

Participants talked about feeling alone and needing to feel like they belonged at these

large institutions. They talked about desiring a sense of belonging, feeling at home, and the

university being a good fit for them. The participants talked about how the membership in their

organizations helped create this sense of belonging. The fraternity was like a family or a home

for them, which helped them connect to the campus as a whole. Having family support can

influence African American males' decision to attend college and to persist.

Due to their fraternity experiences, they were able to let the overall campus community

know that they were present and gained social capital because they were Black Greeks. They

were able to experience that sense of belonging and become connected with their African

American peers and the campus community at-large.

Familial Relationships

Three of the participants talked about how they were influenced by their father's involvement in their fraternity. Others had family members who were members of other BGLFs, also. Another participant talked about how he joined a Greek fraternity despite experiencing opposition from his mother. She would constantly remind him to not let the fraternity put his college in jeopardy or she would drive to the school and take him out. His mother was not well versed in the Greek experience and was against him joining a fraternity. Also present when talking about familial relationships is the brotherhood that is gained. For the participants, the construct of brotherhood provided a much-needed support system on campus.

Community Influences

The participants placed great emphasis on giving back and how being a member was the avenue by which they gave back to their community. Giving back included educating the community about the culture of African Americans and how to interact with them, supporting the community through volunteer service, making a difference, and mentoring. Forming community relationships with their fraternity brothers, other students of color, and other members of the campus community (i.e., White Greeks, other student organizations, and faculty/staff) provided benefits for the participants and membership in their respective fraternities. These findings align with findings indicating that students benefit from engagement in diversity-related activities.

The study participants emphasized leadership, and several talked about how the Black Greeks were the leaders on campus and in many cases that level of leadership and achievement transferred to other organizations. Like beneficial relationships, community influences are connected to academic achievement through mentoring other members and assisting them with their academics.

Accountability

The participants spoke about how being a part of their fraternity had a positive impact on their academics because their fraternity brothers held them accountable not only for their grades, but in all aspects of their lives. Not only would the members hold each other accountable for earning good grades, they would provide support mechanisms for members whose grades are faltering to help bring them improve their grade point averages.

The participants felt a responsibility to their fraternity and their chapters to perform well academically because of their connection to the fraternity and the fact that the fraternity has to maintain a certain cumulative GPA to remain active. Participants noted peer accountability as a notable influence of membership. Although participants shared that the heightened level of engagement that came with BGLF membership often produced competing priorities between social and academic responsibilities overall, these BGLF members felt held accountable to their peers to perform well academically. Many participants noted that once they joined their fraternity, their identities were inextricably linked with the organization. So, any failure on their part was a reflection of failure on behalf of the organization.

Achievement

The participants talked about how their fraternity membership pushed them to excel academically, and even to further their education with graduate and terminal degrees. Their line brothers, chapter brothers, and fraternity brothers pushed each other to attain advanced degrees. Some even chose their careers because of their fraternity involvement. A few of the participants pursued or aspire to pursue graduate degrees and positions in Higher Education because of their involvement in a Black Greek fraternity. Membership also gave the participants the tools to endure the difficult times in college and persist until they graduate. The pledge process taught

them perseverance, which was applied to their academic success. With regard to achievement,

participants reported they felt the need to remain at their universities until they graduated

because of their responsibility to their chapters and graduating from college was the end result of

academic success. These themes indicate that membership in BGLFs seems to have a positive

impact on the academic outcomes of African American males at large institutions.

These findings are related to literature stating that the presence of BGLFs is positively

correlated with the retention/academic success of African American male students at large

institutions.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this research study confirmed that membership in a BGLF, does have

a positive impact on the academic engagement and persistence of the African American

members. Through this research study, I was able to listen to the stories of young African

American males who are also in a BGLF.

Beneficial Relationships

Robertson and Mason (2008) posited that faculty/staff relationships correlated with the

academic success of African American male students, which was supported by what my

participants said in their interviews. My participants also talked about the bond created with

older members of their fraternity, which correlated with the work of McClure (2006b).They

believed that forming and joining Greek-letter organizations could be beneficial to them and

others, both socially and developmentally (Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011). Fraternity

membership has an impact on its members social life. After joining there is an immediate

increase in their social media activity and the number of groups, they are invited to participate in.

Sense of Belonging

Membership in BGLF's helps Black males foster social and cultural networks, which alleviates the negative impact of exclusion from the majority population at large institutions (Harper & Harris, 2006). Participants talked about the feelings of loneliness while attending large institutions. They talked about how those feelings went away after joining their BGLFs. The fraternities were like a family or home away from home which helped them connect to the campus and feel welcome and even join other organizations. The literature suggests that some of the unique challenges students of color experience are isolation and alienation, establishing a sense of belonging, and creating a suitable place in the social life of college (Landry, 2003; Mills-Novoa, 1999).

