The African American Male Student Experience in Black Greek Letter Organizations at Selected Predominantly White Institutions

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Dedication

This dissertation was written in memory of my dearly beloved brother, Jason Jeremiah Michael (March 4, 1969-February 12, 2007), who was my shining academic star. You wrote Mom a letter in 1989 stating that you would be the first in the family to complete a doctorate degree. You were the smartest person I knew, and I loved hearing you talk about things of which I could only dream. When you started working on the laser for NASA's Hubble telescope, I knew that the sky was your limit. Illnesses struck you too soon and took away your opportunity to realize the dreams you spoke of as a child. Although you are now gone, your memory continues. Every time I wanted to give up, I remembered that the choice to pursue this degree was taken away from you. I am now officially the first person in the family to receive an Ed.D., but this doctorate would have never been attempted were it not for your vision. I miss you dearly. I will forever love you.

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Abstract of the Dissertation

The African American Male Student Experience
in Black Greek Letter Organizations
at Selected Predominantly White Institutions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe why African American men join Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs), as well as the role that African American fraternity membership plays in the college experience of African American men at four predominantly White institutions in a metropolitan region. One-on-one interviews were utilized to gather data from 20 undergraduate members from all five international African American fraternities (Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.; Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.; Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.; Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.; Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc.). Data analysis was guided by Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure and Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival.

Three main themes emerged as reasons these African American men chose to seek membership in a BGLO: (a) brotherhood, (b) fraternal identity and legacy, and (c) personal connections. Eight main themes emerged as outcomes of membership. These were (a) peer accountability, (b) leadership development, (c) networking, (d) service opportunities, (e) notability, (f) stereotyping, (g) marginalization, and (h) competing priorities.

Implications for practice include development of mentorship programs between Greek-affiliated and non–Greek-affiliated African American male students, development of academic incentives for BGLOs, and intentional integration of BGLOs into university Greek Week recognitions. Implications for research are discussed in terms of exploring

the influence of Greek membership for other underrepresented groups and conducting similar studies for African American men pursuing advanced degrees.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

This qualitative study describes the experiences of purposefully selected African American male students who were members of Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in a metropolitan region. African American male students are understudied, and this qualitative inquiry gave voice to their perceptions of experiences at PWIs.

Numerous studies have examined the experiences of African American students at both historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and PWIs (Allen, 1992; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Love, 1993; Thompson & Fretz, 1991). In a study that included 171 African American undergraduate students attending a PWI in the mid-Atlantic U.S. region, Thompson and Fretz (1991) found that students who were able to identify with other individuals with common experiences were more likely to socially adjust to their respective institution. Littleton (2002) examined student organization involvement by African American students at four small colleges located in the Southern Appalachian region of the United States. Littleton found that campus involvement served as a significant predictor of persistence for both African American men and women. Also, Guiffrida (2003) examined the conditions under which African American student organizations facilitate cultural connections and social integration at PWIs. The findings demonstrated the importance of minority student organizations to the social adjustment of students of color at PWIs. Despite such findings of the overall African American student experience, very few studies have sought to qualitatively capture the voices and experiences of African American students, particularly African American men. This is

significant to note as recent enrollment and graduation data suggest a disturbing within-group difference for African American college students.

General college enrollment data may suggest to some that the educational gap is closing and that any inference of a looming crisis is overstated. Research tells us that between 1976 and 2002, the enrollment of African American students increased by 14.9% (Fischer, 2007). However, a closer look at this data shows a major gap between the success of African American women and men. In 1976, African American men accounted for 45.5% of enrolled African American college students; however, by 2002, this number dropped by 10% (Harper, 2006a). On the national level, while African American students comprise 14.3% of the college population (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011), African American men account for only 4.3% of that number (Harper, 2006b). In contrast, the enrollment of African American women has steadily climbed, increasing by 126% over this same time period (Harper, 2006b).

What is even more alarming than the decline in enrollment for African American men is their college completion rates. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), only 34% of African American men complete undergraduate degrees within 6 years. This is the lowest completion percentage of any gender/racial group (Harper, 2006a; Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2006; Stiff-Williams, 2007). Cuyjet (2006) stated that “to be effective in assisting African American male student matriculation, one must have a reasonable understanding of that population” (p. 15). This study sought to describe one aspect of the African American male student experience at PWIs.

Studies that have looked at African American student involvement often fail to include African American Greek life involvement (e.g., Stikes, 1984; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Thompson & Fretz, 1991; Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Smith & Moore, 2000). Existing studies that examined student experience in fraternities and sororities often failed to account for the experiences of Black students in BGLOs. Pike (2000), a leading Greek life researcher, utilized a variation of Astin's input-process-output model to assess the influence of Greek membership on the cognitive development and college experiences of first-year college students. Pike found that Greek-affiliated students reported both higher levels of social involvement and gains in general abilities than non-Greeks. As with other existing Greek life studies, however, Pike's study failed to capture the complete picture of the Greek-affiliated community, as more than half of the study participants were high-achieving Greek-affiliated White women. Similarly, Hayek, Carini, O'Day, and Kuh (2002) investigated the impact of Greek membership on student engagement. The results indicated that Greek-affiliated students were more involved in campus life than non-Greeks; Greeks spent less time relaxing and socializing than non-Greeks; and, overall, Greek life added to student experience. Like Pike's (2000) study, this study included only traditional White Greek letter organization members and excluded the experiences of BGLO members.

A modest amount of research has been done specifically on BGLOs and their members. Kimbrough (1995) found that Greek-affiliated students held more leadership positions; the study also found similarities in the self-assessment of leadership skills and in the value of leadership for both Greeks and non-Greeks. While this study was one of

the first to seek out the African American Greek life experience, it failed to represent the male voice, as 80% of the study participants were women. Similarly, Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) investigated the impact of BGLO membership on African American students' leadership development and involvement in campus activities. The results showed that while both Greek-affiliated students and non-Greeks described themselves as leaders, Greek-affiliated students held significantly more elected leadership positions. Greeks were found to be more confident in their ability to lead, and Greeks felt that membership in Greek organizations was more instrumental in developing leadership skills. More recently, Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) found that BGLO membership was the primary vehicle for out-of-classroom engagement for African American students at both HBCUs and PWIs. They found that African American men at PWIs who were members of BGLOs had higher grade-point averages than non-Greek African American men.

Despite increasing enrollment for African Americans as a whole, African American men are not faring as well as their female counterparts. Student involvement data suggest that engaging in student organizations improves the likelihood of persistence for college students. Greek life data, though mixed and almost exclusively conducted on White students, show significant cognitive and leadership gains for affiliated students. This study specifically explored why African American men at PWIs join BGLOs and, moreover, what the students make of their experiences.

Statement of the Problem

A report by the Education Sector (as cited in Schmidt, 2008, p. 6) stated:

> The biggest challenge in better serving minority college students is not creating new knowledge about how to help them; it is creating new incentives for institutional leaders to act on the knowledge that already exists.

What we do know is that facilitating the purposeful involvement of African American students in educationally enriching activities is necessary to ensure success (Astin, 1993). According to Tinto (1993), the degree to which a student is academically and socially integrated determines the likelihood of persistence. Research indicates that involvement in student organizations is integral to the success of students of color attending PWIs and helps students to develop leadership skills among their peers (Feagin et al., 1996; Fleming, 1984; Gossett, Cuyjet, & Cockriel, 1998; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Lang & Ford, 1992). Minority students at PWIs often create their own social communities in order to cope with feelings of isolation and to create spaces where they feel they belong (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007). One such social community is the BGLO. BGLOs were created to provide a haven for students on campuses that were perceived as alienating, isolating, and discriminatory (Kimbrough, 2003). Today, the primary purpose and focus of BGLOs is community awareness and action through educational, social, economic, political, and cultural service activities (http://nphchq.org/home.htm). Not only do African American students find a sense of belonging in these social communities, but BGLO members are more involved in campus activities and have a higher self-regard of leadership abilities than nonmembers (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). As BGLO membership continues to be a vehicle through which African American students engage, understanding how these organizations shape the experiences of African American male students at PWIs will provide insight into this segment of the student population.

Membership in a BGLO provides an opportunity for African American students to experience Greek life among students with a common cultural background. Harper, Byars, and Jelke (2005) postulated that "BGLOs have been integral providers of social and cultural integration and are therefore able to positively influence African American students' adjustment to college" (p. 413). Kimbrough (1995) found a direct relationship between BGLO membership and high leadership development. Taylor and Howard-Hamilton (1995) asserted that specifically for African American men, BGLO membership results in greater self-esteem and racial self-concept than nonaffiliated African American male students. While research exists that examines the role of African American student organizations in student integration (Guiffrida, 2003), the role student organizations play in Black identity expression and development among African American male student leaders (Harper & Quaye, 2007), and the effects of BGLO membership on in-class African American student engagement (Harper, 2007), there is no research that qualitatively describes why African American male students seek membership in BGLOs and their perception of how membership influences their experiences at PWIs. This study sought to fill this gap in the literature.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe why African American men join BGLOs as well as the role that African American fraternity membership plays in the college experience of African American men at four PWIs in a metropolitan region. Using semistructured interviews, this study answered the following research questions:

1. Why do African American male students join BGLOs at selected PWIs in a metropolitan region?

2. What perceived influence does membership in BGLOs have on the college experiences of African American male students enrolled at these selected PWIs?

Statement of Potential Significance

This study makes contributions in two primary areas: the study of African American male student experiences at PWIs, and the existing body of Greek life–related research. Tinto (1993) found that a series of environmental and experiential factors may serve to diminish academic success. He asserted that for a student to successfully persist through college, the student must be integrated both socially and academically. Harper and Quaye (2009) suggested that student engagement "both inside and outside the classroom," not just mere student involvement, was necessary for student success (p. 2). To better support African American male students, there must be research that gives voice to their experiences. Often, African American students perceive the predominantly White campus to be unwelcoming, view social programming on these campuses as being irrelevant to their needs, and accordingly do not integrate into the social fabric of the institution (Feagin et al., 1996; Gossett et al., 1998; Lang & Ford, 1992). Considering the direct link between student engagement and adjustment, lack of involvement directly influences the likelihood that an African American student will become socially engaged at a PWI (Thompson & Fretz, 1991).

This study also contributes to the existing body of Greek life–related research. BGLOs continue to be an understudied segment of Greek life. Even though BGLOs have an international membership of over 1.5 million (http://nphchq.org/home.htm), searches for scholarly literature on BGLOs uncovered few studies that were not narrowly focused on particular aspects of BGLOs—stepping or hazing (Kimbrough, 1995, 2005;

Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Kimbrough & Sutton, 1998). Much of the scholarly Greek life literature (Hayek et al., 2002; Pike & Askew, 1990; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001; Pike, 2000; Pike & Askew, 1990) is focused on student members of traditional Greek letter organizations. This study explored the experiences that African American male students have in BGLOs, described why students become members, and provided empirical information regarding the perceived influence that BGLO membership has on their experiences at selected PWIs.

Theoretical Foundation

Two theoretical frameworks were used as lenses through which to interpret the findings of this qualitative inquiry: Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival and Vincent Tinto's theory of student departure. Tinto utilized Van Gennep's (1960) anthropological model of cultural rites of passage and Durkheim's psychological model of suicide to define "dropping out" as

> a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems (as measured by his normative and structural integration) continually modify his goal and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence or varying forms of dropout. (Tinto, 1975, p. 94)

To state it more concisely, Tinto posited that academic and social integration are critical for college students.

Nagasawa and Wong advanced Tinto's theory by focusing on the "survival" of minority students enrolled at PWIs. This theory asserts that minority students become members of student organizations to buffer themselves from the social alienation, discrimination, and campus hostility that they may experience. Based on minority student

success literature, and framed by Tinto's (1987) model of college student persistence, Nagasawa and Wong (1999) postulated that the formation of ethnic student networks serves three main purposes:

1. To provide a niche or enclave for minority students on campus
2. To help its members meet the social and academic demands of college
3. To facilitate integration into the social and academic systems on campus for survival (p. 83)

This study focused on one ethnic student network, the BGLO. Through BGLOs, African American male students integrate into social systems at their institution, making them more likely to persist. Both Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of student departure and Nagasawa and Wong's theory of minority student survival were used because of their inherent connection, and accordingly they formed the theoretical basis for this study on African American male students and BGLO membership.

Summary of the Methodology

To give voice to African American BGLO members at selected PWIs in a metropolitan region, an interview-based study was conducted. Qualitative research "seeks to provide a holistic view of a social or human in its natural setting" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15); it allows the researcher to understand the way the participants make meaning of and interpret their experiences (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Creswell, 1998; Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 1998, 2002). Harper and Quaye (2009) suggested that qualitative methodologies are preferred when desiring to understand how best to improve the educational experiences of students and to subsequently develop effective interventions. A qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study because the researcher sought

to describe the diverse perspectives that this segment of the college student population may hold.

The four PWIs selected for this study were within 30 miles of each other in a major metropolitan hub, so they were similar in terms of the students they recruit and enroll. One of the PWIs was public, and three were private institutions. The multicultural affairs director, director of Greek life, or designee sent a recruitment email to all African American male BGLO members. Participants were purposefully selected based on two criteria: classification in college as sophomores, juniors, or seniors and BGLO membership for at least one full semester.

Hour-long interviews were conducted with 20 participants. A semistructured interview protocol was designed and piloted by the researcher. Use of the protocol ensured that the participants were asked the same questions; probes and follow-up questions varied based on their answers. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

The Atlas.ti software package was used for data management. The data were coded using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and in vivo coding as multiple participants used similar terms and phrases to describe their reasons for BGLO membership and their perceptions of the college experience. The researcher utilized Gillham's (2005) 10-point procedure for analysis. The trustworthiness techniques of member checking and reflexive journaling were used. In addition, a peer debriefer from the committee helped to determine the appropriateness of the phrases, codes, and themes. Based on feedback from the peer debriefing session, codes were added and collapsed. Data in chapter 4 include long quotes from multiple participants for rich, thick

description. The researcher used Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival and Vincent Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure as theoretical lenses for interpretation of findings. Chapter 5 presents interpretations that are in alignment with either or both theories as well as interpretations that are unique to this study.

Limitations

This study was impacted by the relatively small population of African American male students who are BGLO members at these campuses. This small number may have affected the study in regard to diversity of student perceptions. Every effort was made to recruit and interview all available BGLO members that met the selection criteria. The researcher enlisted the assistance of the offices of Greek life and minority affairs at participating campuses in order to maximize the sample size.

Additionally, the researcher is not Greek affiliated, and neither is anyone in the researcher's family. Accordingly, this may have affected the researcher's ability to truly process and decode all of the observed information. At the same time, this may serve as a benefit as the researcher held no known biases going into the study, making the researcher able to process information from an objective standpoint. Lastly, although this study may provide implications for groups other than BGLOs, the study findings may reflect only the experiences of the African American male students who are BGLO members at PWIs in this specific metropolitan region.

Definition of Key Terms

The important terms used in this study are defined as follows.

Achievement gap: The observed difference in academic achievement between African Americans and Whites that is present before children begin school, throughout their school experiences, and into their college life (Stiff-Williams, 2007).

African American fraternity: 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. (http://nphchq.org/home.htm).

African American student: For the purposes of this study, one who self-identifies as being of African descent. Ethnic identities within the Black race include but are not limited to African, African American, and Black Caribbean (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994).

Attrition: A decline in the number of students enrolled in college from year to year (Tinto, 1993).

Black Greek letter organizations: The nine international African American Greek-lettered fraternities and sororities: Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (http://nphchq.org/home.htm).

Engagement: The time and energy students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside of the classroom, and the policies and practices that institutions use to induce students to take part in these activities (Kuh, 2003).

Greek: A member of a social fraternity or sorority; also refers to a fraternal organization (Kimbrough, 2003).

Involvement: The mechanism through which student effort is engaged in the academic and social lives of the college (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000).

National Pan-Hellenic Council: Coordinating body for the nine international African American Greek-lettered fraternities and sororities (http://nphchq.org/home.htm).

Persistence: A student's decision to continue in the college enrolled from year to year (Tinto, 1993).

Social integration: The extent to which students adapt to the collegiate environment. According to Tinto (1993), informal peer group associations, cocurricular (or extracurricular) activities, and interactions with faculty and staff are mechanisms through which students socially integrate. For the purposes of this study, social integration was measured by active membership in a student organization.

Overview of the Dissertation

This chapter has provided an overview of the study and the significance of the research. It has also introduced the related literature and the methodology. The chapters that follow provide more in-depth detail on the cursory information presented in this chapter. The literature review in chapter 2 clearly outlines the necessity of the research. This chapter provides information on the formation of the five historically Black Greek letter fraternities. Literature related to African American men at PWIs, African American male engagement at PWIs, and African American fraternity membership is presented. This chapter also establishes a conceptual framework based on Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure and Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival. It concludes by establishing the gap in literature pertaining to the influence of BGLO membership on the college experiences of African American men at PWIs.

Chapter 3 addresses the qualitative methodology of the study, involving in-depth interviews of purposely sampled participants from one public and three private higher education institutions in a metropolitan region. Chapter 4 presents thematic analysis of the findings addressing the research questions, and chapter 5 discusses the interpretations, conclusions, and implications of the study.

CHAPTER 2:

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe why African American men join Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) as well as the role that BGLO membership plays in the college experience of African American male students at four predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in a metropolitan region. This chapter reviews the relevant literature, beginning with the context of this study, the experience of African American men in college, and then the history and current status of BGLOs. Afterwards, Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure and Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival are discussed; together they provide the conceptual framework of the study. The fifth section reviews relevant research studies in three areas: African American involvement, Greek life, and BGLOs specifically. The literature review concludes with an argument for the need for this study, which considers BGLOs as a significant contributor to African American male experiences at PWIs.

The Experience of African American Men in College

Statistics

Lerner (1986) described patriarchy as "the extension of male dominance over women in society in general" (p. 239). It seems almost counterintuitive to suggest that educational intervention strategies are needed for any male group in a society with patriarchal roots. For years, programs on the local and federal levels have been geared toward increasing female participation in education (e.g., Women in Science programs and Title IX). However, studies now show that there is an overall gender imbalance in

higher education, where women constitute about 57% of enrollment students and men, 43% (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2006).

The greatest gender enrollment disparity among any racial or ethnic group exists between African American men and women. A sizeable gap exists for degree attainment as well. African American women attain both bachelor's and master's degrees at twice the rate of African American men (Stiff-Williams, 2007). Brown (2006) insisted that solving this gender disparity is "essential to the social, political, and economic stability of the African American and larger community" (p. 47).

For African Americans as a whole, overall enrollment numbers increased to 31% from 1980 to 2000 (NCES, 2003). Yet data show that African American students and Native Americans have the lowest graduation rates of all five racial and ethnic categories regardless of institutional type (NCES, 2007). In the case of African American men, only 34% who start college complete it within 6 years (NCES, 2011).

Stress and Isolation

In one of the first in-depth longitudinal studies about African Americans, Fleming (1984) found that African American men experience more stress at PWIs than their White male counterparts due to the proliferation of negative images that others have of them. The dilemma of negative imagery of African American men is not new. W. E. B. DuBois, in his chapter on "Spiritual Strivings" in *Soul of Black Folk* (1903), insisted that African American men experience a "double-consciousness," a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 3).

W. E. DuBois stated that African American men live in a world where they are assumed to be a problem. The end of slavery was to have brought an end to discrimination to the African American man, yet this discrimination persists. This viewpoint is particularly problematic for college campuses because "when campus climates are hostile and antagonistic toward certain students, disengagement, dropping out, and maladjustment are likely outcomes" (Harper & Quaye, 2009).

Cuyjet (2006) indicated that the stress experienced by African American men at PWIs is likely connected to their low enrollment numbers at these institutions. The low enrollment numbers also contribute to the perpetuation of African American men as underachievers in society (Cuyjet, 2006). African American men often feel isolated on predominantly White campuses because they fail to engage in outside of the classroom relationships with faculty and peers (Davis, 1994; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Brown, 2006). Their feelings of isolation and alienation must be resolved, or persistence is threatened. Astin (1993) found student interaction with peer groups to be positively associated with persistence. Establishing male peer relationships, as found in African American fraternity membership, is critical to African American male survival at PWIs. These relationships "can help to reinforce a sense of purpose, self identity, and positive perception that fosters a more positive education experience for African American males at PWIs" (Brown, 2006, p. 61).

Engagement

For African American men to succeed in environments such as PWIs, where there are low numbers of peers and low societal expectations, they must become actively engaged. Harper and Quaye (2009) defined student engagement as "the participation in

educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes" (p. 2). This is an advancement of Astin's student involvement theory, which states that if students experience a fit with the campus environment, they have an easier time getting involved, thus contributing to persistence.