Familial Relationships

BGLFs have the potential to serve as an essential form of support and social networking for African American students (Harper, 2008b; Kimbrough, 1995). All of the participants shared how membership in their respective fraternities increased their social and campus responsibilities. They also shared how they felt the need to be more visible on campus than they were prior to joining. The concept of brotherhood—strong relationships formed through shared experiences—was linked to Tinto's (1993) construct of congruence. According to the theory, as long as a student connects to a subculture of the institution, the need for congruence is met (Tinto, 1993).

Community Influences

BGLF membership taught participants how to connect with the community and overcome personal barriers. These challenges include difficulty seeking help, becoming involved in clubs and organizations, and establishing supportive relationships with faculty members, administrators, and peers (Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010). The participants placed great emphasis on

giving back and how being a member was the avenue by which they gave back to their

community. Giving back included educating the community about the culture of African

Americans and how to interact with them, supporting the community through volunteer service,

making a difference, and mentoring. These students report a greater knowledge of and ability to

connect with persons of different races and cultures, better academic outcomes, and increased

persistence (Denson & Chang, 2009; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Umbach & Kuh, 2006). The

participants also talked about the bond created with older members of their fraternity, which

correlated with the work of McClure (2006). McClure's participants reported that membership

established a social network after college that fosters a supportive environment that increases

college success.

Accountability

Joining one of these organizations brings an enormous sense of pride and reverence for

the members who have come before (Kimbrough, 1995). With all these feelings compounded

together, the BGLF member feels that they have a standard to uphold and by not doing their best,

they are letting down those men who have come before them. The fear of disappointing the older

brothers may lead the BGLF members to focus on being engaged at the university. Some of the

participants detailed how chapter responsibilities were immediately thrust upon them after

joining without any true training. Participants also described how the expectations of their peers

for fraternities to provide social programming and events placed a considerable burden on them.

Harper (2007) found that collective responsibility (i.e., how individual grades impact the

chapter's success, being a role model for other African American students, and responsibility for

exuding a positive image of BGLFs on campus) had a positive impact on the classroom

participation of members of BGLFs at a large institution. Henry (2012) found that being held

accountable by peers was a positive influence of being a BGLF, which is supported by the

findings of this study.

Achievement

The participants talked about how their fraternity membership pushed them to excel

academically, helped them to persevere through adversity, and pursue graduate and terminal

degrees. For the participants, membership had a positive impact on their academic outcomes.

Many of the members are role models on campus due to their presence and how they carry

themselves (Harper, 2007). Findings from this study show that membership in a BGLF increases

professional networking opportunities, fosters positive peer relations, and improves leadership

skills. Peer support through involvement in student organizations plays a role in the academic

success of high-achieving African American male students at large institutions, and membership

in BGLFs positively impacts the academic outcomes of African American male students at large

institutions (Harper, 2006b; McClure, 2006; Robertson & Mason, 2008). This study uniquely

describes the specific connection between BGLF membership and the pursuit of extended

learning opportunities.

Theoretical Framework

From Nan Lin's perspective, the theory of Social Capital, highlights the idea that social

capital is embedded in resources gained though social networks. When Black males enter

college, they lack the collective assets, like trust that comes from feeling the sense of belonging.

As they get acquainted to college life and meet new people, they become more accessible. After

joining their organization, they gain access to the social networks and all the resources that

comes with fraternity membership. The effect of their new membership brings them a campus

reputation and the satisfaction of having a lifelong brotherhood and a place to belong.

Lin's concept of social capital was developed in agreement with the general, idea of capital, meaning an individual is capable of generating value from their surroundings. McClure (2006) added that Black fraternities are important social networks for African American men and provide men social capital as fraternities integration and connected them with the college campus. As a result of the study, I suggest that since social capital is linked to academic outcomes, involvement in minority student organizations, specifically BGLFs, provides African American males with key resources for college persistence and completion.

Implications for Practice

My study has implications for a number of areas including Higher Education, Student Affairs, and Greek Life. Implications for higher education include a list of strategies to implement to improve the persistence and success of African American male students. One such strategy would be to create offices and resource centers that are devoted to supporting African American male students. This would provide a place for the students to find information about all things campus related. Another strategy would be to develop pre-college programs designed to provide opportunities for young African American males to visit college, stay on campus, and possibly take classes before college. This would give them a firsthand look at what college life is like. During these programs, they can also be introduced to the BGLFs so they can see what they really look like.