Harper and Quaye (2009) suggested that students must be more than just involved—they must be actively engaged. They asserted that the engagement is differentiated from involvement through intentionality, action, and purpose. "There is a key qualitative difference between involvement and engagement: It is entirely possible to be involved in something without being engaged" (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 5). For example, a student may be a member of an organization. He may attend meetings yet not engage in discussions or join subcommittees. He may not interact with fellow members of the group or the group's advisor outside of meetings. According to Harper and Quaye (2009), this student is an involved but not engaged student. Harper and Quaye (2009) stated that "engagement and persistence through baccalaureate degree attainment are inextricably bound. . . . Graduation rates will remain ridiculously low as long as Black men are continually disengaged" (p. 139).

Research has shown that BGLO membership "plays a positive role in improving the quality of campus life for African American students, as they provide much-needed outlets for cross-cultural engagement, community service, civic participation, campus politics, and social support" (Harper & Harris, 2006, p. 149). Specifically for African American men, Taylor and Howard-Hamilton (1995) found that African American fraternity members "tend to embrace a stronger, more positive sense of self-esteem and racial identity than their non-Greek counterparts" (p. 334).

Tinto's (1993) research found that social and academic integration (or what is now in current educational discourse referred to as engagement) was the single most significant predictor of persistence. Often the campus culture at PWIs is not reflective of the cultural experiences, values, or interests of students of color, particularly when it comes to campus activities (Cheng, 2004; Harper et al., 2005; Hernandez, 2007; Smedley et al., 1993). In order to cope with the campus environment and create smaller spaces where they feel more comfortable, minority students often create their own social communities in the form of cultural organizations, such as BGLOs (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Person & Christensen, 1996).

Black Greek Letter Organizations

African American fraternities stand as the primary social organization of African American undergraduate male engagement at both historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and PWIs (Harper & Harris, 2006; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). "Accordingly, BGLOs often assume responsibility for providing social programming that otherwise would not exist for African American students on predominantly White campuses, thus leading to increased social engagement and satisfaction" (Harper & Harris, 2006). The primary purpose and focus of BGLOs is to provide a social outlet in the form of Greek college life and to promote community awareness and action through educational, economic, and cultural service activities (NPHC, 2007). Through membership, individuals are provided opportunities to engage in service to the community and to develop strong bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood, and they are challenged to uphold academic standards. There are over 1.5 million BGLO members. According to Dugan (2006), being involved in a BGLO provides a sense of belonging for

African American students at PWIs and positively influences a sense of common purpose. This section describes the history of BGLOs in the context of the history of all Greek organizations and then discusses some perceptions of BGLOs from media and news coverage.

History

Student organizations existed on American college campuses as early as 1636 in the form of academic literary societies (Kimbrough, 2003). It was not until 1776 that an academic fraternal organization, Phi Beta Kappa, was formed at the College of William and Mary (Kimbrough, 2003). This society was the foray into literary societies for rich White males and later for White female students. From here, social fraternal organizations began to evolve in response to the controlled climates that existed on college campuses. College students started to demand more freedom. They wanted to freely participate in activities that were not condoned by the Protestant denominations that created the colleges and universities. As such, social fraternities and sororities became a haven for students who sought the ability to live as adults free from restricting rules.

By the mid-1800s, college campuses gave birth to social fraternities and sororities for their wealthy White students (Kimbrough, 2003). Then, in the late 1800s, when colleges and universities began to open their doors to a diversified student body, many fraternal organizations reacted to this change by implementing exclusionary clauses to limit their membership to White, male, Protestant students to maintain a brotherhood of "like-minded individuals" with common goals and interests. African American students were excluded from these organizations because of the racial divide that existed during

this time and were denied the right to affiliate with the White students on campus (Torbenson, 2005). This exclusionary practice coupled with the recognized need for cohesion within the African American community of scholars led to the development of African American social fraternal organizations (Kimbrough, 2003).

BGLOs were established in recognition of the isolationist environments to which the students were subjected. BGLOs became "a haven and outlet, which could foster brotherhood and sisterhood in the pursuit to bring about social change through the development of social programs that would create positive change for Blacks and the country" (http://nphchq.org/home.htm). In 1906, a group of African American men formed a social studies club (later Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.) on the campus of Cornell University in order to provide a structure of social support for the very few African American students on the campus (Kimbrough, 2005). This is the first real evidence of the supportive role that BGLOs continue to serve in the lives of their members. Further proliferation of African American fraternal organizations occurred between 1905 and 1963 in response to the ingrained institutional racism that African American students faced daily at PWIs. When BGLOs sought recognition from the national governing structures for White fraternities and sororities, the Inter-Fraternity Council and the Pan-Hellenic Council, they were denied. In response to this, an umbrella organization specifically for African American social fraternal organizations, the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), was created in 1930 on the campus of Howard University (Hughey & Parks, 2007). Whether it was to establish a supportive environment for African American students at PWIs or to establish a space of freedom on

the strict campuses of HBCUs, these social societies represented an “escape” from the college culture that African American students were experiencing.

Media Portrayals and Coverage of BGLOs

Two defining works in recent cinematic history provide a view into the culture of BGLOs. In 1988, filmmaker Spike Lee produced the movie *School Daze*, the first of its kind to portray African American Greek life, and in 2007 *Stomp the Yard* was released. *School Daze* fictionalizes the meeting of African American fraternity and sorority members (groups segmented into the “wannabes” and the “jigaboos”) at HBCU Mission College clashing over homecoming weekend. *Stomp the Yard* highlights the role of the African-originated art form of stepping in the experience of African American fraternal membership; its emphasis on stepping was portrayed at a rather commoditized level. Both movies are hyperbolized examples of the experiences of BGLO members.

Another media portrayal of BGLOs has been the news-making hazing headlines of the past two decades. On October 18, 1989, on the campus of Morehouse College, sophomore Joel Harris died while participating in off-campus activities in pursuit of membership in Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc (Associated Press, 1989). This led to a NPHC ban of pledging activities and the instituting of the new member intake process—yet it did not stop the deaths. In February 1994, Michael Davis was punched and kicked and then put to bed, where he eventually died, while pledging Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc (Hughey & Parks, 2007). On September 9, 2002, Kristin High and Kenitha Saafir died in a drowning incident while pledging Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (Austin, 2002) in California. Walter Kimbrough, a major BGLO researcher and historian, declared a state of emergency for BGLOs as he noted the trend of a hazing death

occurring approximately every 5 years or so (Kimbrough, 2010). For those unfamiliar with the value of BGLOs, stories of hazing deaths reduce these organizations to nothing more than what some refer to as "educated gangs." In response to recent comparisons of BGLOs to "educated gangs," Hughey (2008) warned that BGLOs have adopted violent hazing rituals and are on the precipice of betraying the founding missions of their organizations. Hughey and Parks (2007) proposed that in the near future, some BGLOs will lose their relevance.

This study, however, sought to go beyond the news headlines and past the movie plotlines to authenticate the relevance of these organizations for today's student. BGLOs once produced notable members such as Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, Martin Luther King, Jr. and his wife Coretta Scott King, and other members whose lives have changed the landscape of America. As universities seek to make wise choices on where to allocate human and financial resources, it is particularly important that they understand how BGLO membership not only provides involvement opportunities for students but also aids in the experiences of its members. Through their support of BGLOs, universities can also address retention rates. Harper et al. (2005) noted: "As colleges and universities become more focused on improving their retention and graduation rates, particularly in closing the gaps between White and African American students, they cannot overlook the important roles that BGLOs play in African American students' adjustment and success" (p. 410). The theory of retention and student departure is discussed in the next section.

Theory of Student Departure

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure (see Figure 2.1) represents the seminal research on student attrition. Tinto utilized Durkheim's psychological model of suicide to develop a theory on college student persistence. He asserted that both social and academic integration is critical for student persistence at collegiate institutions. According to the theory, less than 25% of student departures are due to academic difficulty. The theory asserts that when students are unable to succeed, it is due to dissatisfaction with the collegiate environment. This dissatisfaction with the institution, or what Tinto referred to as lack of integration, is a direct product of incongruence with and isolation from environmental elements. Students who experience feelings of incongruence and isolation will be less likely to integrate into an institution and are unlikely to persist.

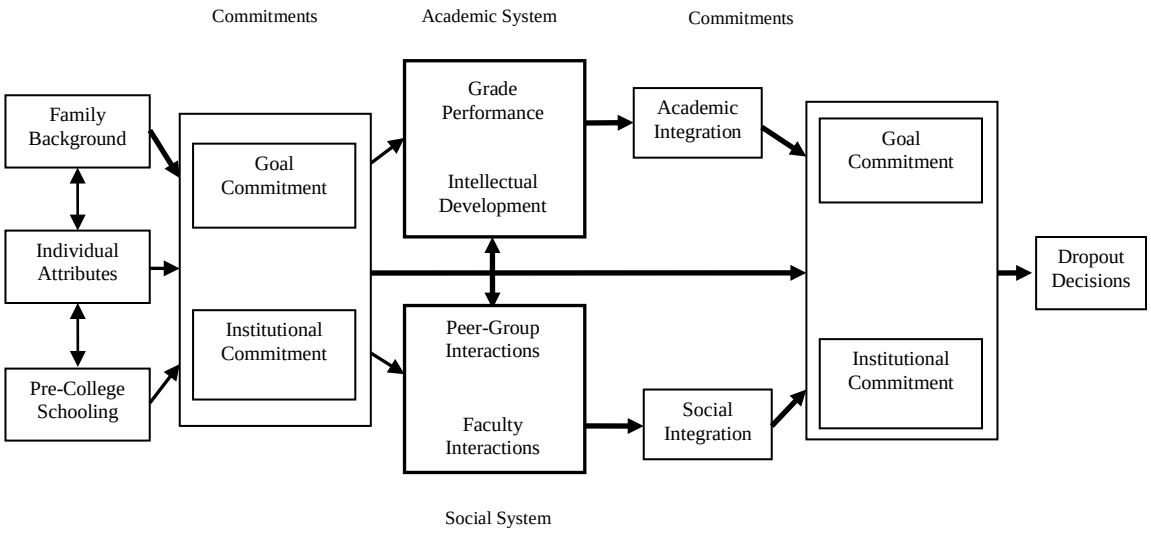

Figure 2.1. Tinto's (1993) conceptual model for dropout from college.

Congruence

This theory utilized the term *congruence* to measure the degree of connection with one's collegiate institution. While congruence is experienced both academically and socially, the concept of social integration is most relevant to this study on BGLO membership.

Tinto asserted that congruence with one's peers is integral to social integration. Feelings of social incongruence are often a result of "a perceived mismatch between the social values, preferences, and/or behavioral styles" of the student and his or her peers (Tinto, 1993, p. 53). In other words, social incongruence may manifest as students' inability to feel like they belong at their university or inability to connect to peers. This theory states that feelings of incongruence are not uncommon. In fact, at some point of their college careers, most students are challenged with feelings of incongruence. It is, however, when these feelings appear to be "substantially at odds with the dominant culture of the institution and or with significant groups of faculty and student peers" that students may decide that they have to leave their institution in search of one where they have a greater fit (Tinto, 1993, p. 53).

Tinto asserted that while congruence is an important part of social integration for college students, this congruence need not necessarily be with the institution itself. It is possible for a student to feel a lack of congruence with an institution but find a subculture to which he or she feels socially integrated, which would be sufficient for persistence. Tinto theorized that as long as a student is connected to the overall culture of the institution or one of the subcultures of the institution, the need for congruence is met (Tinto, 1993, p. 59). Accordingly, college campuses are replete with opportunities for

students to get involved and connect with faculty and other students in order to foster a sense of belonging. This study applied Tinto's concept of congruence to examine BGLOs as a subculture at PWIs that African American men join in order to find fit on their campuses. This viewpoint is consistent with research that indicates that BGLOs are the primary vehicle for involvement for African American students at PWIs (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001; Harper & Quaye, 2007) and enhance student engagement and collegiate experiences (Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011). According to Tinto, while feelings of incongruence are sometimes unavoidable, feelings of isolation "need not occur" (Tinto, 1993, p. 50).

Isolation

Tinto defined isolation as "the absence of sufficient interactions whereby integration may be achieved" (Tinto, 1993, p. 56). According to the theory, a student experiencing feelings of isolation is unable to establish the bonds necessary to develop a sense of belonging at an institution. A student dealing with *incongruence* is often underprepared for the college experience. On the other hand, students experiencing feelings of *isolation* often have achievement profiles that are similar to those who stay and succeed. For some reason, these students have been unable to connect to someone or something at their institution. Therefore, it is quite possible to have a student who is doing well academically, but feels socially isolated and ultimately decides to no longer persist at the institution. This is noteworthy, as "the degree and quality of personal interactions with other members of the institution are critical elements in the process of student persistence" (Tinto, 1993, p. 56).

Research indicates that African Americans at PWIs may perceive the campus to be unwelcoming, view social programming as irrelevant to their needs, and accordingly be unable to socially integrate into the institution (Feagin et al., 1996; Gossett et al., 1998; Lang & Ford, 1992). Thus, the inability to readily identify students dealing with feelings of isolation may in fact be problematic to practitioners, as feelings of isolation are the number one predictor of student attrition (Tinto, 1993). Students who are able to identify with other individuals with common experiences are more likely to socially adjust to their institution (Thompson & Fretz, 1991). Students who can connect with a subculture on campus can lessen their feelings of isolation and have an increased likelihood to persist. BGLOs have been found to foster a sense of belonging and common purpose for their members (Dugan, 2006; McClure, 2006). Accordingly, this study utilized the lens of isolation from Tinto's theory to understand how BGLOs influence the experiences of their members.

Critique of Tinto's Theory

Tinto's theory assumes that students who connect with the institutional culture are more likely to persist and those who align themselves to subcultures may or may not stay in school. The theory asserts that the more closely subcultures are aligned to the main culture, the more likely students feel a part of the institution and persist at the institution. Conversely, marginalized subcultures may see themselves as deviants and not belonging at the institution. This lack of a sense of belonging at the larger institutional level, according to Tinto, increases the likelihood that members of subcultures may ultimately leave the institution.

Other research has shown, however, that subcultures serve as a buffer for students and empower them to succeed, so congruence with the mainstream culture of the institution is not a requirement (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000, Nagasawa & Wong, 1999; Tierney, 1992). So, in fact, students may connect to a smaller subculture while interacting with the larger institutional culture without fully connecting with the larger culture. Guiffrida (2006) asserted that for Tinto's theory to be applicable to minority students, it needs to move away from the integrationist perspective that assumes that students must *identify* with the larger institutional culture in order to be successful and move towards recognizing that the *connections* can be made with the larger institutional culture. This semantic change is used to recognize that minority students may not fully integrate but can find connections with the smaller subcultures of the institution. Other researchers have agreed that Tinto's omission of cultural variables makes the applicability of this theory to minority students misleading (Guiffrida, 2005; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000; Rendon et al., 2000; Tierney, 1999).

Tinto (2006) stated that his earlier theories "lacked complexity and detail" (p. 3) and that dropping out "is not the mirror image of staying" (p. 6). This implies that Tinto's (1993) theory is limited in its applicability to understanding the full scope of student success. Tinto (2006) found that particularly with underrepresented groups, the role of culture on persistence cannot be separated from examining the factors that contribute to success. Thus, this study utilized Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure with Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival to provide a more comprehensive lens that considers cultural factors, as well as the need for integration, to

examine why African American men join BGLOs and the role BGLO membership has on their experiences.

Theory of Minority Student Survival

Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival views minority student organizations as a college subculture that serves as a buffer to the external forces that minority students face at PWIs. The theory states that minority student organization membership provides a "support system and creates a smaller terrain through which students navigate" (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999, p. 82).

Background: Subculture Theory

Although this study on BGLO membership was not grounded on subculture theory, to better understand Nagasawa and Wong's theory of minority student survival (1999), a brief review of subculture theory is provided. Gordon (1947) defined a subculture as a "world within a world" (p. 41). According to Gordon, a subculture is governed by its own set of rules and regulations and has its own subset of cultural patterns.

Cohen (1955) advanced Gordon's work and established the foundational principles of subculture theory, which states that cultures are adaptive, and social separation produces cultural differences. Cohen's work on subculture theory viewed subculture behavior as a problem-solving effort. Cohen believed that all human action was predicated on the need to problem solve. He believed that until one found a solution to his or her problem, there remained a situational "disequilibrium and a challenge" (Cohen, 1955, p. 44).

Irwin (1970) advanced subculture theory research and operationalized subculture as a social world or a shared perspective. According to Irwin, a subculture is an action system or a way of life. For a group to be considered a subculture, it must satisfy three criteria:

1. Have persisting interaction
2. Transmit the norms and values to newcomers by some communication process
3. Exercise social control to ensure conformity to the norms of the group (Bolton & Kammeyer, 1972, pp. 381-382)

Nagasawa and Wong integrated the works of Gordon (1947), Cohen (1955), and Irwin (1970) with observations, anecdotes, conjecture, and Tinto's (1987) earlier work on student persistence and attrition to explain the link between ethnic subcultures, such as BGLOs, and successful social and academic integration into the collegiate environment. Nagasawa and Wong (1999) stated:

> The college subculture serves as a subunit or enclave to reduce the social and physical size of the campus. It also serves as a support system that helps sustain students in college. Hence, if the subculture provides a suitable niche or enclave on campus and helps its members meet the social and academic demands of college, then it will enhance the survival of its members. That is, the degree and quality of contact with other members of the subculture are critical for success in college. (pp. 81-82)

The theory of minority student survival assumes that White students at PWIs gain access, more easily, to the social and academic benefits of these collegiate environments. In contrast, minority students at PWIs deal with anonymity and isolation from the mainstream culture. These issues serve to potentially undermine academic success. Based on the assumption that "subculture behavior is problem solving" (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999, p. 83), the theory of minority student survival suggests that the problem minority

students at PWIs are trying to solve is the sense of isolation and alienation in order to succeed in the collegiate environment. Minority students solve this problem by joining an ethnic subculture, such as a BGLO chapter, in an effort to combat the stressors associated with attending a PWI.

This study incorporated the theory of minority student survival into the theoretical framework to explore how BGLOs serve as an ethnic subculture for African American male students at PWIs. This study posited that BGLOs provide an ethnic subculture for African American men that enhances their college experiences, promotes a sense of belonging, and helps them succeed at PWIs.

The Model and Its Axioms

Nagasawa and Wong combined elements of Tinto's (1987) model of college student persistence with empirical generalizations to posit a theory of minority student survival (Figure 2.2).

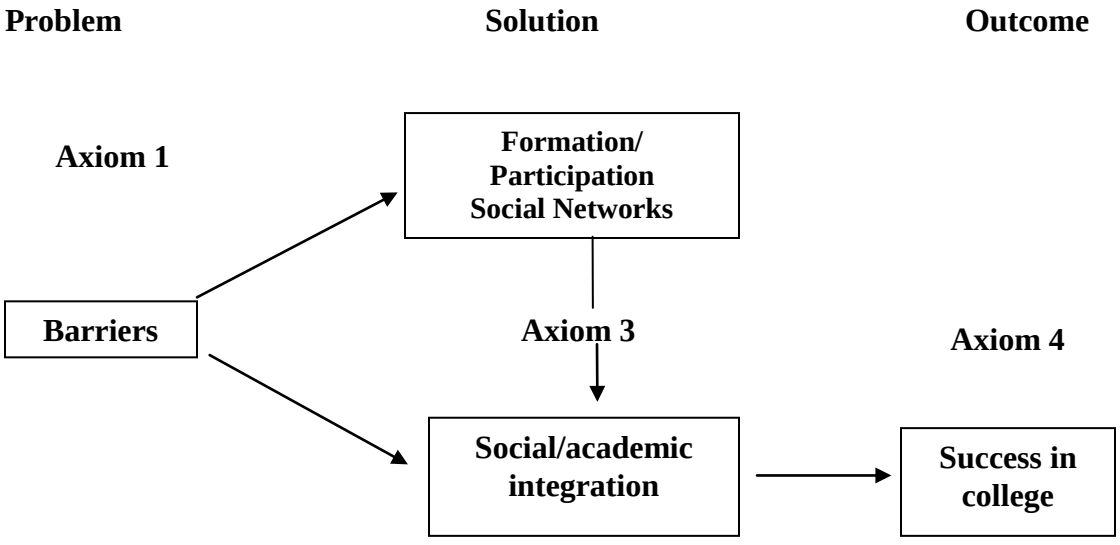

Figure 2.2. Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival.

Nagasawa and Wong (1999, p. 83) postulated that the formation of ethnic student networks serves three purposes:

1. To provide a niche or enclave for minority students on campus
2. To help its members meet the social and academic demands of college
3. To facilitate integration into the social and academic systems on campus for survival

The first axiom of the theory identifies the problem for minority students as the existing barriers to social and academic integration at PWIs. The barriers encountered by minority students at PWIs are those of "cultural/racial hostility, lack of college preparation, and social isolation in college" (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999, p. 84). To persist towards graduation, minority students must first combat obstacles to their engagement at the institution. This is consistent with the theory of student departure (Tinto, 1993), which states that students must establish bonds at the institution to reduce the sense of isolation. Once students identify barriers and create buffers to protect against them, social and academic integration into college and persistence through college result (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). This study assumed that BGLO membership serves as a buffer to the barriers of environmental hostility, inadequate academic preparation, and social isolation. This study purported that becoming a member in a BGLO is an intentional strategy employed by African American male students enrolled at PWIs to counteract the problems that they encounter at PWIs.

The second axiom of this theory states that through the group membership experience, students learn how to adapt to, and interact with, the dominant culture of the institution. This is consistent with research that states that in order to understand students'

decision to persist at or depart from an institution, their interactions with and connections to the culture of the institution must be considered (Kuh & Love, 2000; Tinto, 1993). This study utilized the second axiom to specifically explore how BGLO membership helps African American male students effectively navigate and connect with the larger college culture. Research has indicated that BGLOs provide African American men the opportunity to connect to their collegiate institution, connect with peers, and connect with other BGLO members (McClure, 2006).

According to the third axiom of this theory, joining an ethnic subculture leads to successful social and academic integration into the larger collegiate institution. Integration in this axiom refers to the level of engagement that a student has at the institution. Engagement is the participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 2). This is consistent with the theory of student departure (Tinto, 1993), which asserts that social and academic integration is critical for student persistence. This study assumed that the social support provided to African American men through membership in BGLOs facilitates engagement with the social and academic systems of the collegiate environments at PWIs.

Lastly, the fourth axiom highlights the outcome of the problem-solving effort. Once students identify barriers and create buffers to protect against them, social and academic integration into the collegiate environment and persistence towards graduation result. The last axiom refers to academic success. BGLOs are social organizations that seek to provide both social and academic support, which make persistence more likely. This study utilized this axiom to understand how the experience of membership and

participating in BGLO-sponsored academic programs and initiatives influences academic success. This study assumed that through BGLO membership, African American students create and become a part of an environment where they are more likely to succeed.

Although not empirically tested, Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival enhances the theoretical perspective provided by Tinto's (1993) student departure theory by incorporating ethnic subcultures as an appropriate integration strategy. This study utilized this theoretical framework to better understand why African American men at PWIs join BGLOs and the role membership plays in their college experiences.

Relevant Research Studies

Studies on the benefits of Greek life membership on college students have yielded mixed results. Fraternal membership has been associated with lower levels of academic achievement (Pike & Askew, 1990), alcohol misuse (Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport, 1996), and lower levels of personal development (Wilder, Hoyt, Doren, Hauck, & Zettle, 1978; Wilder, Hoyt, Surbeck, Wilder, & Carney, 1986). Other studies have asserted that students involved in fraternities or sororities do no better or worse than other students (Hayek et al., 2002; Neuberger & Hanson, 1997). Still other studies have asserted that Greek membership positively contributes to collegiate student involvement (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Pike, 2000). Additionally, most of the current research findings on Greek life were normed on White student members of traditional Greek letter organizations and accordingly may not accurately reflect the benefits of membership in BGLOs (Kimbrough, 1995). Relatively few studies have been conducted that specifically examine BGLO membership. This section begins with studies on African American

student involvement, followed by studies on Greek life in general and then BGLO membership. These studies help provide an accurate picture of the role involvement in organizations, particularly BGLOs, has on African American students at PWIs.

African American Involvement Research

Several studies support the need for African American student involvement. Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) conducted a quantitative study seeking to explore African American student involvement trends in mainstream student organizations and multicultural organizations with an emphasis on Greek organizations at PWIs. The findings are relevant to this study, as they revealed that minority student organizations are the primary venue for involvement of African American students at PWIs.

Subjects of this study comprised 405 sophomores, juniors, and seniors at both HBCUs and PWIs in seven southern states. Students completed the Student Involvement and Leadership Scale, which measures on- and off-campus involvement. The researchers found that most students described themselves as leaders regardless of whether or not they actually held a leadership position. The study showed that minority student organizations were the primary vehicle for involvement for African American students at PWIs. In addition, the researchers found an increase in mainstream student organization membership for African Americans at PWIs; higher GPAs among BGLO members than among non-BGLO members at PWIs; and more significant involvement in African American student groups among African Americans attending PWIs than their counterparts at HBCUs who held positions in student government and orientation.

Similarly, Guiffrida (2003) examined African American student involvement in an effort to understand “the conditions under which African American student

organizations facilitate cultural connections and social integration at a PWI" (p. 305). Framed by Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure, Guiffrida conducted a qualitative study that allowed a definition of social integration to emerge from the perspectives of student participants. Eighty-eight involved and noninvolved African American sophomores, juniors, and seniors from a midsize White research university in the Northeastern United States participated in focus groups of two to six students. The data showed that African American student organizations assisted students in establishing out-of-class connections with African American faculty. African American student organizations also provided opportunities for members to give back to their communities and allowed students to be around others perceived to be like them. The findings supported previous research that stressed the importance of minority student organizations to the social adjustment of students of color at PWIs. The study also contributed to the "understanding of why ethnic enclaves are important to the social integration of African American students" (p. 315). It was found that African American students perceived other African Americans to be more friendly and accepting of them; organizational membership allowed students to feel like they had a safe space in which they could "be themselves without the fear of offending others or of perpetuating prejudicial stereotypes" (p. 315); and African American student organization membership provided socialization opportunities that were familiar to their home environments. These findings are relevant to this study as it was found that African American participants were better able to socially integrate to their campus environment only when they made connections to African American student organizations.

Flowers (2004) provided further research on African American student involvement by investigating how student involvement experiences affected African American students socially and academically. Flowers utilized secondary data collected between 1990 and 2000 of 7,923 African American students (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) from 192 postsecondary institutions. Participants were enrolled in public and private HBCUs and PWIs, with 82% of participants at PWIs. Five scales on the College Student Experiences Questionnaire were used to operationally define educational outcomes. Unlike previously mentioned research, the findings of this study demonstrated that although both in- and out-of-class experiences positively impacted student development for African American students, the direct effect was not significant. In fact, the researcher stated that student involvement experiences had "a trivial and nonsignificant direct effect" (p. 648) on the social and academic development of African American students. The findings are noteworthy, as the data showed that "academic-related student involvement experiences" such as library experiences had more pronounced effects on educational outcomes than experiences such as participation in clubs and organizations (p. 649).

Harper and Quaye (2007) sought to determine (a) the role racial identity played in African American male student leaders' engagement in organizations and out-of-class activities at PWIs, (b) the factors that influenced their selection of student organizations, and (c) the ways student organizations support the development and expression of Black identities. The researchers employed a phenomenological study at six large public research universities in the Midwest with 32 high-achieving undergraduate African American men who were nominated by key administrators on campus to participate.

Utilizing Cross's nigrescence model (1971) for African American identity development, Harper and Quaye explored how African American male student leaders developed a sense of self while engaging in student leadership in both African American and predominantly White student organizations. Harper and Quaye found that all of the participants indicated a commitment to racial uplift regardless of the racial composition of the student organization in which they were involved. The participants stated that their focus on racial uplift was in direct response to intentional or unintentional campus racism. Participants selected involvement in predominantly African American student organizations because they wanted to provide the resources and support they felt was missing from the larger institutional landscape to their African American peers. Participants in predominantly White student organizations were involved because they saw a lack of representation by students who looked like themselves and wanted to ensure that the African American student 'voice' was heard. The data showed that participants utilized student organization membership as the primary vehicle to make meaning of their college experience and as a forum to develop and apply leadership skills. These findings are relevant to the current study because they support previous research that shows the need and value of African American student organizations as the vehicle through which most African American students cultivate and apply leadership skills and develop and affirm a sense of self at PWIs.

Greek Research

Although most existing research on Greek life was conducted on White Greek letter organizations (Kimbrough, 1995), it is important to discuss key studies in this field. Greek life research has yielded mixed results, but some studies demonstrate that students

who participate in Greek life learn leadership skills, do better in school, have higher levels of involvement, and integrate more readily into the collegiate environment.

For instance, Pike (2000) sought to better understand the relationship between Greek life involvement and student learning. He utilized a variation of Astin's input-process-output model to assess the influence of Greek membership on the cognitive development and college experiences of first-year college students. The University of Missouri-Columbia Freshman Survey, which focuses on "the quantity and quality of students' academic involvement" (p. 122), was administered to 827 first-time college students who lived on campus to assess the differences between levels of engagement between Greeks and non-Greeks, between males and females, and between freshmen and seniors. The results of this study indicated that Greeks reported both higher levels of social involvement and gains in general abilities than non-Greeks. Also, Greek membership was found to be directly related to social involvement and integration of college experiences, and indirectly related to cognitive development gains. Lastly, the relationship between students' academic and social involvement and math and science gains was indirect and was mediated by students' integration of their experiences at college. This research is relevant to the current study because it examined the impact of involvement on college experiences and provided positive empirical data about the validity of Greek life membership for college students.

Similarly, Hayek et al. (2002) explored how Greek members compared with non-Greek members in regards to study habits, participation in extracurricular activities, and interaction with peers and faculty. This study analyzed secondary data from the National Survey of Student Engagement. The sample was composed of 42,182 undergraduate

students at 192 institutions, of whom 62% were women and 38% were men. Hayek et al. utilized hierarchical linear modeling to analyze the effect of student-level and institution-level variables on student engagement. The findings suggested that Greeks were more engaged than non-Greeks; Greeks spent less time relaxing and socializing than non-Greeks; and there was a mixed effect of the impact of institutional variables on the Greek coefficients. The results of this study are consistent with the existing body of Greek life literature that shows mixed results regarding the benefits of Greek life involvement on the college student experience.

BGLO Research

Although many of the extant studies on Greek life examined traditional fraternities and sororities, some researchers have begun to fill the gap in the literature regarding African American Greek life. In their research, both Kimbrough (1995) and Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) found that BGLO membership had a direct impact on members' leadership development and level of student engagement.

Kimbrough (1995) investigated the views that BGLO members and non-BGLO members held on the role of Greek-letter organizations in leadership development, theorizing that involved students would be more action-oriented, which suggests higher levels of both cognitive and leadership development. He surveyed 61 African American students attending a public rural PWI. Through a two-part questionnaire created for the study, African American students were asked to indicate their overall feelings related to BGLOs. Participants were also asked about views on the value of leadership and leadership experiences and the ability of campus student organizations to provide leadership experiences for them. The data showed that both Greek and non-Greek

students similarly assessed the self-reported value of leadership, and Greek participants held more student leadership positions than non-Greeks. The findings also showed that BGLOs offered real opportunities to practice leadership that African American students might not get in "White-dominated organizations" (p. 71). Kimbrough's (1995) research is relevant to this study, as it has implications for further empirical investigation of the relationship between BGLO membership, student involvement, and leadership development.

A similar study on BGLO membership was conducted by Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998). They investigated the impact of BGLO membership on African American students' leadership development and involvement in campus activities. The study utilized the tenets of Astin's student involvement theory (1984, 1999), which asserts that student involvement leads to greater academic success, lower dropout rates, and the development and enhancement of leadership skills. Surveys were sent to 50 BGLO and 50 non-BGLO members from one public PWI and one public HBCU in each of the seven southern states. Participants included 387 African American students from seven PWIs and five HBCUs; 47% were BGLO members, most of whom attended PWIs. Students were administered the Student Involvement and Leadership Scale, the Competing Values Managerial Skills Instrument, and the Leadership Assessment Scale. The findings revealed that BGLO members were more involved in campus activities and organizations than non-BGLO members. Further, BGLO members believed that their Greek affiliation increased their leadership abilities. Non-BGLO members were less involved, held fewer positions in campus organizations, and scored themselves lower on the leadership skills identified in this study. The data suggested that, after controlling for

high school involvement, BGLO membership contributes positively to and is a factor in increasing African American students' overall level of collegiate involvement. These findings are relevant to this current study, which seeks to further explore why African American male students join BGLOs at PWIs and how such membership influences their collegiate experiences.

McClure (2006), who conducted one of the more recent studies on BGLOs, examined how voluntary associations, as found in African American fraternity membership, "uniquely function to facilitate the success of minority students, in light of current questions regarding their validity" (p. 1037). Twenty semistructured interviews of members of one African American fraternity were conducted at a large flagship PWI in the Southeast. The findings revealed that students "utilize their membership to connect them to each other, to the campus, to African American history and to society in general" (p. 1042). The findings also revealed that African American fraternity membership presented a great social network for students after they completed college, which is consistent with other research on the benefits of BGLO membership. McClure's (2006) research was relevant to the current study on African American male student membership in BGLOs and was used as a model for methodological design, data collection, and data analysis.

Harper (2007) sought to add to the paucity of BGLO research by examining the relationship between BGLO membership and class participation in overwhelmingly White college classrooms. One hundred and thirty-one African American students who were members of BGLOs participated in two phases of data collection for this study. Ninety-five participants were enrolled in at least one course where they were the sole

African American student. Only 20 of the participants had taken a course from an African American faculty member. Phase 1 involved 10 juniors and seniors (6 female, 4 male) who were enrolled in a course where they were the only African American student. These students participated in three semistructured interviews, with questions focused on classroom engagement and the role BGLO membership played in their classroom engagement. Preliminary constructs derived from phase I were used to create an interview protocol for phase two. None of the participants in the first group of interviews were included in phase two. Phase II of the study consisted of 11 focus groups. The data showed that forced representation had a negative effect on classroom participation. Participants felt negatively toward being the sole representative of their race in a classroom setting. Yet, unlike other studies on alienation, Harper (2007) found that being the sole representative in a predominantly White classroom setting "had a positive effect on willingness to participate in class" (p. 110). Because participants were often the sole representative, they felt it necessary to positively contribute to the classroom environment. Harper distinguished that participants preferred speaking up on their own as opposed to being forced to represent their race. Overall, the findings demonstrated that participants felt that BGLO membership positively affected their participation in predominantly White classrooms in the areas of underrepresentation, voluntary race representation, and collective responsibility. The study found that participants were more motivated to participate in class because they felt the need to be seen as positive role models because they were known BGLO members. The findings also revealed that participants were cognizant of the impact of their individual GPA on the overall chapter GPA, thus providing motivation to succeed academically. These findings are considered

important to this study as they revealed that environmental factors at PWIs continue to impact the African American experience. In addition, the findings highlight the sense of communal responsibility and accountability among BGLO members.

Lastly, Patton et al. (2011) conducted a quantitative study to examine the impact of Greek affiliation on BGLO members' engagement in effective educational practices at HBCUs and PWIs. The researchers analyzed data from the 2003 National Survey of Student Engagement for 9,539 freshman and senior African American students enrolled at HBCUs and PWIs nationally. Using analytical techniques from previous research on Greek affiliation, the researchers analyzed the four measures of student engagement based on Greek affiliation, differences of the impact of Greek affiliation by racial composition of collegiate institution, and differences between Greeks and non-Greeks. The results showed a "moderately strong relationship" between Greek affiliation and student engagement for African American students (p. 119). In fact, the data demonstrated that Greek affiliation enhanced student engagement for African Americans at both institutional types, though less at PWIs. Greek affiliation was also shown to promote "increased interactions with faculty, and higher levels of collaboration with peers" (p. 119). The findings imply that BGLO members are able to maximize their college experiences by developing stronger relationships with faculty, which is consistent with Tinto's (1993) assertion that students who are both socially and academically integrated are more likely to persist. One notable limitation of this study was that due to use of secondary data, the researchers were unable to disaggregate Greek membership type (Black or traditional) for African American students enrolled at PWIs. The findings, however, are still relevant to this current study in that they suggest that Greek affiliation

plays a significant role in the engagement levels of African American college students and enhances their college experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature in three key areas relevant to this study: the context of the problem, the theoretical framework, and relevant research studies. Overall, although research indicates that membership in Greek letter organizations and other organizations is associated with positive gains in student development, there is a lack of empirical research specific to BGLOs and their members. By conducting a systematic qualitative study exploring why African American men at PWIs join BGLOs and the benefits of membership, this study provides a foundation for building strategies to retain African American men at PWIs. A basic interpretive research design was utilized for this study. This design, along with the full methodological frame, is presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

Chapters 1 and 2 have illustrated the achievement gap faced by African American men at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Scholarly literature indicates that students of color who are engaged in student organizations at PWIs are more likely to be academically successful (Feagin et al., 1996; Fleming, 1984; Gossett et al., 1998; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Lang & Ford, 1992), and Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) serve as the primary vehicle for student engagement for African American students enrolled in college (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). This study sought to better understand the role of BGLO membership on the experiences of African American men at PWIs. Accordingly, it addressed two research questions:

1. Why do African American male students join BLGOs at selected PWIs in a metropolitan region?
2. What perceived influence does membership in BLGOs have on the college experiences of African American male students enrolled at these selected PWIs?

The next sections describe the general approach to answer these questions, including epistemology and research design. The chapter then details the procedures for site and participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival and Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure were used as interpretive lenses for the findings. The chapter closes with the researcher's subjectivity statement and a review of the study's trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Epistemology

Epistemology is "a way of understanding what we know and how we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). It is a belief system that explains how individuals understand their world. Like other qualitative studies, this study lent itself to the epistemology of constructionism. In constructionism, there is no absolute truth, or meaning, to be uncovered; meaning is constructed and interpreted as people encounter their world (Arminion & Hultgren, 2002; Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) suggested that constructionism is the convergence of the objective and the subjective. With this understanding, researchers interact with subjects to identify the meaning attached to the studied phenomena and to obtain data. Because data are constructed, they are dependent on both time and context (Coll & Chapman, 2000; Cousins, 2002; Crotty, 1998).

The epistemological stance of constructionism is particularly relevant to this study. Although all BGLOs share a common history birthed in response to the racial climate that existed in the early 1900s, the experience for each member is still unique. The research of Kimbrough (1995) and Guiffrida (2003) has highlighted the need for deeper investigation into the influence of BGLO membership on its members. Additional literature implies the need for further exploration of how BGLO membership specifically affects African American men at PWIs (Brown, 2006; Harper et al., 2005; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995).

Research Design

This study used a qualitative methodology to describe this phenomenon in depth. Quantitative research methodology interjects a layer between the researcher and the research, whereas qualitative research methodology allows the researcher to gain a closer

understanding of the complexities of an issue through in-depth study and to understand the way the participants make meaning of and interpret their experiences (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Creswell, 1998; Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 1998, 2002; Patton, 1990). Qualitative research "seeks to provide a holistic view of a social or human in its natural setting" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

To address the problems of practice and research, this study was designed as a basic qualitative interview-based study. The design is based on the assumption that the purpose and function of BGLOs are unique and hence worthy of study (Creswell, 1998). Merriam (2002) indicated that an interview-based study is appropriate for researchers seeking to understand how people construct, interpret, and make meaning of their worlds and experiences. This design is particularly appropriate because this study sought to describe the individual membership experience for African American male BGLO members. The researcher understood that although these students share similar ethnic backgrounds and similar interests as indicated by organizational membership, their experiences cannot be assumed to be monolithic. Harper and Nichols (2008) underscored that "within-group heterogeneity is often ignored and broad generalizations become accepted as normal" (p. 200). This study sought to give voice to the unique experiences of each BGLO study participant. Because the researcher is the "primary instrument for data collection and data analysis" (Merriam, 2002, p. 5), the basic interpretive design allowed the researcher to develop a close relationship with participants, which is necessary for exploring BGLO membership as an outsider of that world (Kimbrough, 2003).

Site and Participant Selection

Sampling Strategy

Purposeful sampling was the sampling strategy for this study. Whereas quantitative sampling typically requires large random samples, qualitative sampling techniques are usually smaller samples "selected purposefully" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). This sampling technique is widely accepted as resulting in a wide population to which readers of a study may connect (Patton, 1990; Seidman, 2006) and providing "the most effective basic strategy for selecting participants for interview studies" (Seidman, 2006, p. 52). Purposeful sampling was used to gather "information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 1990, p. 190).