In addition to providing pre-college programs, universities could also provide access to internships, assistantships, and apprenticeships to African American males. These experiences, similar to benefits of a BGLF, help college students visualize future career options and provide social connections for applying for those positions. For example, students interested in business management can attend leadership institutes to learn socialization and interviewing skills plus the

specifics to developing successful business plans. Without exposure to leadership and career opportunities, students lacking social capital may not have the ability to break the generational cycle of working in low wage professions.

My study revealed that membership in BGLFs has a positive impact on the academic and engagement of African American male students and the presence of BGLFs has a positive impact on the campus at-large. It also adds to the existing literature regarding fraternity membership and provides new knowledge regarding this phenomenon. Findings like these can hopefully overshadow the negative image of BGLFs portrayed in the media due to hazing events. BGLFs also benefit from these findings in that they show the large institutions that these organizations have merit and can assist them in improving the persistence and success of African American male students. There are some large institutions that have banned Greek membership as a whole, that only serves to further harm the potential benefits that BGLFs provide. Large institutions with BGLFs could use my findings to develop ways to integrate these organizations into the overall campus culture and showcase them, thus showing they are aware of the impact of these organizations on the campus. In findings that support the literature, the participants found that their BGLFs supported them academically and socially and assisted them in navigating the campus; however, the participants indicated that BGLFs were different from other forms of student organizations.

Implications for Policy

The findings of the study indicated that membership in a BGLF provided leadership development for the study participants. Participants also benefited from a strong social network that allowed for internship and career opportunities, as well as a peer network within the collegiate environment that provided a supportive environment that participants found beneficial.

This is consistent with existing literature that states that BGLF membership creates an environment that makes the experience at large institutions more positive (Brown, 2006) and provides opportunities for service and engagement and much needed social support (Harper & Harris, 2006). These findings suggest that Greek life offices should consider encouraging mentorship programs between Greek-affiliated and non–Greek-affiliated African American men to build on the strength of the social network found in BGLFs. Non-Greek African American men can benefit from the peer accountability inherent in BGLF membership. The social network found in BGLFs also presents an opportunity for Greek life offices to partner with alumni development and admissions offices to develop programs with BGLFs for outreach to former and potential African American students. This may enhance the enrollment numbers of African Americans as well as potentially increase the rates at which African Americans matriculate to graduation.

A strength of Greek life is their ability to create connections and build social capital among members. New policy could incentivize Greek life chapters that successfully promote members into professions following graduation. Participant John lamented about the negative attention Greek life receives during hazing incidents and the lack of attention Greek life receives for the lifelong benefits afforded to members. Policy that continues to shift Greek life activities toward professional opportunities can incentivize a reduction of harmful practices and events.

Future Research

Additional research is necessary to understand African American male student persistence. I would like to extend this research to include a larger sample of undergraduate and recent graduate members. The data collected shows promise and I feel that getting more study participants possibly from all organizations may give a better look at the phenomenon. This

research study touches on the fact that African American students who attend a large institution

perform better academically and make positive decisions to persist until graduation when they

are able to engage in student organizations. Harper (2015) identifies the issue of persistence and

provides a general solution with the engagement. Another study noted the need for successful

Black male initiatives. Wood (2011) specifically identified a BGLF as a student organization that

has historically provided undergraduates with a network of fraternity brothers who are leaders,

excellent students, and community service oriented. Wood (2011) noted in his study that a

college and its personnel, culture, policies and procedures, and programs have a critical role in

student success. I also feel that this type of study would be beneficial to look at the influences

that Greek membership has on African American females attending large institutions. The

female and male dynamic is a bit different, but it would be interesting to see if there is a

difference between the genders.

Conclusion

Our colleges and universities are more diverse than at any other time in history. More and

more students are enrolling in colleges, and students of color can freely attend any institutional

type of their choice. What remains relatively unchanged, however, is the educational gap that

exists between African Americans and their White counterparts. Although the African American

male student enrollment numbers are increasing, the retention and persistence numbers do not

reflect the same (NCES, 2017). The African American men who participated in this study

acknowledged and credited their BGLF membership with their persistence and success at a large

institution. The study yielded some interesting results and I feel that utilizing multiple locations

throughout the country may yield additional beneficial practices. With further research, there can

be programming designed to help keep those students who may not normally finish college,

while my study had limitations and difficulties, the results are valuable, nonetheless. The results

of this study demonstrated there are mechanisms on college campuses that do support African

American men and perhaps make them more likely than not to persist.

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Appendix A

UTA IRB Application

SECTION A: GENERAL INFORMATION

1. **Non-UTA Personnel:** *Enter all individuals that are **NOT affiliated with UTA** who will interact or intervene with human subjects for the research study OR who will access identifiable subject data. <u>UTA-affiliated personnel should be listed on the electronic portion of the protocol (#3) in the electronic submission system.</u>*

    *Note: *In the electronic submission system, upload a completed <u>Non-UTA Collaborator Form</u> and Human Subject Protection training for each listed Non-UTA individual.*

Name:	Organization:

2. **Expected Start Date and Completion Date:** The expected start date is January 2021, and the completion date is June 2021. *(You are not authorized to start any research on human subjects including subject recruitment until the IRB has approved the research protocol.)*

3. **Funding:** *Indicate existing, potential, or pending sources of funding below (you may select more than one).* ***Note: If you do (or may) receive funding from NSF, NIH, CMMS, DOD, DOJ, DOE, DOEd, DOT, or any other federal agency, you <u>MUST</u> disclose this funding source below to ensure that your study is reviewed in accordance with the appropriate federal regulations for that specific federal funding source.**

    <u>External:</u>
    ☐ **Federal (Sponsor:)**   ☐ **State (Sponsor:)**   ☐ **Industry (Specify Sponsor:)**

    Grants & Contracts Bluesheet Number from <u>Mentis</u>**:**
    <u>Other:</u>
    ☐ **UTA Department Account**   ☐ **Personal Funds**   ☐ **Other:**   ☒ **None (*No funding*)**

SECTION B: RESEARCH CLASSIFICATION, RATIONALE, PROCEDURES, SITES, QUALIFICATIONS, OVERSIGHT

4. **Research Classification:** *Indicate if this study is categorized as **Minimal Risk (MR)** or **Greater than Minimal Risk (GMR)**. "Minimal Risk (MR)" means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in the subjects' daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. "Greater than Minimal Risk (GMR)" refers to research activities that do not meet the definition of "Minimal Risk." Throughout this application form, there are additional questions or information requested for studies categorized as GMR; these instructions will be presented in purple.*

    ☒ **Minimal Risk (MR)**   ☐ **Greater than Minimal Risk (GMR)**

Note: *Studies that are federally funded and/or FDA regulated will be further classified into exempt, expedited, or full board in accordance with the Common Rule 45 CFR 46 and/or 21 CFR parts 50 and 56. See **Flowchart**.*

5. **Rationale:** *List the primary research questions, hypotheses, and / or objectives guiding this study.*

   This study will serve to answer the following research questions:
   1. What are student perceptions of how their undergraduate membership in a Black Greek-letter fraternity influences their academic progress?
   2. What expectations of the fraternity do undergraduate members believe influences their academic success as they define it?
   This research study is designed to examine the Black Greek Letter Fraternity membership's characteristics to propel its members to be more academically engaged while attending a predominately White institution.

6. **Procedures:** *Describe the procedures step-by-step, including details on all methods that will be used to collect human subject data from the beginning to the end of the study. Describe* what *data will be collected (and if it will be individually identifiable);* when *and* where *the data will be collected; and* how *it will be collected (instruments or other measures). Use clear, concise layman's language that can be easily understood by persons outside your field and provide definitions for any technical terms. Add pictures if needed. **Note: Refer to the Types of Research guidance page for a list of specific information required for different types of research.** For GMR research, it is also helpful to provide references or pilot data to support the proposed procedures.*

   As it pertains to human subject data collection, I will set-up individual one-on-one virtual interviews with each study participant. Once the criteria have been determined, each qualifying participant will be contacted through email with the study details. I also plan to use snowball sampling to ensure the desired number of participants is reached. I will use students that meet the criteria attending the University of Texas at Arlington. Due to the limited number of Black Greek Letter Fraternity members at UTA, I will contact the Greek Life Director at the University of North Texas. I will email him the introduction letter and he will send it to the chapter presidents, who will in turn send it to the individual members. During the interviews, a series of approximately thirteen open-ended questions will be asked, with follow-up questions, to assess the participant's level of academic engagement. The data will be digitally recorded using a cell phone recording app, a computer through Zoom, and a digital recorder to ensure accuracy. The data will be collected during the forty-five-minute interviews that will take place virtually to ensure participant confidentiality.

7. **Duration:** *Indicate how many participation sessions, interactions, or follow ups are expected for each subject participant, including the amount of time required for each visit and how long their total participation is expected to take (weeks, months, years, etc.) over the entire duration of the study.*

   For this research study, I will have between 10 and 15 participation sessions, one with each study participant (each participant will sit for only one interview). The interviews will take approximately 45 minutes to one hour in length. The interviews will take place over the course of a semester, approximately three to four months.