Site Selection

Four institutions, one public and three private, represent the population of PWIs with BGLOs in a metropolitan region. This metropolitan region was purposefully selected because it is considered the "cradle" of BGLO civilization, as six of the nine BGLOs were founded in this area. BGLOs in this area also benefit from immense external support from graduate advisors, area alumni, and the accessible locations of the organizations' national offices. Additionally, each of the included universities shares a long history of hosting Greek letter organizations on their campuses.

University A is a mid-sized private university. Its first Greek organization was chartered in 1934. Since then, University A has recognized approximately 27 Greek letter organizations, three of which are the African American fraternities Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., and Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

University B is a mid-sized private religious university. It is unique in that it does not officially recognize social Greek life but considers Greek organizations to be student organizations. These student organizations, however, are recognized as official individual chapters (or members of a city-wide chapter) by the National Pan-Hellenic Council. There are three African American fraternities on this campus: Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

University C is a mid-sized private university that chartered its first Greek letter organization in 1858. It currently has 42 university-recognized Greek letter organizations, four of which are the BGLO fraternities Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., and Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

University D is a large public land grant and state-supported institution. Its first Greek letter organization was chartered in 1914, and it now has 61 Greek letter organizations. University D is the only institution included in this study that had members for all five African American fraternities, i.e., Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., and Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

Table 3.1 summarizes the characteristics of the four university sites. Representatives of all four sites agreed to participate. The site permission letter is provided in Appendix B.

Table 3.1
Institutional Descriptions and Demographics

University	Type	African American enrollment		Black fraternities		6-year graduation rate*	
		Total	Male	Names	Members	African American	White
A	Private	4.2%	3.7%	Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Phi Beta Sigma	5	72%	78%
B	Private	6.2%	Not Available	Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi	11	86%	94%
C	Private	6.6%	2.1%	Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Phi Beta Sigma, Omega Psi Phi	7	71%	81%
D	Public	11.8%	5.2%	Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Phi Beta Sigma, Omega Psi Phi, Iota Phi Theta	41	68%	82%

Note: Data for University A were from fall 2008; for University B, fall 2010; and for Universities C and D, fall 2009. Data on membership in Black fraternities were from fall 2009; there were 64 total members of these fraternities in the four universities.

*Universities are not required to disaggregate graduation rates by both race and gender. Only graduation rates by race were available. Graduation rates are for students entering Fall 2002.

Participant Selection

BGLO members at selected PWIs in a metropolitan region were purposefully selected based on two criteria: classification in college and length of BGLO membership. Only African American men who were sophomores, juniors, or seniors and had been BGLO members for at least one full semester were interviewed for this study. All of the students that met the criteria were contacted by their respective Greek or multicultural affairs administrators regarding participation in the study.

Twenty-four current members of one of the five African American fraternities were sought; however, 20 participants were obtained for the study. Sample size

determination was based on both recommended minimums and a desire to reach a data saturation or redundancy point (Merriam, 1998; Morse, 1994). Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended a minimum of 22 subjects in a qualitative study, and Crotty (1998) suggested a minimum of 20 to 25 subjects. As stated in chapter 1, in 2002, African American men accounted for only 4.3% of all nationally enrolled undergraduates. As such, the recommended minimums for qualitative study (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in fact approached a saturation point for enrolled men in higher education. Patton (1990) indicated that sample size must take into account "the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions being asked, and the constraints being faced" (p. 181). As of fall 2009, only 64 students comprised the population of African American men who fit the criteria of being a member of BGLO for one semester. The sample size of 20 represents 31% of the entire population and accordingly results in an in-depth exploration of fraternity life at the respective institutions.

Participant Recruitment

To maximize the number of potential participants, the researcher contacted the director of multicultural affairs, director of Greek life, or other designated administrator at each institution to identify participants for this study. This university administrator sent out the researcher's recruitment e-mail (Appendix C), which included her contact information if potential participants had any questions. All subsequent communication took place directly between the researcher and student.

Students who contacted the researcher were screened to ensure they met the eligibility criteria. One potential participant was excluded from the study because he

identified his racial identity as biracial. Only participants who identified as African Americans were sought for this study.

Data Collection

An interview design was selected to collect data for this study so that the findings would be based on the participants' perspective rather than the researcher's perspective (which might be the case in a survey-based inquiry into this topic, for example). A focus group design was not selected due to the potential sensitivity of the information provided by the study participants. The researcher believed that confidential individual interviews provided the greatest opportunity for honest and open answers by the study participants.

Merriam (1998) suggested that researchers establish a predetermined data collection plan to ensure that data are relevant and answer the research questions. The interview design, pilot interview process, and interview logistics are detailed in the following sections.

Interview Design

Interviewing, used to gain in-depth knowledge of a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998), is a method of inquiry that "is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language" (Seidman, 2006, p. 14). The assumption of the interview design is that the researcher seeks to understand the lived experience and meaning-making process of the participants (Seidman, 2006). Yin (1994) suggested that interviews should be "guided conversations rather than structured queries" (p. 89). Interviewing was particularly important to this study on BGLO membership because interviewing provides insight into "important social issues through understanding the experience of the

individuals whose lives reflect those issues" (Seidman, 2006, p. 14). More specifically, the interview design was appropriate for this study for three reasons:

1. It allowed the researcher to understand the nuances associated with BGLO membership.
2. It captured the 'voice' of a social group that is often stereotyped by the larger society.
3. It is in line with the researcher's constructionist paradigm.

The research questions and theoretical framework were used to create a semistructured interview protocol (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002) (see Appendix A). Semistructured interviews "assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways" (Merriam, 1998, p. 74) and provide flexibility to the researcher to follow up on specific responses provided by each participant. Questions categorized by the theoretical constructs of barriers, group membership, engagement, and outcomes were used to provide consistency among interviews.

Pilot Interview

The researcher conducted a 60-minute interview with a graduating senior who was a 3-year member of the first nationally recognized BGLO, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. This student was recruited in person and immediately agreed to participate in the pilot interview. He was an active member of the multicultural Greek community and a former Multicultural Greek Council executive board member. Because the researcher did not have access to an audio recording device, the interview was transcribed on a laptop during the interview.

The researcher began the interview by explaining the purpose of the study and also the purpose of the pilot interview. The student was asked to answer all questions as openly and honestly as possible, and also to assist the researcher in determining the utility and clarity of the questions asked. The student was informed that the researcher would be taking notes via a laptop computer; hence, questions would be posed more slowly than normal.

Merriam (1998) warned against asking compound questions in the interviewing process. Seidman (2006) suggested that interview questions should be intentionally structured to achieve the goals of the interview and to avoid unrelated responses. The pilot interview process revealed that the initial interview protocol was replete with compound questions. The researcher noticed that simple questions were more effective. When there was a need to clarify, follow-up questions were found to be more effective than compound questions. Also, the researcher had one question that specifically referenced the main theory of the study. The question, "One of the theories used in this study insists that minority student organizations, such as BGLOs, help African American students overcome obstacles encountered at a PWI. What do you think of this statement?" confused the participant. Even when the question was repeated or stated more slowly, the student got lost in trying to understand the theory and accordingly missed the point of the question. The researcher reformulated the questions so that they targeted the theoretical constructs without directly referencing the theory. The participant provided the researcher additional questions to be added to the interview protocol based on his membership experiences. Lastly, the researcher experienced a pull between accurate transcription and

being present in the interview (Seidman, 2006). Accordingly, all subsequent interviews were audio recorded.

Interview Logistics

All interviews were conducted in the spring semester. This time period was chosen since many BGLOs take in members in the spring semester to replace graduating members. Collecting data in the spring semester allowed for the recruitment of BGLO members who had joined the BGLO in the fall and completed at least one full academic semester in their organization.

Interested participants were scheduled for a 1-hour in-depth interview and were sent an informed consent form via email that provided information about the purposes of the study, specific procedural information, and potential risks of participation (see Appendix D). The researcher worked with participants to determine a mutually agreed upon time and private location that was convenient to the participants. Due to the relatively small population size of African American fraternity members at two of the institutions, interviewing at those institutions was completed over 6 weeks. Two to three weeks were allocated for each of the remaining institutions.

The researcher began each interview by explaining the purpose and nature of the study and the format of the interview. The researcher provided the participants a written copy of the informed consent form that they had previously received via email. Participants also received audio release forms at the onset of each interview to review and sign (see Appendix E).

Interviews lasted 21 to 53 minutes and were guided by the interview protocol. Precollege demographic questions were asked at the start of the interview. Subsequent questions addressed the research questions and the theoretical constructs.

At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher thanked the participants for their involvement, provided a signed copy of the consent form for them to take with them, and reminded them that they would receive a transcript of the interview via email. The participants were instructed to review the transcript for accuracy and return it with any corrections and/or additional relevant information within 3 days of receiving the transcript. Only one participant provided additional information upon review of the transcript. To establish an audit trail, the researcher immediately recorded any impressions or reactions about each interview in a journal. Each participant received either a $10 TGI Friday's or Chipotle gift card as a token of appreciation for participation.

All interviews were transcribed by the researcher. In the transcript and all other written documents, participants were assigned a pseudonym to ensure their confidentiality. All information that could be used to identify participants was removed from the audiotaped interview transcripts. A list matching participants to pseudonyms was kept separate from the interview data in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office, and all of the records for this study were kept private. Upon publishing the final results of this study, the list linking participant identities to the pseudonyms will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research provides rich data to aid in understanding a phenomenon. Coding is an analytic procedure utilized in qualitative research to link data to and establish relationships with the research questions and hypotheses (Strauss, 1987). As such, coding is recognized as "condensing the bulk of our data sets into analyzable units by creating categories with and from our data" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 26). The qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti was used to conduct thematic analysis.

The researcher followed Gillham's (2005) 10-point procedure for analysis to prepare and process the data:

1. The researcher was careful to ensure that transcripts were prepared in a format that made them easy to utilize. Questions asked from the interview protocol were set in boldface. Clarifying or follow-up questions were set in italics. The participants' responses were set in regular font. The transcripts were prepared with double-spacing, which made it easier to read and add observations or remarks.
2. The researcher reviewed each transcript, highlighting significant statements.
3. The researcher read no more than three transcripts each day until all transcripts had been through an initial analysis (for approximately eight successive days). Reading too many transcripts in one day may overload the researcher's capacity to clearly understand and process the material. Setting a maximum of transcripts to be read each day allowed for sufficient absorption of the material and also provided a sufficient amount of time for mental rest. Reading transcripts on

successive days allowed the researcher to clearly see linkages between participant data.

4. After reading through all of the participant data, the researcher read through each transcript again, checking for commonalities among the highlighted segments. The researcher also glanced over nonhighlighted sections to see if new themes emerged.
5. The researcher sent the marked-up document to the committee chair for review as a means of providing an interrater reliability check. The researcher reviewed and revised codes as recommended.
6. The researcher went through each transcript and assigned categories for each question, not for the entire transcript. At the end of the process, the researcher consolidated similar categories and discarded categories that seemed unnecessary.
7. The researcher reviewed the transcripts a fourth time, fitting highlighted segments into the categories. Any highlight segment that did not easily fit into a category received a question mark. At the conclusion of the transcript review, category headings were revisited to see if they could be modified in a way that would include question-marked segments. Highlighted segments that still did not readily fit into one of the category headings were assigned their own category heading.
8. Two analysis spreadsheets were created to prepare a visual diagram of the data.
9. The researcher entered data into the spreadsheets. One spreadsheet captured words and phrases used, which provided a qualitative analysis. The second spreadsheet captured check marks, which provided a frequency count of how many participants made similar statements for each category.

10. The researcher put the reference number and letter combination on the actual statement of the transcript. This provided a visual reference representing where the data were categorized.

Subjectivity Statement

Gillham (2005) reminded researchers that in qualitative research, not only is the participant constructing meaning, but so is the researcher. “Inter-subjectivity is at the heart of all social relations, whether in a research context or anywhere else” (Gillham, 2005, p. 6). Accordingly, in conducting this study on BGLO membership, this researcher must acknowledge areas of potential bias. These areas include non-Greek affiliation, personal interest in African American student success, and lack of sufficient understanding of what it means to be an African American man.

One day as I was channel surfing, I could not help but notice the number of African American men I saw on television. There were two African American men on CNN talking to each other on a split screen about the oil spill in the Gulf Coast. I viewed several African American men in commercials encouraging the consumer to purchase anything from cars to soap. There were African American men in music videos on both BET and MTV. I saw African American men hosting judge shows, dominating sports competitions, and starring in leading movie roles. Later that afternoon I was unable to see the last 15 minutes of a show due to a breaking special news report live from the White House lawn, where the first African American president of the United States of America was positioned to speak. The most logical conclusion that one could derive from these observations is that African American men have finally “made it” in America. However, a rising body of research suggests that African American men are at crisis levels in both

enrollment and graduation data. Despite a proliferation of African American male images today, the reality remains that only one-third of African American men who start college will graduate (NCES, 2011).

The researcher's first real experience with BGLOs was in college at Howard University, which is referred to as the "cradle of Black Greek civilization" (Kimbrough, 2003, p. 93). This experience included an introduction to the symbols, traditions, and calls unique to each organization. Although the researcher was intrigued by the BGLO culture, membership was never a major interest. The researcher has now worked in the higher education field for over 13 years and has learned a great deal about BGLOs through program attendance, observation of probate shows, and close relationships with students. The researcher also served as the multicultural Greek letter organization advisor for 1 year at one of the institutions included in this study. Despite having years to observe the culture of BGLOs, the researcher is not Greek affiliated. This outsider understanding of BGLOs may have limited the researcher's ability to understand the full context of the BGLO experience.

The retention and graduation of African Americans from kindergarten through bachelor's degree has always been a passion for the researcher. Upon completing graduate school, the researcher took a position as a counselor in a multicultural affairs office. There, the researcher created and managed an African American student retention program geared toward freshmen students for 6 years. Now working in the Center for Student Engagement, the researcher purposefully seeks out opportunities to work closely with students of color in various aspects of the college experience (e.g., residence life, financial aid issues). This study is not only in alignment with the researcher's

constructionist belief system, it is also in alignment with the researcher's personal and professional areas of interest related to student engagement, retention, and persistence.

Patton (1990) asserted that "scholars must state beforehand their prior interpretations of the phenomenon being investigated" (p. 476). The researcher has often heard anecdotally that it is hard to understand how it is to be an African American male in America. The research that was introduced in chapter 1 and explored more fully in chapter 2 may not provide full understanding of what it means to be an African American man in America, but it does highlight several educational disparities that exist with this group of students. The researcher wonders if, as in the case of not being a BGLO member, not being an African American man affected her ability to truly understand the need that is met through fraternity membership.

Trustworthiness

Golafshani (2003) stated that "the most important test of any qualitative study is its quality" (p. 601). Lincoln and Guba (1985) asked, "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (p. 290). The measure of quality in a qualitative study is trustworthiness. As such, the intentional creation of strategies to ensure quality was essential to the design of this qualitative study. Krefting (1991) asserted that the creation of such strategies increases the rigor associated with the qualitative study itself. Accordingly, the researcher enhanced the trustworthiness/quality of the study in the areas of data collection, data analysis, theoretical triangulation, and peer debriefing.

This study utilized interviews as the primary source of data. Yin (1994) argued that interviews should be "guided conversations rather than structured queries" (p. 89).

The researcher followed an interview protocol that was developed based on the purpose of the study. The researcher strove to ask questions in a nonleading, nonthreatening way to elicit accurate and descriptive data. Although there are many interesting aspects of BGLO membership, the interview questions were guided by the research questions. This was to ensure that topics related to BGLOs but not relevant to this study were excluded. Each participant interview was used to corroborate the views expressed by other participants. Yin (1994) referred to interviews as "verbal reports," subject to inaccuracies (p. 92). As such, all interviews were audio recorded in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected.

Trustworthiness safeguards were also employed in the data analysis phase. A preliminary analysis was conducted after each interview to produce initial themes (Merriam, 1998). This provided a constant check to ensure that the interview questions provided information that answered the research questions. Additionally, a system of coding and recording, based on Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method, was used to identify recurring themes and concepts within and across interviews. In addition, a peer debriefer on the committee helped determine the appropriateness of the phrases, codes, and themes. Based on the feedback from the peer debriefing session, codes were added and collapsed. Data were represented with long quotes from multiple participants for rich, thick description. The trustworthiness techniques of member checking and reflexive journaling were used to ensure that the collected data reflected the statements and experiences of the study participants (Merriam, 2002).

Theoretical triangulation is the utilization of ideas from similar or rival theories (Patton, 1990; Krefting, 1991). The purpose of theoretical triangulation is to provide

multiple lenses through which to view and interpret data. This study utilized Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival and Tinto's (1993) student departure theory to examine why African American men at PWIs become members of BGLOs and their perceptions of experiences attributed to membership in a BGLO.

Ethical Considerations

"In qualitative research, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings" (Merriam, 2002, p. 37). Conducting backyard research produces ethical and political considerations. The researcher works at one of the institutions in which the study was conducted. Although the researcher may not know each student personally, because the researcher serves as one of very few African American staff at the university, there was a possibility that many of the study participants may have some awareness of the researcher. As such, there was concern that students may have felt unduly pressured to participate in the study because the researcher is an administrator at that institution. The researcher was careful to function in the capacity of a researcher and not as an administrator of the university.

There was little foreseen risk associated with this study. However, the interview questions consisted of probing questions that could have disturbed latent feelings associated with current perceptions associated with being an African American male in a BGLO. Terms such as "educated gangs" have been used in modern discourse to describe BLGOs, and so discussion about this and similar perceptions may have potentially been disturbing to some participants. Additionally, BGLOs often hide behind a cloak of organizational secrecy (Kimbrough, 2003) and so being able to elucidate true, open responses was a potential concern.

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) indicated that obtaining informed consent and ensuring the protection of research participants are necessary concerns in research involving human subjects. For this research, participants were informed of the purposes of the study and the confidentiality of the information provided and were provided the opportunity to conduct member checks of the collected data. The researcher was careful to delete specific references in the transcripts that associated participants with the information they provided. All participants were also ascribed a pseudonym to ensure their confidentiality (Seidman, 2006). Participants were assured that information provided for this study would be used only for research purposes; no parts of the information they shared would be provided to the office of Greek life or any other administrative office of the universities.

CHAPTER 4:

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe why African American men join Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) as well as the role that BGLO membership plays in the college experience of African American male students at four predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in a metropolitan region. Participants were interviewed using a researcher-created, pilot-tested semistructured interview protocol. Two research questions were addressed by this study:

1. Why do African American male students join BGLOs at selected PWIs in a metropolitan region?
2. What perceived influence does membership in BGLOs have on the college experiences of African American male students enrolled at these selected PWIs?

Participant Characteristics

Twenty African American male members of BGLOs at four selected PWIs located in a metropolitan region volunteered to participate in this study. All 20 participants met the selection criteria of being sophomores, juniors, or seniors and having been BGLO members for at least one full semester. The participants included in this study represented all five African American fraternities: Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. (7 participants), Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. (4 participants), Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. (5 participants), Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. (3 participants), and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (1 participant) (Figure 4.1).

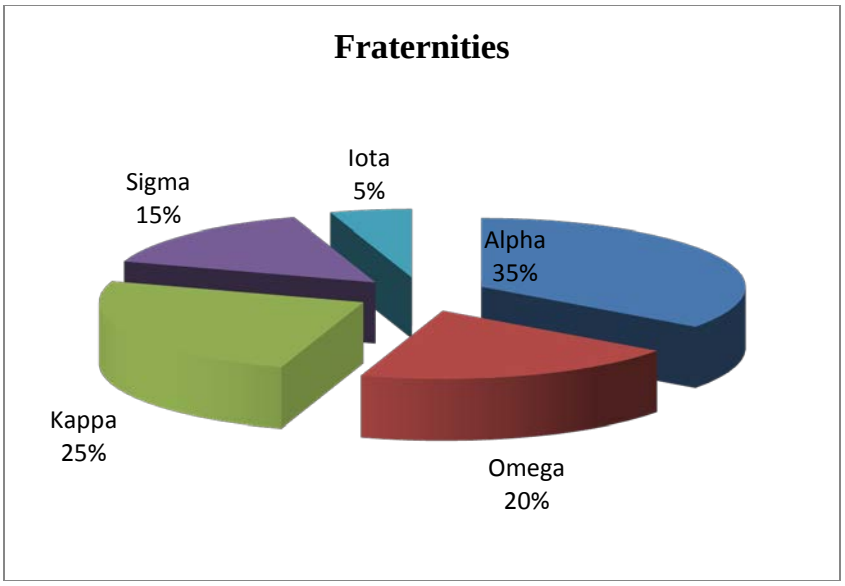

Figure 4.1. Fraternal affiliation.