8. **Alternatives to Participation:** *Describe subjects' available options if they choose not to participate in the research study and clarify whether individuals that decline participation will still be subjected to the*

intervention (even if their data will not be utilized for research purposes). If research involves students, describe their alternatives to obtain course / extra credit if applicable. If research involves a health intervention, clarify whether individuals that decline will continue to receive standard care.

If subjects choose not to participate in the study, no data from them will be included in the research. They will have complete control over whether or not they want to participate. This study will not have any course or extra credit associated with it

9. **Location(s) and Site(s):** *Specify all locations where research procedures are expected to take place and which study procedures will take place at each site. Studies that take place online should specify the websites where data will be collected. Describe if any of the research will take place internationally. For multi-site research studies, review the web page for [Collaborative Research](). If any part of this study will be conducted in an institution or location administratively separate from UTA, indicate the institution(s) and upload a site permission letter.*

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the study participants will complete a virtual interview using Zoom. Ultimately a face-to-face interview will be ideal for getting body language cues to go along with the verbal responses. Writing and data analysis will take place at the PI's home office.

10. **Personnel Qualifications:** *Describe the relevant qualifications, special training, and experience of the research team/personnel as it pertains to the specific procedures or population of the study. If you (and your faculty advisor, if applicable) do not have any relevant qualifications or experience, please state that; the IRB will consider the risk level of the study and evaluate if additional oversight or input is necessary.*

I currently serve as a coordinator in Academic Affairs, where I work with the student population at UTA. In my current role, I handle student data, so I am fully aware of confidentiality rules and specifications. I am also an alumni member of a Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity and serve as the On-campus advisor to that Fraternity.

11. **Study Oversight:** *The Principal Investigator has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of this research, protection of subjects, and supervision of all protocol personnel. Describe your plan for oversight and communication to ensure that the entire research team: conducts the research ethically and in accordance with the approved protocol, creates/maintains appropriate study documentation and research records, and protects confidentiality of data.*

As I will be the only one conducting this research study, I will be solely responsible for ensuring the study data's safety and protection. All data collected will be stored /saved on devices that are password protected and encrypted. All study participants will give their consent at the beginning of the study and at each subsequent meeting that takes place. They will have the choice to decline participation at any time. Each participant will be informed about what will happen to the data collected and ensured that it will be held in confidence.

SECTION C: POPULATION & ENROLLMENT

12. **Population(s):** *Describe the target population(s) of the study, for example: UTA students, competent or healthy adults, children, prisoners, non-English speaking, pregnant women, individuals with impaired decision-making capacity, other vulnerable populations.*

The target population for this study will be Black male students attending both the University of Texas at Arlington and the University of North Texas. These students will also be members of Black Letter Greek Fraternities.

13. **Inclusion Criteria:** *List all criteria for including subjects, and explain the methods you will use to determine whether a subject is eligible based on your criteria (i.e. pre-screen, medical chart review). If your study is/will be funded, ensure that the inclusion criteria listed here match the details in your proposal.*

For participants to be eligible for this study, they need to either in their Sophomore, Junior, or Senior year in college. They will also be an active member of one of the 5 Black Greek Letter Fraternities, this information with be collected through the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life at the University of Texas at Arlington and the Office of Greek Life at the University of North Texas.

14. **Exclusion Criteria:** *Explain any specific factors or contraindications that would make a subject ineligible to participate in this study, even if they would otherwise meet the inclusion criteria listed above. If your study is/will be funded, ensure that the exclusion criteria listed here match the details in your proposal.*

All students that meet the above criteria will be eligible for the study. The only exclusions would be that the students have to be academically eligible and in good standing both with the university and the Greek life office.

15. **Number of Subjects:** *Provide the number of subjects (or subject records/data sets) you intend to enroll over the course of the study. This information will be utilized by the IRB to understand the scope and logistics of the study; you may provide a projected range.*

To get a solid data set, the number of participants will be between 10 and 15. This number of participants should help to get an accurate account of college experiences.

16. **Recruitment Strategies:** *Describe how you will identify and contact potential participants, and how you will obtain their contact information. Upload permission letters/emails as needed from individuals or organizations providing access to private contact information. Upload a copy of all planned recruitment materials (i.e. letters/emails; website/social media posts; printed flyers; telephone scripts; subject pool posts (SONA, Mechanical Turk, Research Match); scripts for recruitment in-person).*

I will contact the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life at the University of Texas at Arlington to identify potential study participants that meet the desired criteria. I will get their contact information to contact them and initially introduce myself and the study subject. The first contact will be through email, and they will have the option to email me back or contact me through the phone. I will also contact the Director of Greek Life at the University of North Texas with my introduction letter. The director will then send the letter to the chapter presidents and they will send them to the members who meet the criteria.