Three participants (15%) were enrolled at University A, four (20%) at University B, eight (40%) at University C, and five (25%) at University D. Of the participants, seven (35%) were members of their fraternity for 1 year, 10 (50%) were members of their fraternity for 2 years, and three (15%) were members of their fraternity for 3 years.

Table 4.1 summarizes the participants' classification, BGLO affiliation, institution, and membership date.

Table 4.1
Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Classification	BGLO affiliation	University	Membership date
Samuel	Sophomore	Alpha Phi Alpha	A	Spring 2010
Wade	Senior	Phi Beta Sigma	A	Spring 2010
Aaron	Senior	Phi Beta Sigma	A	Fall 2008
Richard	Senior	Kappa Alpha Psi	B	Spring 2008
Jordan	Junior	Alpha Phi Alpha	B	Spring 2010
Eugene	Senior	Alpha Phi Alpha	B	Spring 2009
Brian	Senior	Alpha Phi Alpha	B	Spring 2009
Dennis	Junior	Omega Psi Phi	C	Spring 2010
Jeff	Senior	Omega Psi Phi	C	Spring 2009
Casey	Junior	Omega Psi Phi	C	Spring 2010
Phillip	Junior	Kappa Alpha Psi	C	Spring 2009
Warren	Junior	Phi Beta Sigma	C	Spring 2010
Joseph	Junior	Kappa Alpha Psi	C	Spring 2009
Andrew	Junior	Alpha Phi Alpha	C	Spring 2009
Joshua	Junior	Omega Psi Phi	C	Spring 2010
Kenneth	Junior	Kappa Alpha Psi	D	Spring 2009
Noah	Senior	Kappa Alpha Psi	D	Fall 2008
Reginald	Senior	Alpha Phi Alpha	D	Spring 2009
Michael	Senior	Alpha Phi Alpha	D	Spring 2009
Nate	Senior	Iota Phi Theta	D	Spring 2009

Findings for Research Question 1: Reasons for Joining

The purpose of this research question was to better understand the factors that led African American men to seek membership in a BGLO. Data analysis for this question was guided by Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure and Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival. The theory of student departure states that social and academic integration is critical for student success, while the theory of minority student survival states that minority student organization membership helps members meet the social and academic demands of college and facilitates integration into the social and academic systems on campus. As such, the researcher explored why

participants joined their respective fraternity through the theoretical framework. Three themes emerged as reasons for membership: brotherhood, fraternal identity and legacy, and personal connections.

In providing the specific reasons that led to BGLO membership, participants discussed at length their initial perceptions of Greek life. An overwhelming majority of the participants (17 of 20, 85%) were first-generation Greek; that is, no one in their immediate family was a member of any Greek-affiliated organization. The other three participants had at least one parent who was a member of a BGLO. The data showed that most participants embarked on a journey of discovery of these organizations and, based on interactions and observations, decided to join. The participants' perceptions of Greek life and how these perceptions impacted their reasons for membership are discussed first, followed by the three main themes that emerged to answer Research Question 1.

Perceptions of White Greek Life

Most of the participants entered college with a limited understanding of the benefits of Greek life. The participants shared views that were uninformed and generally unfavorable of White fraternities. Kenneth believed that "more of the White fraternities is who has the nicest house, who throws the livest parties, who has the most beer at their parties."

The participants believed that there was little value in membership in traditional Greek letter organizations (TGLOs) beyond socializing and hanging out. As such, many expressed reluctance in considering membership in these organizations. Wade and Dennis shared almost identical sentiments:

> Wade: I really saw them as all about beer and partying. I don't like beer, and as much as I dance, I actually don't party that much, and so it seemed like the two things you have to offer me, I have no interest in.

> Dennis: Mainly all they do is smoke, drink, and stuff like that, and I mean if you're not doing anything else more than that—you just do one philanthropy a year and throw parties—you can do that with another group of people. You don't have to be a part of a brotherhood or a certain organization to say I do this.

For Warren, White Greek life was not even on his radar of things he considered doing in college. He shared:

> I was very oblivious to Greek life. Personally, I didn't even really acknowledge Greek life to that extent. When I was here, I guess certain fraternities wanted me to rush. . . . Predominantly White fraternities were all, "Oh, come to rush," but there was nothing there for me. There was no like pull for me to be there. There was no real substance within their fraternities or nothing that really appealed to me specifically.

Similarly, Jeff felt that he would only join a TGLO if he was selfishly after something:

> I never really considered it just because I felt like if I did that it would kind of be a little disingenuous because I would strictly be doing it just assuming that it would pay off for me or something down the line just in terms of what I wanted to do. I don't think I would really enjoy that.

Some of the participants were so underexposed to Greek life that they were unable to decipher what was real and what were caricatures of fraternity life. Casey was unable to qualify what membership in a White fraternity was all about:

> I don't really see their impact in my community, so I've never seen them, so I couldn't put a face or an event to them. I just saw them on TV, and I don't even know if half the ones on TV are real.

Similarly, Joseph shared:

> I didn't know about Greek life and I didn't even know that [University C] had White Greek life because, once again, when I think of White Greek life, I'm

> thinking like University of Missouri—just open grass, huge houses, people in convertibles.

Lack of exposure to White Greek life was only one reason why participants did not consider joining TGLOs. Participants also noted the fraternal legacy of these organizations as well as incongruence with organizational values.

Phillip did not consider joining a White fraternity because of the fraternity's historical legacy of exclusion of African Americans from its membership. He explained:

> I did do my history on them and a lot of them have a lot of lawsuits out for just being racist. I look at the people who are Black in them now and I wonder: Have you read a book about the fraternity that you're in? Do you understand that the founders of this fraternity would not want you in there right now? And that's blatant. I'm like, Why would you join it now even if it's for temporary brotherhood? You join the legacy of people, and that's not the legacy that had you in mind when it was created. So I would never ever . . .

Also, Brian and Reginald did not consider membership in a TGLO because they felt that the values and norms of a White fraternity were inconsistent with their personal values and what they would be seeking out of membership in a fraternal organization:

> Brian: In terms of my values and the contributions that I'd like to make in my community, White fraternities do not necessarily align as well as my organization does—so [it lacks] fit.

> Reginald: What I was looking for in a fraternity I didn't see in a White fraternity, and that was a sense of brotherhood—especially one that lasted beyond the college experience.

Overall, the perceptions that participants held regarding White Greek life were either based on stereotypes seen on television and in movies or based on limited interactions on campus. Participants reported that of what they observed of White fraternities, little matched their personal values or met their desire to connect with a

larger social network on campus. Accordingly, for many, joining a White fraternity was not a consideration.

Perceptions of Black Greek Life

Participants were as unaware of BGLOs as they were of TGLOs. Some participants reported encountering trepidation or total ignorance of Greek life from family members. Wade's family did not understand why he was joining a fraternity. He said, "In fact, it's kind of like, me doing this is a really big question mark in everyone's head." Samuel's parents, who were born in another country, had no cultural context for the organizations: "My parents are straight from Africa, so they have absolutely no idea what fraternities and sororities entail." Richard painted a more colorful picture of his family's concern regarding membership in a BGLO:

> My mother thought I was joining a cult. She didn't understand what fraternity life was about. Me and my father don't have a good relationship, so he did not know until after I became a Greek. One of my uncles said something to him. So, he doesn't really know about Greek life, but he's seen movies and stuff, so he just thought that's what the cool kids did at school.

For participants who did indicate some foreknowledge of Greek life, a few were completely unaware that there was a separate council of fraternities that was dedicated specifically to Black Greek life. For example, Noah stated:

> The funny thing is I didn't know about Greek life. I thought Greek life was White Greek life. When I was in high school, because I went to high school in the inner city as well and I genuinely thought it was just White kids getting drunk, big parties, everybody just having wild fun times, and that was it. I knew Black people could be members of fraternities and sororities just because it's 2011. I didn't really know there were specific Black sororities and fraternities with history and things of that nature.

Others were aware of the presence of BGLOs, but this awareness was generally inaccurate as these perceptions were often formulated based on images in the media. Among the participants who talked about media images, three referenced the movie *Stomp the Yard* as being the medium that provided an initial image of what it meant to be a member of a BGLO. Phillip said:

> I had no perceptions of Greek life. I didn't even know it existed. If you had asked me in 12th grade about APhiA, AKA—I had no idea. I didn't even realize that *Stomp the Yard* was actually based on real fraternities and things like that.

Similarly, Dennis shared:

> Prior to joining my fraternity, I saw Greek life as, let's see . . . *Stomp the Yard* [laughs]. I saw it as, ok, you go through certain things to join a fraternity and you step and all that other stuff you see in that movie and stuff that you see on TV in relation to fraternities. . . . I thought they just drink a lot and stuff like that. That was really what my perception was prior to coming to [college].

Michael added:

> The only fraternities that I saw where I grew up were Omega Psi Phi and two of my high school teachers were 'Ques' [nickname for those in Omega Psi Phi]. It really didn't interest me that much. I saw the movie [*Stomp the Yard*] when I was still in high school, so it kind of put me in the weird perspective of, "Is this what it's really like?"

Participants consistently shared that what they did know of BGLOs mirrored what chapter 2 referred to as the limited mainstream understanding of BGLO culture. This understanding is generally relegated to the imagery of stepping or the occurrence of hazing. Richard discussed his perception of BGLOs prior to becoming a member:

> All I thought they did was step. I thought Greeks step. I didn't really know the difference between Greeks at all. . . . I just thought that if you were Black and you were a guy, you were in the fraternity that was on your campus. I didn't know that there were different fraternities and different chapters of the fraternity. I had no idea. I also thought that people would beat you up, and you would get thrown around and stuff. And that they haze you in the public in front of all these people.

> And that's basically from watching movies; everything that I perceived was from movies.

As with TGLOs, the participants initially believed that BGLO membership had little value. Eugene observed fraternal activity on campus but it did not provoke him, initially, to seek membership:

> In my freshman year, towards the end, I saw a couple of probate shows on campus. I saw a few parties and stuff like that. I didn't really have a perception of it, negative or positive. It was just there.

Aaron entered college with a positive outlook on African American fraternities, but that perception was quickly redefined when he felt that he saw little of value from the BGLOs on campus:

> I actually came to the school with a scholarship from Kappa Alpha Psi. They gave me $1,500 a year for having a 3.0, so at the end of the day I got like $6,000, which is really an amazing amount, and I really appreciate the organization for that. But when I came here, they were just talking to girls, and not a lot of people were doing a lot of stuff. So I kind of figured like it was like a White fraternity except they're not as drunk all of the time. That was just kind of my perception, like I kept it moving.

The participants' stories tell of a journey from knowing little to nothing about BGLOs to gaining an appreciation of these organizations. Participants became interested in joining BGLOs once they were exposed to more substantive interactions of the organizations and their members. Andrew stumbled into Greek life one day while observing a group of women on campus:

> Because I'm a first-generation college student, my family doesn't know that much about Greek life or what these Greek organizations have done for these communities in an historical context. So when I first came to campus I thought they were clubs. Actually my first memory of Greek life is kind of funny. The AKAs were out on [campus] at a student org fair, and you know they are attractive young ladies, so I went up to them and asked, "Yo, how can I hang out with y'all all the time, you know?" So they just started talking to me and telling

> me about Greek life. I'm a naturally inquisitive person so I just started asking a whole lot of questions. The whole fraternal organization idea definitely sparked my interest and, you know, I just started doing more hard research on the web and with the members present on campus and started to inform my opinions—like, ok, these are leaders on campus for the most part. Whether it be on the social level or student organizations or academic areas, for the most part they are leaders. I thought that is something I can see myself pursuing.

Jordan's first view of Greek life exposed him to strong African American male role models who were members of BGLOs. He saw African American men who were excelling in their fields, and he wanted to be affiliated with that type of success:

> When I was in high school, in 11th grade we went on a college tour sponsored by my fraternity to HBCUs. So coming from New York you had to go as close as Howard to find the closest HBCU. The college tour was 5 days; it was on the bus from New York to DC to Virginia. We made it as far down as Florida to FAMU [Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University]. I think it was Alabama A&M, Tuskegee, Morehouse, Spellman, all of that. So that was my first exposure to Greek life. Then it was important to me because in the community that I'm from, there aren't too many successful Black males, so I wasn't sure if this alumni chapter picked their best alumni people to send on this tour, but it was just like—Yeah, I do such and such, and I'm the first person to do this, or I'm the best person at this. If you need this done, on the entire East Coast, I'm the person that you have to call. I was like *what?* I want to know more about how I could be like them.

The data showed that participants entered college with inaccurate perceptions of Greek life. As they learned more about the differences within Greek life, participants felt incongruence with the norms and values of TGLOs. These feelings carried over into initial perceptions of BGLOs. These primary perceptions were eventually replaced by meaningful interactions with BGLO members and positive observations of what BGLO members do. Once the participants learned of Greek life, for many, making the decision to join a BGLO was a reflection of a search for deeper meaning in fraternal membership.

The following sections address the answer for Research Question 1. When asked why they joined a BGLO, the main themes that emerged as reasons for BGLO

membership were (1) a support system gained through brotherhood, (2) the fraternal identity and legacy of the respective organizations, and (3) personal connections with older BGLO members.

Theme 1: Brotherhood

The most recurring reason that participants indicated for seeking membership was the notion of brotherhood. Participants consistently noted that they joined a BGLO for the social support that brotherhood in the fraternity brought. Phillip stated:

> The brotherhood is the most important thing that administration doesn't understand. Why we love our frat so much. Why we graduate people who are 70 still wearing line jackets with, like, "Death Row Chapter" on the back. Not because they are still going so hard for their fraternity or sorority but because they love the sisterhood that it represented; they love the brotherhood that it brought about. People say, "Oh, I can get that through BSU [Black Student Union], I can get that through. . . ." I don't think those people are indebted to you. I don't think those people are bound to you by a creed or some sort of promise that I took when I crossed the burning sands. I took a promise to protect all those people in that room with me and everyone who has come before me and everyone who will come after me. So I think the brotherhood is the most important thing.

Brotherhood, in the sense of the African American fraternity, provided a support system, or a second family, that significantly impacted the collegiate experience for its members.

> Richard: I don't have any family here, and so my family here is my fraternity. I feel like you need a support system in order to be in college and be productive. As much as I might bicker and fight with them, we are brothers, we have our ups and we definitely have our downs. But at the end of the day, you know there's going to be another up and there's going to be more ups.

> Warren: Once you join a fraternity, if you so choose, you have the ability to talk to a lot of members who have a lot to share with you. They've been through it and done all of it, and they have a lot to share. They will definitely embrace you and give you a lot of information that—not information; I don't know how to describe it. They'll give you a lot of like wisdom and bestow wisdom upon you that you won't necessarily gain if you weren't a part of it. It's kind of like it's an extended

> family, and it's kind of based on that African concept of community, you know? An older generation or even ancestors continuing to give back and kind of building a legacy. So in terms of that, that's one thing that you can have if you want it.

Membership in a BGLO provided consistent support for Kenneth and Jeff:

> Kenneth: You just got a group of Black men that you can call on at any hour of the day. Someone's bound to pick up. Someone's bound to help you, talk to you whenever you want. You can do that with probably a best friend but all these dudes are considered your best friend, your brothers. They will always look out for you.

> Jeff: For the reason that I wanted to join the first place. I feel that those desires have been fulfilled in terms of having people I feel like I could always fall on or go to or always be in my corner.

For Warren, brotherhood was stronger than regular friendship because of the coming together under the banner of fraternal values:

> I think that it's like a genuine brotherhood or closeness you wouldn't have found in a lot of different places. Especially at [University C], it seems that you just like are generally connected—genuinely connected to other people and under the banner of your fraternity, the banner of what your fraternity is supposed to be, like us specifically, "Culture for Service, Service for Humanity." So you find a lot of people, like genuinely good people who want to make an impact on, say, the community, or, say, the university setting specifically. So you can meet so many people like that and become so close to those people in a way that you couldn't have been if you weren't a part of the fraternity.

Phillip shared initial reluctance towards embracing a group of men. He stated that due to cultural roots, he shunned anything that put his sexuality in question. He felt, initially, that being too close to men could allow someone to question his sexuality. He stated, however, that when he lost his grandmother who raised him, it was his fraternity brothers, not his blood family, who supported him through a dark period. It was then he decided to embrace the brotherhood that fraternal membership brings:

> You realize, . . . man, don't fight the brotherhood. There are people out there—men—who really care about you because you have on the same t-shirt and generally want to see you succeed. Other people have stories and I can go on for days about the brotherhood. One day I didn't have money—someone gave me money. I didn't have a ride—someone gave me a ride. The bond . . . Kappa is so deep that I love [my fraternity] before anything else. It's not about, I didn't join because I knew there's a lot Kappas in business so I can get internships. I didn't join because I knew that they are the pretty boys and they get girls. I joined simply because someone reached out to me even before I was taken in as a member as a brother into this chapter. The bond between all of us is still really, really strong. We fight—literally fight— but you get over it and there's always someone to say, "Yo, you're not respecting the bond. You guys need to get over this." It's sometimes ridiculous how close we are, but I'll do it for him because I know he'll do it for me . . . and I hope he'll do it for me.

For some participants, the brotherhood created an instant network of friends in an environment that may not always be perceived by African American men as welcoming. For Phillip, the sense of brotherhood provided the support needed to make it through college:

> Before the internships or the strolling or stepping, me personally I like the brotherhood. I probably wouldn't be in college right now if it wasn't for my line brothers.

Aaron was encouraged by his mother and brother to join a fraternity so that he would have a peer network to help him through adjusting to college:

> My mother told me when I came here, "Join a fraternity." My brother who came to [University A], he said, "You're not going to make any guy friends or not a lot of guy friends or not a lot of strong relationships with guy friends unless you do," because this school is like 1:3, 1:4, guy/girl ratio. So there are all these girls, very few guys, because all of the guys are separated. It's really hard to last here unless you have male friends. And then taking it even further, having no friends that have a similar background as you or also identify as you do is another layer.
>
> So having an organization where all of the guys are guys, one, and two, are Black, most of the time, gives you that group of friends you know aren't going to go anywhere like brothers, which makes a relationship even tighter because you know I may wrong him in this way, but I know he'll still forgive and love me because he's my brother. . . . So I feel like . . . it gave me a really, really big group of male friends that I wouldn't have had outside the organization. I mean, I had

> like three or four . . . really good male, Black friends at this university outside the fraternity, but inside it's like, it's over 10. So it provided that means toward friendship that I would not have gotten if I hadn't joined. And that's the kind of support that you need on an all-White campus sometimes.

The brotherhood allowed for fraternity members to contribute not only to themselves and each other but towards the larger goal of community uplift. Brian provided a powerful image of being a Black male role model in the African American community:

> Before I could even qualify exactly what a fraternity was, I saw an image of a Black man dedicating himself to being a positive role model in the community, and it's one of the largest reasons why I sought to join my organization. I wanted to join something that was bigger than me—a movement where brothers from different backgrounds could come together and serve the community, who could uphold one another to high standards, who could push one another. Just a sense of brotherhood and the common understanding that comes with it. I think this is particularly important at a predominantly White institution where, historically, African Americans feel left out. They feel that they're not supported or recognized by the university. By joining this, I've been able to overcome some of the stigmas of attending a predominantly White institution.

Brian continued by stating that fraternity membership "produces leaders":

> people who are pioneers, people who set the pace, people who speak out above the rest and even first about social good. . . . I'd say my fraternity takes on a large responsibility for caring for the community as a whole.

Reginald shared a similar sentiment:

> I really wanted to have a sense of brotherhood and also I wanted to be in an organization where they focus on a lot of Black issues and I was surrounded by positive Black role models. So to me I just didn't want to be in an organization and I look back at the founders or a lot of the people of the organization and didn't see people who looked like me.

Samuel felt that he owed it to other members of the African American community to uplift and support the rest of the community at a PWI. BGLO membership was the vehicle through which he chose to provide this support:

> First of all, there weren't that many Black men period. So at Greek Week events or things like parties, when I did see a group of like-minded Black individuals or men who were my age, I was kind of like, wow, they're on the same path. They dress well, they speak well, they carry themselves well, and they run campuses. Like why would I not want to be part of an organization like that? So it was a no-brainer. I felt like I was obligated as one of the few Black men to join a Black Greek-letter organization. . . . Everybody has their own reasons and such, but I feel like, especially like at a place like this where there aren't that many of us period, it's definitely an uplifting experience to be around this many like-minded individuals who look like you.

The brotherhood found in BGLO membership extended across age groups and even beyond the participants' fellow college peers. Aaron shared:

> So having [fraternity brothers] has always been like a backbone or something to rely on. You don't get it in other fraternities—specifically White fraternities. I know some people who didn't know all of the brothers in a pledge class. [I think it] would be really weird [to be in] a fraternity and not know anybody in your line. But just having guys that I crossed with, like my LB [line brother], it was just me and him when I crossed. He was like 25 at the time and I was 18, so it was like a 7-year difference, but that 7-year difference was just wiped away. He is one of my best friends now. I can hit him up about anything and we can talk about it. Same goes for me in the chapter and the other chapters I have close relationships with.

Eugene commented:

> You have an interest in seeing your chapter succeed, and seeing brothers in your chapter succeed no matter what. Even if you don't really know them, because after you graduate and you're not around the chapter that much, you don't really know the current brothers as much. You know them a little bit through an e-mail listserv, so we know the older brothers here and there. But some of them we don't really know them that much because they're busy with professional stuff. But somehow they manage to check in when we have chapter barbeques or something—they check in. And once everyone is there in one spot, it's almost like we have that common bond. It's really weird, it's really hard to describe, but the brotherhood definitely is there.

Casey identified on a spiritual level with BGLO membership. He likened the experience to searching for the intangible benefits that spirituality brings:

> It's kind of like I was doing some research on different religions and faith, and just like you kind of . . . you have a belief in an unknown—do you know what I

> mean? So you can't really rationalize why you believe in the god or why you believe what you believe. It's just like infinite faith. It was more or less one of those situations where I can't really explain it, but everything kind of happened at the same time and happened the right way, and I felt like the people who were on campus at this school, I felt like I had a connection to them and that we could actually have some type of friendship and brotherhood.

Ultimately, the bond of brotherhood united the participants in their search for membership. Joshua summarized it well:

> Prior to joining, what brought me toward it was the bond I saw between them. A whole bunch of people from a whole bunch of places in the United States but somehow they were able to link together and they just seemed like the best of, tightest friends as possible. That's what brought me toward it but I had never elevated them in my eyes. I always saw them as a good group of people. I'd just say it was an overall good perception and that's why I came over.

Most of the participants mentioned the bond of brotherhood as a major reason for joining a BGLO. As stated through these comments, brotherhood provided the participants opportunities to connect with other African Americans on campus. Brotherhood brought a sense of belonging, security, and connectedness to the participants. Participants developed close relationships that provided overwhelming support. Joining a BGLO is a lifelong commitment that provided the opportunity to connect with a network of Black men both nationally and internationally. Participants shared that the bonds of brotherhood made them a part of a larger family and gave them a reason to stay in school.

Theme 2: Fraternal Identity and Legacy

Prospective members of fraternities are often encouraged to "do their research" on the differences between organizations in order to make an informed decision on which of the five BGLOs fits their needs. Findings of this study revealed that participants' decision

to join a BGLO were heavily influenced by known "stereotypes" of individual fraternities and the legacy of the accomplishments of alumni fraternity members. For purposes of organizational clarity, the following section is arranged by (a) fraternal identity, and (b) fraternal legacy.

Fraternal identity. When asked to describe the characteristics of their fraternity, each participant was able to rehearse a widely known and accepted fraternal identity that for some factored into their decision to choose a specific fraternity. Joseph provided an overview of "stereotypes" related to four of the African American fraternities:

> I would say on the undergrad level we [Kappas] have the perception of being ladies' men and it really depends on the area. If you're in the South, the South has a really bad representation of Black men in regards to the HBCUs. Ques and Kappas, they never graduate. They just stay there and are womanizers. Alphas are primed to be super intelligent, upstanding and whatever, whatever. Whereas that may not be true, I actually think it also works to their benefit. I think we all subconsciously want to match the stereotypes of our organizations although we don't come out and say it. So here's a kid who's not that smart, you're like, "Oh crap. Shit. Like I gotta be smart, that's the stereotype." Whereas if you're a Que, you might have been a calm guy but "Oh crap, I gotta be wild now because I gotta match my stereotype." Whereas if you're a Kappa who maybe had one girlfriend or you just kept to yourself, you were really shy with girls, now you gotta be out there. You gotta be a ladies' man. You gotta get all the girls. All the girls gotta like you. So that's what I think is on the undergrad level.

What Wade understood of the fraternal identities also impacted his membership decision:

> Looking at the kind of stereotypical, national identities of the organizations: Ques—I never could see myself fitting in with. Kappas—I could never see myself fitting in with. I knew one Iota who's really cool and DJ'd, and he had all the respect in the world for me. But that's the one person I could talk to about Iota, so I was like, nah. So it came down to Sigma and Alpha for me. And just getting to know regionally the brothers in the area—I have a lot of respect for both organizations nationally, but I also [understand that I'm not only] joining the organization, I'm also joining the chapter. I'm joining the region. So who they were mattered in my determination.

When asked to specifically describe what it meant to be a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Samuel shared:

> I would describe my fraternity as the cream of the crop, simply. Of course, we were the first, so we set the precedent of Greek life for the collegiate community—or intercollegiate—and we're known for having a standard of excellence which is never subpar. We're known for being—people might say we're the geeks and we're the nerds, but the geeks and the nerds are the people who change the world, and that's what we've done time and time again. . . . It's kind of—I guess some people might perceive it as sad, but, hey, I can't come off as stupid because I'm an Alpha. And that plays into the stereotype that you have, but that's a very productive stereotype, so I'll take it. As long as it's nothing negative and it'll help me to do better, you can stamp that stereotype right on my forehead—go ahead.

Reginald added:

> Some of the images of Alpha is we tend to be smart. We tend to excel academically and do well in the professional environment. Some people say we're a little cocky. But overall I think it's this image of the Black male who succeeds and is very professional and ends up doing well.

Andrew provided a succinct description of the goals of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. organization: "Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. develops leaders, promotes brotherhood and academic excellence, while providing service and advocacy for our communities."

Noah, a member of Kappa Alpha Psi, described his fraternity as "the shimmy frat, the guys with the canes. Arrogant—I think that's true, though. I think a lot of us are pretty arrogant."

Casey clarified what it meant to be a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., an organization that has a more pronounced stereotype attributed to its members:

> If you're attracted to this fraternity, you're going to see that certain characteristics are slightly aggressive and stuff like that, but it's aggressive in every aspect, though. It's kind of like you want to say doing work, so academics, like diligence and community service, nothing is just halfway; everything is enthusiastic, I would say that.

Warren explained the multicultural membership of Phi Beta Sigma:

> Phi Beta Sigma is known as the sum of all things. That's what a sigma is, I mean the actual letter sigma. So it's one thing that describes my fraternity, specifically because we have so many different types of members. You'll see a lot of African members; you'll see a lot of Black members, Latinos, even some White members that are a part of it. So that's what kind of differentiates us but also doesn't give us a specific characteristic.

As the youngest of the five African American fraternities, the fraternal identity for Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. appeared to be one that is still emerging. Nate explained:

> Outside of being the youngest and getting the joke, "Oh, you're out to lunch with your founders and blah, blah, blah," I'll say we're known by five principles: scholarship, leadership, citizenship, fidelity, brotherhood and we're actually the largest growing, currently, organization, and I think that Iota is also known . . . you don't have to be the brand, you can make the brand. That one of the things about Iota; you don't have to come in and think that you have to be a certain way. Rather you being yourself is what it's about. It's about you being an individual. . . . The iota itself is the smallest thing that you can break down, and when you break somebody down, there's nothing else left but an iota and that is the core of who they are.

No matter the fraternity, each participant proudly owned the identity attributed to each organization. Some participants selected their respective organization because they felt that they held personal attributes that lined up with widely accepted identities of their fraternity. For others, once they chose an organization, they conformed their personal identity to match that of the fraternity.

Fraternal legacy. The data demonstrated that when it came to determining membership, participants' membership choice was influenced by the legacy members of the organization who had made a social impact on the world.

Samuel stated that as he was doing research on Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., learning of its prolific members served as the tipping point for membership for him. He said, "When I heard Dr. Martin Luther King was a member, I was like, 'Oh, no.' And

then when I started reading about other members—it was a done deal." Another member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Reginald, was similarly impressed by others who share membership in his organization.

> I looked at some of the famous brothers who are Alphas, and there were just a lot of people who I realize have done a lot of great things and a lot of people who I looked up to even before even knowing about Greek life. Like Martin Luther King and Paul Robeson and there was just so many more people who I looked at and thought, "Oh, I didn't know that person was an Alpha."

Warren's decision to join Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. was heavily influenced by the fraternal legacy of the organization:

> I am one of the few people that joined it just based on its principles specifically. So that's why I got interested, that's why I thought about it, that's why I found the connection to it, and then all of the great brothers that came after that. So specifically, Kwame Nkrumah, but generally, the principles of the fraternity and its connection to Africa. So that's one of the things that brought me closer to it.

Michael discussed how his exposure to the prefraternal society of the free masons impacted his decision to join Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.:

> My father being a mason . . . they're very connected to the Alphas. They're very connected to Egyptology. A lot of things sorta made sense for me. I can't describe every facet that I saw. Even some of the members that passed away [I was able to] see them in dominant roles in society. They were the ones actually making progress in history. A lot of my African American studies classes, I would see this particular person. . . . I can't think of his name, . . . but he's the person who made "A Voteless People is a Hopeless People." He created that campaign in the 50s. He was an Alpha. That's one of the programs we do nationally. It's a lot of connections that I see within myself that the organization represented, so it just made sense to me.

The data demonstrated that for these students, being a part of a larger fraternal legacy was important for their membership. These participants were inspired by the accomplishments of legacy members and desired to become members whose

contributions could be counted towards the rich history of their respective African American fraternities.

Theme 3: Personal Connection

The final main theme that emerged for reasons participants joined a BGLO was personal connection. Participants shared instances where individuals they came in contact with created an awareness of and evoked an interest in BGLOs. Phillip and Joseph both developed a friendship with someone who looked out for them and treated them like brothers. That bond led to membership in Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.:

> Phillip: The reason why I joined Kappa is because [of] one of my prophytes who went to high school with me. I was a freshman—he was a senior. In high school he would take me home; he would buy me food. In high school he was like an older brother. I don't have an older brother. So he took me under his wing. That was kind of weird but it was cool too. So when I came to college he was a senior, again, I was a freshman and he was like "Yo, come to this interest meeting." I was like, "What is this for?" He's like, "It's this interest meeting and it's for Kappa Alpha Psi—just a bunch of guys talking about faith, money, and being about their business"—and that's three things that I feel like when I came to college I was really into.

> Joseph: I'd say close to 80% of students come in here don't even know about Greek life or at least Black Greek life. So I joined mine through a personal connection. It just happened that one of my close friend's high school classmates was a Kappa. When we came to [my university] we were freshmen—he was a senior and he just took us under his arm. He drove us all around and we hanged out with him. He was just a really cool guy. So it was through that I joined. I thought he's cool. I might as well do it. I didn't know what I was getting myself into at all.

Richard shared a similar experience of establishing a personal connection that led to his membership in a BGLO:

> I met [an older member in the fraternity], who's my line brother now, and he is amazing, and he's the one that told me . . . "Look, we can do this together. It's going to be great." And once I had somebody to be a support mechanism, to validate my interest, to make sure that I was actually thinking about the right

> things, based on what he was thinking about, seeing if we were correlating . . . that's when I made my decision.

Similarly, Noah joined his fraternity because he had a positive role model to look up to:

> I just was able to get exposed to a positive male role model that was a member of Kappa Alpha Psi. So I didn't really know about Greek life but I knew that I wanted to be a Kappa just because that was a man I admired. Not growing up with a father, he was like a father figure to me. That definitely influenced my decision.

Kenneth initially became interested in Greek life through his brother's membership but then developed a deeper relationship with an older fraternity member who encouraged him to learn more about Kappa Alpha Psi, Fraternity, Inc.:

> My brother was an Alpha so obviously I was just trying to follow in his footsteps. That's what I had originally wanted, but after going to the step show the Alphas just didn't wow me like the Kappas did when they got on stage. When I came here the Kappas were suspended so they had just came back my freshman year and my neighbor was actually the only one here and he was a transfer student. He definitely introduced me to the fraternity, told me to do my research, make sure this was "my final choice" because you know, once you do it you can't go back and exchange your letters for somebody else's.

Brian was exposed early on to Greek life while enrolled in elementary school:

> My first experience with a fraternity was when I was in kindergarten. My PE teacher told us three things when he met us. He told us what university he attended, the fact that he graduated with honors, and that he was an 'Alpha man.' It sort of was from then on my awareness for historically Black fraternities was always high. From there I met a number of very positive people along the way. They shaped my thinking around fraternities—they produce good people. They produce a population of people who lead and work towards a common good, if you will.

In summary, Research Question 1 helped to explain why these African American male students joined a BGLO at a PWI. The data chronicled the process of participants gaining new information about BGLOs and clarifying existing understandings of TGLOs

and BGLOs. Once participants learned of BGLOs, they pursued membership because of (a) the support system gained through brotherhood, (b) the fraternal identity and legacy of the respective organizations, and (c) personal connections with older BGLO members.

Findings for Research Question 2: Influence of Greek Membership

This research question sought to explore the influences these African American male students attributed to membership in a BGLO. While few participants felt that their college experience would have been unpleasant had they not become a member of a BGLO, many felt that their experience had definitely been enhanced as a result of doing so. Participants demonstrated a heightened level of student engagement as a result of fraternal membership. This heightened level of engagement resulted in both positive and negative influences on the college experience. The findings revealed several influences on the college experience for participants: (a) peer accountability, (b) service opportunities, (c) networking, (d) notability, (e) leadership development, (f) stereotyping, (g) marginalization, and (h) competing priorities. Figure 4.2 provides a visual summary of the perceived influences of BGLO membership on the participants' college experiences.

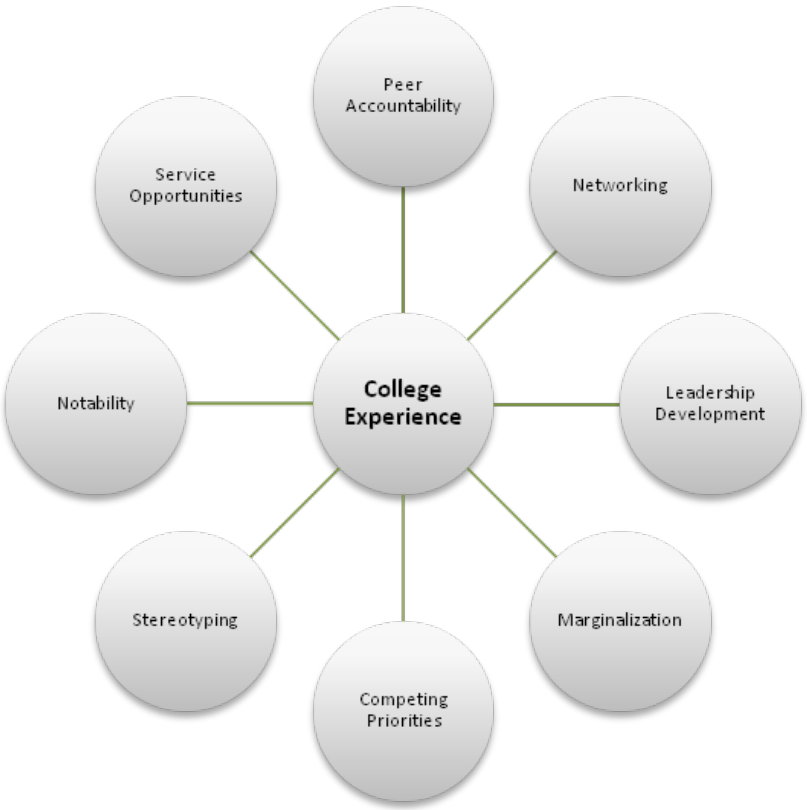

Figure 4.2. Influences on college experiences.

Advantage 1: Peer Accountability

The most noted influence of membership was peer accountability. Participants stated that being a part of a fraternity heightened their awareness of the impact their personal decisions had on the larger organization. Jeff said, “I feel obligated to succeed because people, when they look at me, I’m reflecting my chapter—my fraternity on a whole.” Joshua agreed, “I can’t do the same things like I did before, because even if I’m not wearing letters I am wearing letters at all times. I always have to remember that I’m always representing something other than me.” Being accountable to one’s peers fostered high expectations for achievement, as Michael indicated:

> It's sort of ingrained in us that academic success is mandatory. Even if you look back at some of our aims and our mottos—manly deeds, scholarship, and love for mankind—it's built into the fraternity. We sort of pride ourselves on it, so within the chapter it is assumed you need to do well. So everyone coming into the chapter and everyone in the chapter has that sort of in the back of their mind—that it's not an option to not do well in school. If we have to cut a program or cut an exhibition show just because folks have midterms coming up, then we'll do that. It's definitely a huge priority, which reflects in everyone's grades. Alpha Psi, that's just a decision that we've made as a chapter to build each other up academically.

Some chapters instituted internal sanctions to hold each other accountable.

Richard shared:

> If your GPA falls below a certain point or even goes lower than where you were the semester before, then you'll be suspended from the chapter for a semester. That's only something that is chapter specific. . . . It's no regulation in Kappa.

Being a member in the same fraternity also created a healthy competition between fraternity members. Samuel discussed how the accomplishments of fellow fraternity brothers set a "bar" of achievement for him:

> So it's like, "Oh, my God, he has a 3.4. He's interning with such-and-such. He just got a job offer. What am I doing?" It's not, "What am I going to do to stand out?" it's, "What am I going to do to fit in or stay on the same level?" So, it's challenging. I mean, it's very productive, but it's challenging in that it always keeps you on your toes. You're always like trying to raise the bar higher and higher when you're around seven other people who are doing the same thing.

Andrew and Eugene offered similar thoughts:

> Andrew: Being around high-caliber individuals who are taking internships here and there, going to get this fellowship really pushes you to work harder. I always have the saying, "I don't like being the tallest person in the room because you have nothing to look up to." So definitely associating yourself with people who are doing big and better things makes you want to do big and better things.
>
> Eugene: In my chapter alone, we strive to go 3.0 and above, and that's kind of like a competition that we have within the chapter. So every semester we actually have a competition of who has the highest GPA, and it keeps each other accountable. So academically that's pushed me a lot harder.

Not only did accountability produce healthy competition but, overall, it provided positive behaviors for participants to emulate.

> Brian: If you find out another brother's schedule—what they do right—you learn from them and emulate them and ultimately you study together and you push one another. If I don't do well on one of my tests, one of my brothers is gonna know that and he's gonna say something about it and encourage me to do better and I'm gonna do the same. We're very clear at the beginning of the semester what our goals are academically, and we push one another to meet those goals by the end of the semester.

Jordan discussed that he and his fellow fraternity members held each other accountable regarding positive academic progress. This was demonstrated as more than just an assumption fraternity members were doing well in school. Fraternity brothers were actively engaged in ensuring that a fraternity member was academically on target before it was too late to do anything about it:

> So we all see each other's transcripts at the end of the semester, just making sure everyone's on top of things, because the last [thing] that you want is for somebody to fail. . . . This is a conversation that we've had with people in other chapters even on campus, where they just don't know that somebody is doing that bad until it comes time for them to graduate, and it's like: Well, ok, I'm staying another semester. Because right now we have three graduating seniors and we know that they were graduating, since I knew them, so of course it isn't a matter of—wait, actually you have to take some more classes. We saw your transcript, you're out of here; this is good enough. This 3-whatever will get you right on out of here. That's definitely been something that has required some focus.

Casey shared a similar story of ensuring the success of a fraternity brother:

> You're always kind of like on your brother to make sure that he's doing something. So if you know that he's got like a test coming up, you're, "Oh, you're working on that test? You've been studying, right?" and it's like, "Okay, you're right." I mean, you've got always somebody on your case about certain things, and that kind of keeps you sharp. They say steel sharpens steel, so you're on your brother because he can handle it.

Reginald shared how peer accountability was also about setting academic priorities:

> When I came into the fraternity, actually my GPA went up because I had a lot of older bros who were really pushing for us to be successful academically, and it's really kind of taught me how to focus on academics and make sure that is a number one priority.

Peer accountability was demonstrated to be an experience that extended beyond current members and included alumni fraternity members:

> Aaron: If I hadn't joined the fraternity, I probably would have just chilled the entire time. One of the older brothers before he graduated used to push me a lot. If I wasn't holding events, if I wasn't being active, he would call me like, "Aaron, you need to hold this, this, and this. You need to do this. You need to do this, this, and this. Why aren't you guys doing this?" And I would be annoyed, but at the same time, that's what I asked for, so that's what I would get, so I didn't mind.