SECTION D: COMPENSATION AND COSTS

17. **Compensation:** *Describe any compensation to subjects for participation, including monetary payments, gift cards, course/extra credit, raffle prizes, goods or services, donations to charity, etc. Describe how and when you will provide the payment to the subjects, and how confidentiality will be maintained (for example, use of*

coding in payment log books/receipts). If you intend to hold a raffle, explain when you expect that the raffle will be drawn, and how participants will be contacted if they win the drawing. For course / extra credit, alternative non-research assignments must be offered for an equal amount of credit.

For compensation of study participants chosen to participate, they will be given a $15.00 e-gift card to a local restaurant. The gift card will be emailed to each participant upon completion of the interview.

18. **Costs:** *Describe any costs or expenses (monetary or non-monetary) subjects will incur as a result of participation.*

For my study, there will be no expenses incurred by the participants.

SECTION E: INFORMED CONSENT

19. **Informed Consent, Broad Consent, & Assent:** *Describe the informed consent process, including when, where, and how subjects will be consented. If children or mentally disabled or incapacitated persons will be subjects, explain the assent process. If broad consent (consent to use data for future studies) will be requested, describe the scope and the process for tracking subjects' accept/decline responses. Upload finalized copies of all consent, assent, and / or verbal consent script documents in the electronic system.* ***There are several consent form templates available for your use on the*** [***Forms & Templates Page***](#)***.***

After the initial contact with the participants, they will respond and let me know if they wish to participate. Once the students that wish to participate contact me, I will schedule an interview time and create the zoom meeting. They will be emailed a copy of the consent form for their records. Before each interview, the consent form will be read to the study participants, and they will give their verbal consent. Each participant will have the choice to remove consent at any time.

   19a. Requesting a Waiver of Consent or Waiver of Written Documentation: *If you wish to waive some or all of the requirements of informed consent, or the requirement for written/signed informed consent, please describe (if your study is* <u>*federally funded or FDA-regulated*</u>*, also upload Form 3 from the* [*Forms Page*](#)*).*

   Not Applicable

20. **Incomplete Disclosure / Deception:** *Describe if your study will withhold information from subjects regarding the purpose of the research or the nature of the intervention, interaction, or procedures. Provide scientific justification for utilizing deception (if your study is* <u>*federally funded*</u>*, also upload* [*Form 3*](#)*).*

After the interviews have been completed and transcribed, the participants will have the option to see their interview transcript and be emailed their transcript upon request.

SECTION F: RISKS & BENEFITS

21. **Risks to Subjects:** *Explain any potential risks to subjects that could result from the research intervention/procedures, including **physical risks** (i.e. fainting, falls, infections, muscle soreness, pain, broken bones, physical fatigue, headache, burns, medication side effects); **psychological risks** (i.e. depression, anger, stress, guilt, embarrassment, damage to self-esteem); **social risks** (i.e. potential damage to financial standing, reputation, or employability); **risks to privacy or confidentiality** (i.e. exposing someone as a research subject,*

*release or breach of sensitive data); and/or **risk of perceived coercion/undue influence** (i.e. if investigator could have influence by nature of their relationship or status, such as a teacher & student, manager & employee, doctor & patient).*

The interviews for this study will be done virtually through zoom or by phone, so there are no physical risks to the participants. Only one interview will be done at a time so there will be no psychological or social risks to the participants. All personal information will be encrypted, and pseudonyms will be used to conceal the participants identity, so there will be no risks to privacy or confidentiality. The study protocol has been designed so that the questions are open-ended. That has been done to prevent any risk of perceived coercion/ undue influence.

22. **Strategies to Minimize Risks:** *Explain the strategies that the research team will use to minimize the potential risks listed above.*

Clear and concise communication with the study participants will ensure there are no risks associated with the study. The interviews will be scheduled on an individual basis, so they will be confidential and anonymous. They will also be done so that no interruptions will happen for the duration of the interview.

23. **Health & Safety Considerations:** *Specify whether the study involves any hazardous materials, locations, or equipment that is relevant to the health and safety of either the subjects or the protocol personnel (i.e. handling of human blood/body fluid/tissue, chemical or biological hazards, radiation/X-rays, lasers, or carcinogens). List any related authorizations/approvals from the Environmental Health & Safety Office.*

There are no health or safety concerns associated with this study.