> Kenneth: I will say that looking at the success of the alumni—I have one frat brother working at Microsoft, a couple at Enterprise, one or two in grad school and also working—so their success is always motivating me. They talk to me all the time just to make sure my head is in the academic game.

Jeff summarized how being a BGLO member held him more accountable in college:

> I feel held more accountable for my actions because, like I said before, I'm not just representing me. I feel like what I do is going to reflect on the fraternity and the perceptions that people have of the fraternity and my chapter. I think there's a greater level of accountability that I just inherit naturally.

The aforementioned comments showed how being a member of a BGLO brought instant accountability into the lives of its members. Participants held each other accountable in college by ensuring that papers were completed and tests were studied for. Some chapters instituted chapter-specific sanctions to incentivize satisfactory academic progress. Participants felt held accountable not only by peers but also by alumni members

of the organization. Alumni members demonstrated active interest in seeing the participants succeed. The professional accomplishments of alumni set a bar for participants to aspire towards as well.

Advantage 2: Leadership Development

Another noted influence on the participants' college experience was leadership development. Being a member of a BGLO exposed participants to experiences that allowed them to grow in their leadership skills and prepared them for their professional careers. Reginald explained being taught how to tie a tie and other basics of professional dress from fellow fraternity members:

> There's a lot of lessons I've learned just being in the fraternity and coming into the fraternity. Before I didn't know how to tie a bow tie. I knew how to tie one knot in a regular tie, so now I know how to tie three knots and I know how to tie a bow tie. There were some things I learned from other brothers who have work experience who taught me a lot like when you wear a suit you should always wear White underneath a White shirt.

Warren learned basics of leadership such as parliamentary procedure and other technical leadership skills from fraternity-related activities:

> It also teaches a lot of technical skills that will make you a better candidate to be involved in other organizations. You know, once you throw an event for this organization, you know you have the ability to do it for another organization if you so choose. At the same time, you get acquainted with a lot of things like parliamentary procedure, for instance.

Andrew agreed that BGLO membership influenced his leadership and professional development:

> I feel like my organization definitely has developed my leadership skills and my ability to speak in front of crowds. That confidence translates into some of the leadership positions I have here on campus. It's made me more confident when conducting meetings or facilitating or presiding over meetings, being a guest

> speaker, running a program efficiently. Those are the skills I've developed since being in this chapter since a very young age in my college experience—my second semester of freshman year. [It] has definitely accelerated me and matured me a lot quicker than if I didn't join. The summer of 2009 I participated in the Alpha Leadership Academy. It's for current brothers in the fraternity to enhance their ability to interview well and write effective papers and email correspondence —all the leadership and professional development skills that you need to be a successful businessman.

Being a member of a BGLO provided participants opportunities to attend external leadership development activities and to serve in ambassadorial roles. Nate spoke of his leadership development since joining Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc:

> Through Iota and through being Greek, I've gone to leadership conferences, seminars, lectures, I've represented the university on different panels—that type of stuff. . . . I was doing leadership but I wasn't going to be able to reach that many places or interact with that many different people, so being Greek has definitely exposed me to different types of leadership styles, leadership formats.

Eugene summarized how being a BLGO member has influenced him and has made him a stronger, more confident leader:

> I wouldn't change it for the world, not to sound cliché. . . . It really has done a lot for me in terms of growth overall. I think it forces you to be a leader anywhere. Whether you have a leadership role in your chapter or not, you're forced to do that to some extent. So it really builds leadership characteristics, it builds confidence because you have to step up and do a lot of things and take on leadership roles and make decisions overall.

In sum, the finding of leadership development was consistent with existing research that states that BGLO membership positively impacts leadership development in its members (Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). The data showed that participants were taught how to dress professionally, learned public speaking, and learned how to run effective meetings as a part of their BGLO membership. In addition, participants were provided opportunities to attend conferences and seminars and to serve as ambassadors for their fraternities and universities.

Advantage 3: Networking

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.

Some participants joined their fraternity seeking to establish contacts on their respective campuses. Jeff stated:

> When I got to [University C], I knew that I wanted to join a Black male fraternity. I knew I wanted to do it, just for the networking sake of it, . . . just to have more of a bond with a group of people because when I first got here, I didn't know anybody on campus.

Other participants were able to establish networks with college students at neighboring institutions. Jordan shared:

> I know I wouldn't have met as many people at [University C], [University A], and [another local university] if I wasn't in my fraternity. Because I would just be there, I might go for a party, but I wouldn't go for an event. I wouldn't go to just chill out to meet people. So that's definitely been a great advantage—the networking aspect of it.

Michael shared a similar outlook on networking:

> Networking is huge within my organization. I can pretty much go wherever I want to and be able to meet a fraternity brother in that area and we'll have the same connection and the same understanding and we'll both know that we'll do what we can for each other.

As Wade was traveling one night, an alumni fraternity brother extended himself in a manner that exemplified how networking personally benefits fraternity members:

> You'd just be surprised the different doors that randomly open. For example, as I was headed home to Baltimore, a gentleman actually approached me— I guess he saw my lanyard. He asked me when was I initiated. Turns out he's a charter member of the Bowie State chapter, from like 1970-something. We actually had a long conversation the entire train ride home. It's 11 or so at night, he asked, "How you getting home?" I said, "I guess catch the bus." He said, "No, that's stupid. Some brother that I know from this chapter is coming to pick me up. I'm sure he won't have a problem driving you home." I was like, ok, because he seemed kind of insulted that I would even think of taking the bus. And, I actually get a ride home. This gentleman was like, "You like swimming?" . . . Sure. . . . "Oh, I have this Olympic-size swimming pool. You want to come over, and I know you young people, you like this, this, and this." So just by being myself, and being in this fraternity, but being cordial or whatever, I was opened up to an Olympic-size swimming pool. Me and some of my friends could hang out certain summer days. For me, that networking has been more social thus far. I'm still anticipating the more financial or job-style benefits of it.

The benefits of networking extended into the world of career development and enhancement. For Andrew, being a member of a BGLO provided access to an internship that turned into an opportunity for employment:

> I landed an internship through a connection in my fraternity that set me up for a great offer that I have this summer at IBM. It's been a great experience in terms of the networking and the strong brotherhood that I have with my line brothers and my neos, and I wouldn't trade that for anything.

Samuel shared a similar experience of gaining a career opportunity through networking:

> I was flown out to Houston for almost a week for this fellowship with General Electric. This was all through my fraternity, and they were basically training us on corporate life—a lot of which I'd already learned from just being in the chapter in this area because it is just so intensive. But then when I finally came back from this week-long leadership conference yesterday, I was offered an internship with General Electric. This was all through my fraternity. So I will be spending the summer in Kentucky while working with General Electric.

Warren explained how one's college experiences are influenced by the networking opportunities BGLO membership brings:

> Definitely a networking advantage that you gain [from joining a BGLO]. A lot of people will reach out to you that wouldn't have done that before. So they will reach out to you if, say, they have a job, say they have an organization that you want to be a part of, or even an organization that they're running that they want you to be involved with, like any type or some sort of charity or someone that's giving back to the community. So a lot of people will give you a lot of connections that you wouldn't have had before.

Dennis felt that networking was necessary for postgraduation success:

> I feel like when you get a degree and you graduate from college, it doesn't guarantee you a job. It's usually your network and the amount of people that you know that can really help you and say, "Oh, I know him. He's a good guy. He's worked for me" or "We've worked on something together and we got things done. He's a dependable person." My fraternity gives me that.

Overall, the participants shared stories of benefits from having an international network of BGLO members on which to lean. Participants reported feeling instantly connected to a group of peers on their respective and other college campuses. One participant was helped by a fraternity member he didn't know as a result of wearing fraternity paraphernalia that identified him as a fellow member. In addition to personal benefits, the data showed that networking opened up doors for fraternity members to gain internships, fellowships, and advance in their careers.

Advantage 4: Service Opportunities

Research participants overwhelmingly mentioned engagement in BGLO-sanctioned service initiatives. Each of the five African American fraternities has a national service mandate that participants are expected to contribute their time and energy towards. Brian stated that the fraternity allowed him to be exposed to local and national service opportunities.

> I think if anything, my joining the fraternity, and brothers who are just as involved as I am, shows the level of commitment that the fraternity builds and that it

> develops in the gentlemen that do join at the college level. I would say my fraternity probably opened my eyes to more similar events that I can engage in outside of my campus—where I can go out into DC or engage in national projects with brothers who I've met only once or never before met. It just increased the scope of service that I could provide elsewhere.

Some participants indicated that had they not joined their fraternity, they may not have participated in community service. Aaron communicated:

> There's a few community-service events like Relay for Life I probably would not have done had I not been in Phi Beta Sigma. Also, there's a thing for St. Jude's where you write letters to family members and friends to donate money to the organization, and I'd probably not done any St. Jude events had I not joined Phi Beta Sigma.

Aaron also shared that the opportunity to participate in service factored into his decision to join his fraternity:

> I had one guy in my class, and we'd just, like, laugh and joke around. We had to go on a field trip together to the court, so we were just talking and stuff, and he'd go, "Yo," and he'd like try to find me at the parties. And then whenever I went to the party, they were like, "Yo, we're doing service in the morning." So I'd wake in the morning after being out until 2:00 a.m. or 3:00 a.m. and go out and do service, and I was like, "Okay, these guys are doing what they say they're doing." . . . I was like, these guys know what they're about, and I know they'll push me. That and the fact that they were doing community service.

Participants participated in service not only because it was a requirement of membership, but because they had a personal commitment to serving the needs of others. Wade shared, "Being a part of Sigma, and service being one of our principles, it's kind of inspired me to think more on my own of what I can do and how I can contribute."

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., like many of the other Black fraternities, has national philanthropic mandates that local chapters commit toward supporting. Richard explained:

> Our biggest initiative is St. Jude's Children's Fund. It's our philanthropic initiative. Our chapter specifically is the only undergraduate chapter to be in the Million Dollar Club for Kappa Alpha Psi. And the Million Dollar Club is basically a dedication that each chapter will move towards giving. . . . After a 10-year goal, the chapters included will have made $1,000,000 to give to St. Jude.

Other participants noted, however, that what they participated in was more than just what others considered "philanthropy." Joseph mentioned a differentiation between the philanthropic outreach of White fraternities and Black fraternities.

> There's a big push for philanthropy and things like that, but I think it's interesting that when White people say philanthropy they just mean giving money. They don't actively mean being involved in the community they want to give philanthropy to, and I think that's very interesting.

To the participants, community service was about making a meaningful and lasting impact on communities. Noah stated:

> Here at [my university's] campus, our chapter (since we've come back from suspension in '08) every year we've done an HIV awareness program. Every year we actually bring a gay man who has contracted HIV and he's lived with it for 20 years, so he comes and speaks to the campus. We like to do that event. We have a Guide Right program where we mentor children. We do that with [our graduate advisor], as well, in the alumni chapter. That's definitely one fraternity experience—that's the biggest one I can take away from college . . . just being able to branch out to a lot of young men and women.

Several other participants shared mentorship initiatives with which they volunteered. Reginald shared national social and political initiatives that he took part of as a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.:

> We're nationally known for programs like "A Voteless People is a Hopeless People" where we urge minorities, particularly African Americans, to register to vote and to actively use that right and vote. We are also known for the "Go-To-High-School, Go-To-College" program where we urge high school students to continue their education beyond just being their senior year of high school and go on and get a degree in college.

Nate shared what he did within his local community:

> We've done high school mentoring a lot. We've gone to different schools, we've spoken to students, and even with students here we've tried to help with scheduling and things like that—you know, picking your major—and we're in the process of working on a graduate school prep program.

Dennis felt that African American fraternities were not known as much for their commitment to service as they were for their step shows and parties:

> Some of those *other* organizations—they think that all we do is just step and throw parties and stuff, but that's not really correct because we actually do more community service than they do in 1 year.

The findings revealed that all of the African American fraternities had both local and national service mandates for fraternity members. Through BGLO membership, participants engaged in activities that contributed to community uplift. Participants felt that although they spent a considerable amount of time doing service, they were more known for their social activities, such as step shows and parties. In all, as a result of BGLO membership, participants were able to consistently participate in giving back to the community.

Advantage 5: Notability

Another theme that emerged was that of notability among peers. Research participants shared that for many of them, once they joined a BGLO, they rose from relative obscurity to celebrity-like status on campus. Samuel explained:

> When you have letters, they're like, "Oh, my God, that's the guy with the letters." Everybody knows who you are because you're different. The letters on your chest make you look different or, sadly, put you on a higher status than some other people.

Joseph shared a similar viewpoint on being a notable figure on campus:

> It gives you a newsworthy source of attention—if that makes any sense. So the average person that wants people to care about them would have to make up something or continually talk about something to garner people's attention. But once you're a part of a fraternity, especially Kappa Alpha Psi, there's always something going on where you can garner attention.

Joshua tried to make sense of his newfound celebrity status on campus:

> Your peers supposedly look up to you, so you have to do your best to leave the best impression and do the right thing. Your peers—I don't know why they seem to elevate you above themselves. . . . I don't know why they do that. Before I joined the fraternity I thought they were all regular people, regular guys, regular joes. Peers seem to just elevate you to kind of a college celebrity.

Phillip talked about the emotional payoff of notability:

> As much as Black Greeks don't want to admit it, it's cool to have everyone look at you up there strolling, and stuff like that. That's pretty fun. Getting Facebook messages from random girls—that's always good, like "Hey, what's up?" Meeting Congressman Conyers on Martin Luther King Day. He's actually the uncle of someone in my chapter, so we got him here.

Richard credited his fraternity membership with defining his overall college experience. To him, being in Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. allowed him to be held in high esteem with his peers:

> At [University B], I've joined a million different groups. Two dance groups—the top dance groups on campus. Then I turned around and joined a fraternity here at a very young age, and I think my fraternity experience has made my college experience. And had I not joined Kappa Alpha Psi, Inc., I would not have been able to travel outside of the university and to be looked at as a high figure amongst my peers because of my choice to be Greek.

Participants shared that notability gave them an influential voice on a campus that they may not have had otherwise. Noah described:

> I guess this can be an advantage and a disadvantage—you have a lot of clout. A lot of people really listen to you. You're [automatically] looked at as a leader. I look at that as an advantage, but to some that's a disadvantage. You're always looked at as a leader on campus. Somebody who's gonna be the voice of the community to an extent. You have a lot to live up to.

Similarly, Aaron shared the benefits and drawbacks of the visibility that notability on campus brought:

> When someone knows of the organizations, at least especially in the Black community on campus, everybody knows who are. It's like being a celebrity without ever like doing anything. All you have to do is join, and then everybody will either know who you are and something about you. It's like all eyes on you. You know, which can go both ways, where you don't do anything then it looks bad for the organization, and it looks bad on you. When you do stuff, then it makes the organization look better, you look better, and it gives you a vantage point to do a lot of things that you would not have been able to do had you not been in the organization.

Joshua found that BGLO membership gave him notability with both administrators and fellow students:

> I know much more people, especially in terms of administrators—you really do need administrators in your life. Something will go wrong at some point and if you're just able to call them on a first-name basis, it will actually help you. The more students on campus I know—there are plenty of people who know my name; I don't know their name—and that's definitely helped at times. You just turn in class and say "Oh, can I get these notes?" and they reply, "Oh yeah, yeah, no problem" . . . so it's been good.

Warren also found an increase in attention from administrators, as well:

> I think I've definitely been acknowledged by a lot more administrators and Greeks, so that's how it's been augmented, just to have administrators acknowledging me—you know, through my fraternity. A lot of other organizations—NPHC [National Pan-Hellenic Council] organizations and even those that are like Asian or IND [Iota Nu Delta], for instance, they will invite you to their events or share an event with you. So I think that you meet a lot of people. I think that it's just the amount of people that you meet increases exponentially when you join any Black fraternity.

Not only did participants share positive influences related to fraternity membership, they also shared several disadvantages related to being a member in a BGLO. These disadvantages included stereotyping, marginalization, and competing priorities.

Disadvantage 1: Stereotyping

The research demonstrated that as with other forms of celebrity, the notability that BGLO members experienced came at a cost. The participants discussed dealing with inaccurate assumptions of who they were from members internal and external to the college community. Kenneth stated, "People start to think of you different in terms of being cocky or you've changed since you joined."

Phillip felt that his academic abilities were in question because of his membership in Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. He shared, "Kappas are sometimes seen as the pretty boys who just skate through college and probably don't graduate, and that's not true and it's [assumed] like everywhere I go."

Participants expressed frustration at being stereotyped simply because of Greek affiliation. The participants reported feeling like they were now seen as one monolithic group instead of being assumed to have individual traits and thinking abilities. Nate stated:

> People make a lot of assumptions of what you do, how you treat women, how you act in the community, what you're all about because people take a general idea and they just attach it to you. So people tend to just generalize us and they think, ok, because you have those letters on that means you are a certain thing or that you act a certain way. So we kind of just get stereotyped and put in a box a lot.

Warren concurred:

> I think that certain people might have a negative view of fraternities in general. So when they think about fraternities in general, they have a negative view about it—the amount of drinking or partying—and they definitely have a very superficial view of what the fraternity life is, what it means to be a part of it, how hard people work to be a part of a fraternity, and the history of the fraternity and what it brought to America.

Andrew talked of dealing with a lack of understanding that some have of the differences that exist within Greek life:

> [A challenge is] just trying to get people to understand the cultural differences and practices amongst NPHC [National Pan-Hellenic Council] organizations and mainstream IFC [Interfraternity Council] and PanHel [panhellenic] organizations. They are very, very different but a lot of things are similar as well. You have your philanthropy and your community service. You have your leadership aspect, but there are also things and intricacies that make our organizations very different. So just trying to explain that to them and dealing with their ignorance when it comes to that. We do get, "Those are Black Greeks. All they do is step and stroll and stuff," but you know we're just trying to educate them.

The data showed that participants had interactions that reflected a stereotypical understanding of African American men and Black Greek life. For example, Joseph felt that among traditional Greeks, Black fraternities were not held in high regard. He stated, "In the Greek world, we're just the Blacks. We're just there to them—'*Oh,* the minorities.'" Similarly, Phillip felt that TGLO members sought him out to fulfill organizational requirements or to participate in athletic activities but not for any meaningful interaction beyond that:

> I think the White sororities just use us as their Greek Excellence points. I'm not against that because I can send that into my nationals, but sometimes it's like, "Oh, [Phillip], we're having an event. Can you guys do it?" or "We're having a basketball tournament. You all wanna do it?" or "We're having a softball . . ."—it's always like some sport thing. Or you get, "Can you all just come and take a picture with us?"—you know, for Greek Excellence, and that's kind of annoying sometimes.

Richard explained that the stigma sometimes associated with membership not only created difficulties with individuals outside of Greek life but presented challenges across fraternity chapters as well:

> There are those negative stigmas attached to, and stereotypes attached to the idea of Greek life or the idea of fraternity. The idea of buying friends, and all of these

> other things that I have to deal with and the tensions of different fraternities not liking your fraternity or different chapter problems.

Kenneth encountered stereotyping while patronizing an off-campus establishment:

> I feel as though they view us as just the stereotype because I know recently there were movies like *Stomp the Yard* and I forgot the name of the other one. It depicted African American fraternities. I even know for a fact that we were stereotyped because this wasn't on campus, it was off campus and I had to get something made for some new initiates that were about to join my fraternity. They were like, "So what is this for?" and I said, "We're in a Black fraternity so we're just getting these things made," and they were like, "Oh, you guys do all the stepping and the stomping and the chanting, right?" And we kinda just had to go along with it. They didn't really want to get into a conversation about it.

Brian discussed how being stereotyped created a sense of invisibility for the fraternity members. He shared that in the minds of many, who you are as an individual was defined by the organization instead of the organization being defined by the individual:

> Sometimes joining fraternities comes with a stigma. People who don't necessarily understand or have negative impressions of fraternities will label you. Your reputation kind of shifts. It could shift in a negative light. I think the last part that people don't really pay as much attention to—you can lose your identity. So instead of being an individual, you're now a member of that fraternity. Before you're "Bob, Jane, Sue," you are "that Alpha," and then there's your name. So that can be perceived as a potential drawback.

Jordan agreed:

> It's worse when the first time they meet you is when you have on 'para[phernalia].' So those people are never going to know my name, they're just going to know that he's an Alpha. It's like, no, because I was actually a person; I was actually a person before I became an Alpha. And I was a cool person before that happened. So that's definitely—just seeing how that affects people, I guess, actually it affects people differently because there are some people who only want to be known as an Alpha now. This is me: that was my past, this is me now, this is how you know me. Some people are like, "I'm the Delta now," "I'm an AKA

> now," this is how I want you to know me. There are people who are like—I was a person before; I would like for you to still know me as a person.