24. **Benefits:** *List potential benefits that may accrue directly to the study subjects as a result of their participation, if any (other than compensation). Also describe the expected or potential benefits of this study to the field or society at large.*

For the study participants, the potential benefits may be a feeling of satisfaction to be able to explain their feelings as they pertain to their academic success. As it pertains to society, there may be programs developed to help other college students be more engaged in their academics and matriculate through college.

SECTION G: PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY

25. **Privacy:** *How will the privacy of subjects be protected during the course of the study (privacy refers to controlling the environment and circumstances of interactions with subjects to prevent situations where they might be embarrassed, exposed, or stigmatized)?*

All interactions with study participants will be individualized and scheduled so that there will not be any chance of them interacting. Although they attend the same university and may be in the same organizations, the study participants will be reminded that their participation is anonymous and private.

26. **Confidentiality & Data Security:** *Explain if the data collected (including biospecimens) will be anonymous, identifiable/coded, or de-identified*. Explain the precautions that will be taken to protect confidentiality of subject data and information, and how these precautions will be communicated to subjects (during informed*

*consent or another process). Security should be considered for each phase of data's life cycle, including: collection, transmission, accessing, collaboration, storage, analysis, reporting, and disposition. Consider the tools and resources that will be utilized for data collection, how access to identifiable data will be limited only to authorized research personnel, and who will be responsible for storage and disposition. **Recordkeeping:** UTA and the IRB must be able to access research records and consent forms at any time; therefore, **all paper documents in their original form must be stored on the UTA campus** unless the IRB grants an exception. **All electronic data must be maintained on UTA servers utilizing [sanctioned storage tools](#)** unless the Office of Information Security grants an exception. **Record Retention Period:** All records (paper or electronic) must be maintained and kept secure for at least 3 years after the closure of the protocol or in accordance with funding agency requirements (whichever is longer). Student PIs should address long-term storage arrangements if planning to leave UTA prior to the end of the retention period.*
Visit the [UTA IRB's Web Page on Human Subjects Data Security](#) for allowable data storage options and more helpful information about DO's and DON'Ts with human subject data!

For confidentiality and data security, all data collected will be password protected and encrypted throughout the duration of the study to protect the privacy of the study participants. All research data will be stored on encrypted and password protected electronic devices. All paper documents will be stored in a secure location on the campus of the University of Texas at Arlington. All data will be securely stored for a period of three years, after that the data will be disposed of properly and following all university and IRB protocols.

> **26a. Legal Limits to Confidentiality:** *If any part of this study could result in the potential identification of child abuse, elderly abuse, communicable diseases, or criminal activities that would / could not have been otherwise identified, explain this possibility and estimate the likelihood of disclosure. Describe the plan of action that you will take if this occurs. In rare circumstances when research reveals these issues, confidentiality should be maintained to the extent that the law allows.*

> Not Applicable

27. **Data Sharing:** *If you intend to share, release, or present any <u>identifiable</u> subject data from this study, explain where, when, and to whom the identifiable information will be shared, presented or released, and how this will be communicated to the subjects beforehand.*

    No identifiable data will be used or released for this study.

SECTION H: CONFLICT OF INTEREST

28. **Conflicts of Interest (COI):** *Does the Investigator or any protocol personnel have an affiliation, arrangement, or financial interest that could be perceived as a conflict of interest? If yes, please describe.*

    I joined Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc., while in college. This experience has led me to study the influences of Black Greek membership. My study has been designed so that my Greek experience will not pose any conflicts of interest.

Appendix B

Introduction Letter

Dear Black Greek Fraternity Member,

My name is Cedric Shelby, a current doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Texas at Arlington. I am currently working on a research project pertaining to the academic engagement of male Black Greek college students. This research is affiliated with the College of Education and is in requirement for a doctoral dissertation. Student Affairs, the Department of Fraternity and Sorority Life, and the Office of Greek Life have approved this study in conjunction with the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC).

As part of the research, I am looking to conduct research of current Black fraternity members who are active participants during the Spring 2021 semester. If there are any young men who are current members of your chapter that would be interested in discussing their experiences with me, please send them my contact information, and have them get in contact with me.

The purpose of this study is to further understand the academic engagement of current members and how membership has affected that engagement and attrition of fraternity members in the Greek community. Qualitative research methodology will be used to investigate trends and common themes between a variety of fraternity chapters and through the lens of Black Greek Letter Fraternity (BGLF) members. The data collected as well as your information will be kept confidential

Thank you for your time. Please e-mail me or call if you have any questions.

Kind Regards,

Cedric Shelby

cedric.shelby@uta.edu

817-223-2134

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT
The Influence of Black Greek Membership on the Academic Engagement of African American Male Students

RESEARCH TEAM
Cedric Shelby, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, cedric.shelby@uta.edu, 817-223-2134. Dissertation Chair-Dr. Catherine Robert, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, catherine.robert@uta.edu, 817-272-5166.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH PROJECT
The research team above is conducting a research study about the influences that Greek membership has on academic engagement. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine whether membership in Black Greek-letter fraternities (BGLFs), specifically expectations of membership, influences Black males' academic progress. You can choose to participate in this research study if you are in your second or third year in college and a member of one of the five Black Greek fraternities.

You might want to participate in this study if you are interested in sharing how Greek life has or has not influenced your academic engagement, which can ultimately help countless others be successful also. However, you might not want to participate in this study if you are uncomfortable sharing your personal experiences or if you do not have the time to attend a 45-minute to an hour-long virtual interview.

This study has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB is an ethics committee that reviews research with the goal of protecting the rights and welfare of human research subjects. Your most important right as a human subject is informed consent. You should take your time to consider the information provided by this form and the research team and ask questions about anything you do not fully understand before making your decision about participating.

TIME COMMITMENT
You will be asked to participate in a 45-minute to an hour-long virtual interview through zoom. Your participation will require only one interview.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES
If you decide to participate in this research study, this is the list of activities that we will ask you to perform as part of the research:

1. Read through this Informed Consent and talk with the research team to make sure that any questions you may have are answered; then make your choice about whether to participate.
2. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to schedule a virtual meeting through zoom.
3. During the interview, you will be asked a series of 14 open-ended questions to examine your academic engagement.

If audio/visual recordings will be used

The interview will be audio recorded using an encrypted handheld digital recorder. The virtual interview will also be recorded using Zoom. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed, which means they will be typed exactly as they were recorded, word-for-word, by a professional transcription service. All information will be changed to ensure confidentiality of study participants.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

The possible benefits of this study will be to determine what skills can be used to help motivate other students to be successful academically.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

This research study is not expected to pose any additional risks beyond what you would normally experience in your regular everyday life. However, if you do experience any discomfort, please inform the research team.

COMPENSATION

For participating in this study, you will be emailed a $15.00 restaurant e-gift card to be used at your convenience.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

There are no alternative options offered for this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The research team is committed to protecting your rights and privacy as a research subject. All paper and electronic data collected from this study will be stored in a secure location on the UTA campus and/or a secure UTA server for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The recordings will be kept with the other electronic data in a secure UTA Box account for the duration of the study.

The results of this study may be published and/or presented without naming you as a participant. The data collected about you for this study may be used for future research studies that are not described in this consent form. If that occurs, an IRB will first evaluate the use of any information that is identifiable to you, and confidentiality protection would be maintained.

While absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the research team will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your records as described here and to the extent permitted by law. In addition to the research team, the following entities may have access to your records, but only on a need-to-know basis: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the FDA (federal regulating agencies), the reviewing IRB, and sponsors of the study.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS
Questions about this research study or reports regarding an injury or other problem may be directed to Cedric Shelby, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, cedric.shelby@uta.edu, 817-223-2134. Dissertation Chair-Dr. Catherine Robert, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, catherine.robert@uta.edu, 817-272-5166. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject or complaints about the research may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

CONSENT
By signing this form, you are confirming that you understand the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and your rights as a research subject. By agreeing to participate, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. You can refuse to participate or discontinue participation at any time, with no penalty or loss of benefits that you would ordinarily have.   Please sign below if you are at least 18 years of age and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

_____

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER   DATE

If you agree to participate, please provide the signed copy of this consent form to the research

     team. They will provide you with a copy to keep for you

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

1. Describe why you chose to attend your/this University?

2. What did you expect your collegiate experience to be like, before you started college?

    a. What did you think your academic experience would be like?

    b. What did you think your social experience would be like?

3. At this point in time, how would you describe your academic experience?

    a. At this point in time, how would you describe your social experience?

4. How does it match your expectations?

5. Why did you decide to join a Greek letter organization?

6. When and how did you first learn about this organization?

7. What were your initial experience/ impressions of Greek organizations?

8. How would you describe your college experience now?

9. How does your current college experience differ from your initial impression to your current role?

10. How has your experience in the organization effected your overall college experience?

    a. Please provide examples

11. If someone were considering joining your organization and asked you for advice, what would you say?

12. Knowing what you know now, would you still join this organization? Why?

13. How do you think your college experience would be different had you not joined your Greek organization?

14. Is there anything else that you would like me to know about your experience in this Greek letter organization?

Wrap up: Thank you once again for sharing your experiences with me. I greatly appreciate your time and insight. If I have follow-up questions, may I contact you again?