Reginald shared a similar thought:

> Sometimes it's hard when you're Greek especially when you're wearing letters and people know you're Greek when you first meet them. They automatically have this image or idea of who they think you are. And so I guess trying to combat that image among students . . . not essentially a bad thing but just to say we're not all the same and we're not all trying to do the same things with the fraternity.

Participants not only dealt with being stereotyped by their college peers but felt that preconceived notions of who they were and what they represented posed challenges for them when working with administrators. Aaron discussed what he thought administrators believed about BGLO members on his campus:

> As far as the administration is concerned, they don't know about us until we have a party. Then they're all up in arms like, "What's going to happen? Is there going to be a fight? Is this going to blow up? Can we trust them? Are they, quote/ unquote, hoodlums? Are all of the hoodlums going to fight on the campus?" So until we do large-scale events, we pretty much don't exist as far as the administration goes; and unless we're stepping or performing in another aspect, we don't exist to the rest of the campus.

In all, the participants shared that being a BGLO member meant sometimes dealing with stereotypes associated with Black Greek membership. Participants discussed dealing with negative assumptions of their ability to be academically successful and having stereotypical group characteristics assigned to them as individuals. They reported not always feeling valued by members of TGLOs and felt they many of their interactions with TGLO members was to fulfill Greek organizational requirements. Also, participants felt like they were just seen as "the Blacks" by not only peers and administrators but also by individuals outside of the college community. The interview data revealed that the

intentional and unintentional stereotyping that the participants experienced often led to feelings of marginalization.

Disadvantage 2: Marginalization

Merriam-Webster defined *marginalize* as "to relegate to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group." The research participants expressed feeling unimportant to the larger college community. Participants encountered policies and practices that made them feel marginalized and served as barriers to their organizational success. Participants reported instances of marginalization with university administrators and university police.

When asked what he thought university administrators thought about Black Greek life, Joseph simply stated, "I think they don't care." In fact, Noah stated that he had a conversation with the director of Greek life who questioned the value Black Greeks brought to campus:

> Well, we're not the most accepted council on campus. They try to ban us from a lot of different things in their own ways. Honestly, coming from [the director of Greek life] himself, he really doesn't think we add much to the campus. When we have one or two bad issues or things that pop up, it gets blown up to a bigger extent and we're looked down upon. There were three fraternities suspended in the IFC [Interfraternity Council] this year alone, [but] we have our little troubles and ours is news. We have guys over there that are hazing people up [laughs sarcastically] and really, in essence, getting away with it to a certain extent. They don't really think we add anything to the campus, and I feel like that permeates down to the other Greeks.

Wade expressed the trepidation that he believed others felt when he and his fraternity brothers walked the halls of his campus:

> A group of us [might be] walking around [on campus], and especially if we have brothers visiting from another chapter, it's like, whoa, who are all of these Black people? I've never seen them before. What's about to happen? What's going on?

This sentiment was echoed by Noah, who also experienced this on a different campus:

> Overall, it's still like that "edge" walking around [my university]. There are still people that look at you like maybe you shouldn't really be here. "What is he really doing here?" -kind of thing.

Participants attributed this trepidation and fear to an overall lack of exposure to Black Greek life in general. Nate said:

> Campus admin is not really too fond of, especially, Black Greek life. I think because . . . here it's kind of foreign what we do—their only frame of reference is what they see in the media. So I feel like the administration is kind of . . . all they focus on is the negative because that's all they've heard and they're actually—a lot of it is just unaware.

Phillip expressed strong feelings regarding how he felt Black fraternities were viewed by administrators:

> I feel like administration just views us as menaces to society because they don't really see our community service because we do it off-campus, so all they see is [the main student center] parties and people getting into fights and things like that. What they don't realize is that to us it's like nothing serious from where we come from. A fight happens, you break it up, everyone goes home. To them it's like "Oh my God, someone's fighting." I'm like: Dude, where I'm from, this happens every day. I'm not really scared of a fight. So it's kind of like you always have to go against what they think.

In general, Warren believed that administrators tolerated the existence of BGLOs on campuses:

> Especially with administrators here at a predominantly White university, they definitely look at us in terms of a liability. It's not what we bring in terms of other people, support, events; they kind of look at us like a liability and kind of just accept our presence here while not really embracing us or supporting us to that extent.

Aaron shared a story of an interaction with university security officers. Although he was dressed well, he and his friends were still, in his perception, singled out. He

expressed frustration that although the university security force was overwhelmingly Black, he still felt targeted and marginalized:

> I know multiple times when Public Safety just wonders why there are Black people on the campus and have to stop you for stuff. I've been on campus multiple times at night and have to show them my ID because I fit the description of suspicious persons or loud persons or something on campus at random times; and I'm usually wearing—I intern at [a nationally recognized human services organization], and I'll be wearing like a button-up and dress slacks, and they're still trying to talk to me. I'm like, "Obviously, I'm not just some regular hoodlum going to school."
>
> One time, I sat on this floor doing homework with laptops out of the library, which you can't get without a [university ID], and they asked me and my friend to show them IDs and stuff. And I was just like, "What are you doing?" And it's sad, too, but Public Safety is mostly Black, but they be marginalizing minority students on campus, so it's really frustrating.

Whether it was by administrators or university police, participants felt that they were viewed as threats to the larger college community. Participants felt that administrators tolerated the existence of Black Greeks but held low personal regard for the organizations. Participants believed that administrators treated BGLOs more harshly than TGLOs, which resulted in restrictive university policies and affected how they were viewed by other Greek councils. Participants also shared instances of being viewed suspiciously by university police. In all, participants felt like, despite the community service and other positive things they were involved in as BGLO members, they still had to deal with being marginalized at the PWI they attended.

Disadvantage 3: Competing Priorities

The most notable challenge of BGLO membership was that of competing priorities. BGLO membership brought with it many opportunities for participants to be engaged. Participants were involved in service opportunities within the local community,

held programs on and off campus, and participated in local and national fraternity-sponsored conferences. This high level of engagement, however, put a demand on the participants' time and required a balance between social and academic responsibilities. Participants reported having to decide, at times, which priority to put first. As such, for purposes of organizational clarity, this section on competing priorities is broken down into three sections: (a) time demands—a reference to participants' incorporating fraternity commitments into life responsibilities, (b) involvement demands—a reference to participants' balancing fraternity involvement with involvement in other campus activities, and (c) academic demands—a reference to participants' maintaining academic success while being heavily engaged in fraternity-sponsored activities.

Time demands. All of the participants noted that BGLO membership brought new time demands that heavily influenced their college experience. Some participants noted the competing demands for time as something that forced them to hone their time management skills. Wade commented:

> Being a part of Sigma has more or less taught me more time management skills. Where if initially I thought, "Oh, I don't have time for this," now I know how to manage my time better, and find ways to be a part of things, if I really want to do it. I feel like college, the majority of it, is time management. I don't feel like a lot of the work that I get is necessarily too difficult for me to handle; it's just when I try to tackle it is where the stress and everything comes. But being a member of this fraternity, one, has taught me better time management skills.

Warren agreed:

> There's just less time to get everything accomplished; and I guess that could be an advantage, too, so that you learn how to use your time more effectively. You know where your time goes. You have to actually look through your schedule, look through your life, and say, "I need to move from this point to this point at a quicker interval if I'm going to get everything accomplished that I want."

Other participants expressed greater difficulty managing the new time demand. Jeff found the time commitment to be one of the challenges of membership. “It’s time consuming. That’s one of the things that I wish—that I could have more time for other things. Really, that’s the only true disadvantage [of membership].”

Managing time was also difficult for Casey. He said:

> It’s very time consuming—extremely. I mean, it’s just, pretty much it’s your life as an undergrad. Time management is one of the—I thought I was a good time manager, and it’s one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to adjust to—just having so much on your plate at once and finding ways to dissect it the right way.

Michael believed that BGLO membership could be experienced either positively or negatively depending on one’s time management ability:

> If you don’t really have good time management skills, you’re going to suffer. Again, we have this saying that “whatever Alpha will give you it will take away”— not to be sacrilegious or anything like that, but it’s definitely true. If you say it will give you, you know, girls or whatever, it will take it away just as easily just because of the time requirements that it takes up.

Reginald shared a similar perspective:

> If you’re the kind of person who doesn’t know how to manage your time well and don’t really plan ahead, you’ll end up losing a lot of sleep working on things. If you’re the type of person who just wants to go to class and just chill out and want to go to sleep at 10:00 at night—it’s not gonna happen. You’re gonna lose some sleep. My bros always say you use 25 hours of the day, so you will be busy.

Phillip likened the time commitment to that of being a student athlete:

> It’s kind of like, being a student Greek I would equate to being a student athlete—it’s so hard. Coming through as a freshman and [University C]’s Greek life is so intense. You have to turn things in and your email becomes a Greek email instead of like a regular student email. So the [University C] aspect is hard because it’s not too many of us on campus and there’s a lot asked of us.

Being a BGLO member required participants to make choices between participating in fraternity-related activities and maintaining their overall involvement in campus life.

Involvement demands. Participants expressed difficulty in being able to fully participate in a BLGO and maintain a high level of participation in other student organizations. Kenneth discussed how he handled the competing priorities of BGLO membership and membership in another minority student organization:

> It conflicts with a lot of other organizations. I'm a part of the BSU [Black Student Union]. Things go on a lot here at 7:00 p.m., so sometimes I have to choose. Sometimes my frat brothers get mad at me because I'm choosing BSU over the frat, but they know that I sit on the exec board so I sometimes have to attend to that.

Other participants, however, felt it extremely challenging to fulfill the demands of the fraternity and be involved in other campus activities. Jeff commented:

> I have two jobs already and classes and then this, so it's hard to do this and have time for other organizations. That's just me. A lot of other people can balance it, but for me it makes it a little difficult to really be involved and get hands on and truly active in other organizations when you have this.

Similarly, Noah shared:

> [Being in a fraternity] is time consuming, so I don't really have enough time to branch myself out the way I would like to in other things. I still have school and Kappa and BSU [Black Student Union] and things like that, so I don't really have a whole lot of flex time. It's time consuming.

Additionally, Warren stated:

> It's such a large time commitment that you have less time to be involved with other organizations, so you have to learn to use your time more effectively. So you have to think about what organizations you can really give a lot to and just make sure that you are giving your all to those organizations.

Andrew prioritized involvement in other activities because he wanted to ensure a balance in his campus activities. He did so, however, at a cost:

> You want to have a well-rounded resume. You don't want to just have Alpha on your resume. So trying to balance everything that you do, especially because you are an active chapter—you get tired so you sacrifice sleep a lot. You may not have much time to do a lot of fun things a normal college student would in terms of hanging out and partying.

Participants had to balance not only on-campus involvement but off-campus involvement as well. Michael shared, "Being able to represent yourself on a national level during the conferences—district conference, national conference—it's a lot that goes into it. So balancing that and school work as well is definitely a huge challenge."

Samuel discussed the process of traveling off-campus to represent his fraternity:

> I spend a lot of time traveling to and from [University A and C]. It's very time-consuming, so the only trade-off for me was that I would lose a lot of time on this campus, because I'm traveling there, preparing to travel there, or doing something so that I can prepare to travel and then travel.

Reginald's commitment to his fraternity made it easier for him to find the balance for its responsibilities and the other responsibilities:

> I really invest myself into fraternity life because it was something I really wanted to do. It really became my first priority, but there are definitely people I know in the chapter who have still pursued other things. One of my brothers was the president of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] chapter here at [University D] a year ago. So you definitely have the opportunity to still be involved in other things. It's kind of how you're going to have that balance.

Although it required a lot of work, fraternity life itself was rarely seen as a disadvantage.

Academic demands. Participants reported being involved in service activities and other beneficial fraternity-sponsored activities. These responsibilities often conflicted

with the BGLO members' academic demands. For example, Kenneth shared, "I remember last Thursday, one of our older brothers—alumni—asked us to go to this high school, but [it was] during school hours so people had to miss class to go talk to some kids at school."

Warren discussed the competing priorities of being a BGLO member and attending an academically rigorous university:

> As a [University C] student, I'm already consumed by my academic life as well as my extracurricular activities, so taking on joining this fraternity, initially, was a drawback because you have to refocus and redevelop yourself and prioritize. Those aren't negative things to do, but the initial impact of moving from one semester to the next with an increased responsibility can be seen as a drawback.

Although BGLOs promote academic success through national programs geared toward promoting college attendance, the findings showed that there were no national incentives to help maintain academic excellence once enrolled. The findings showed that attention to one's dress, ability to step, and social commitments, among other things, were at times in conflict with participants' academic responsibilities, particularly for members of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. On academic success and being a Kappa, Richard shared:

> Being a Kappa, it's yes, you do business, yes, you're intelligent; however, you care more about your looks than you care about school. So that was another thing. I had to combat that to make sure my academics were reflective and that when people saw me [they'd think] . . . "Oh, maybe not all Kappas are the same."

When asked how being a member of a BGLO influenced his academic progress, Phillip said:

> I wouldn't say Kappa has boosted my GPA, to be honest. It's definitely held me more accountable about my GPA, but it definitely doesn't have some type of national initiative like—oh, your GPA's so high, your chapter wins an award. There is a chapter year award for GPA but what's more looked upon, I think, with

> Black Greeks that need to change is who won the [national] Step-off or who hosted the most bomb program or who had the most girls at their party instead of, like, who had the highest GPA, who got the most A's in MGC [Multicultural Greek Council] or something like that. Even MGC here doesn't do something about GPAs. We get a report but we don't get like any incentive for getting good grades, but we definitely get incentives for having cool programs. Like "Oh, you hosted the date auction the other day? Great girls." But what's your GPAs looking like? Although [Black sorority] GPAs are the bomb [laughs], you need to look at the Black frats—we suck [laughs]. There's no incentive like on a school-wide thing . . . even up to nationals, there is no incentive about that.

Michael, a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., explained that he was more socially engaged as a result of his BGLO membership. He felt that his increased engagement impacted him academically:

> I'm way more social now because I have more outlets than when I was in high school and I think my academics suffers because of it. I think it goes back to that idea where I say Greek life does not push academics.

Kenneth expressed a similar conflict between social and academic responsibilities:

> Sometimes you have to put grades on the back burner; you have to put the frat before your grades sometimes. For the most part, when there's stuff like a probate or a step show coming up, it could be hours upon hours that you have to devote towards Kappa. In terms of academically, it can hinder your success sometimes, but you just gotta make sure that if there's a party the next day, you may just have to sacrifice that since you spent so many hours step practicing or probate practicing that you need to sit down and study for a little bit.

Joseph described what it meant to be "a great Kappa." He talked of the responsibilities of membership and how it required continual reassessment of social and academic priorities:

> I think it's like a balance if you want to be a great Kappa. It's hard to be a great Kappa and also be very astute academically and do other things as well. You could do that both. For example, I could go to this party and tell myself I won't go to any other party unless it's a Kappa party. Then I won't go to any other parties; I'd just do my homework. But then for you to say that, then you're not really a

> great Kappa. Or if you're gonna do your homework all the time, and there are Kappas like that, then you're not going to the parties. You're not visible. You're not making. You're not on Facebook talking about the party so it's like a balance that's very hard, to be honest.

Phillip shared a similar account of feeling the pull between his fraternity and his academic responsibilities:

> On my prophyte side it's hard, because these are guys who act like I'm not in school. "Why isn't the chapter doing this?" and I'm like, I'm in school. "Why did you miss this conference?" I don't have a car. I'm not gonna drive 2 hours away and rent a zipcar and cost the chapter $200. I'd rather miss that and explain to you that we have school. So it's kind of really, really hard and sometimes I wonder how would my life be if I wasn't a Kappa? Last night I just went to sleep but we have a party tonight so we had to have stroll practice. Then Saturday I want to sleep but we have [University A]'s community service so it's like, whew. . . .

Phillip, due to the competing priorities that existed, indicated that maintaining social standing and the integrity of the pledge process were sometimes elevated beyond the need to make satisfactory academic progress:

> These guys are fifth-year seniors, and they are congratulated by organizations, and I know it's not only us. In the South it's even worse where it's the norm. "Oh, he pledged as a sophomore, man. He's doing a fifth year trying to get that GPA up." But it shouldn't be like that. It should be like he pledged as a sophomore—he busted out a 3.2. Cause when he wasn't pledging there was a dean of education with them during the day making sure they did all their school work—you're gonna get up for class. You're not gonna go till 5 in the morning; that doesn't make sense. You're gonna go till 2 in the morning, let them get back at 3. But pledging has taken the place of education with Black Greeks where you're cooler if you pledged hard. If you have a cool little brand or tat instead of "Yo my chapter just got best GPA in chapter." Underground no one cares; above ground they'll clap in your face. So let's say [at a local university] . . . they have suss lines and lines that were made. Just because they're single letter they get a lot more investigated than my chapter. So they have the best GPAs sometimes because since they're under investigation, basically nationals pick whoever is gonna be in that chapter. They busted out a 3.3 chapter GPA last year. But when we went to conclave they were getting into fights with brothers because they didn't pledge, which makes no sense. They're bringing national news to the chapter. They're in the [national] Step-off. Their GPA is bomb. They're always doing videos for the chapter, but they always have to fend off the rogue brothers who are like, "Man, you never did this; you never did that. You don't know the

> grip" but it's like, Black fraternities especially, just lose sight of educational focus more than pledging.

Despite the espoused values of academic excellence, participants found that the realities of the commitments related to BGLO membership posed a constant challenge to ensuring academic success. The interview data demonstrated, however, that the passion participants held for their BGLO made the competing priorities worth it. Brian shared:

> Not a day goes by that I don't have to respond to an email or plan for an event. So I think on top of my academic and social lives, it's the lifelong commitment that I've made to my fraternity to serve makes it all worthwhile. I won't necessarily call it a difficulty. It's just an added responsibility.

Summary

Conducting one-on-one interviews was the most appropriate methodology to explore why African American male students joined BGLOs at PWIs. The researcher discovered during the investigation that the decision-making process for joining these organizations was formulated mostly during the college years, as most of the participants entered college with little to no previous knowledge of Greek life. In sum, the participants in this study decided to join BGLOs because of the (a) support system gained through brotherhood, (b) fraternal identity and legacy of the organizations, and (c) personal connections with older BGLO members. Study participants discussed eight influences BGLO membership had on their college experiences. Participants were held accountable by their peers, were involved in service activities, and developed leadership skills. In addition, participants benefited from networking opportunities and reported heightened notability on campus as a result of membership. There were disadvantages to membership as well. Participants expressed having to deal with BGLO stereotypes and

marginalization from university administrators and university police. Participants also dealt with the competing priorities that resulted from the heightened engagement that BGLO membership required. Despite the challenges, participants felt that their collegiate experience had been enhanced as a direct result of their fraternity membership. These findings provide important implications for policy and practice, as well as future research, which is discussed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe why African American men join Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) as well as the role that BGLO membership plays in the college experience of African American male students at four predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in a metropolitan region. The problem of practice explored by this study was that research on African American student success in college reveals that African American students who do not establish supportive communities at PWIs often experience feelings of discomfort, social isolation, and stress, which contribute to student attrition (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990; Feagin et al., 1996; Gossett et al., 1998; Daugherty & Lane, 1999; Lang & Ford, 1992; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Love, 1993; Smedley et al., 1993; Suen, 1983). The problem of research addressed in this study is that despite the inception of BGLOs in 1906 and a membership of over 1.5 million, existing research on the Greek organizational membership experience fails to adequately capture the BGLO experience (Kimbrough, 1995); accordingly, the influence of BGLO membership on the college experiences of its members is unknown.

Summary of the Study

This qualitative study was conducted at four selected PWIs located in a metropolitan region. Interviews were conducted with 20 African American male undergraduate members of BGLOs who had been a member of their fraternity for at least 1 year. One-hour in-depth semistructured interviews were conducted throughout the spring semester of 2011. All five national Black fraternities (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.) were represented in the study. The interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed by the researcher.

This chapter (a) discusses the emergent themes for each research question, (b) compares themes to existing literature findings and discusses the applicability of the theoretical framework to the study results, (c) discusses the implications of findings for practitioners, (d) provides suggestions for future research, and (e) discusses the limitations of the study, followed by conclusions.

Research Question 1: Reasons for Joining

Why do African American male students join BGLOs at selected PWIs in a metropolitan region?

Three main themes emerged as reasons these African American men chose to seek membership in a BGLO: (a) brotherhood, (b) fraternal identity and legacy, and (c) personal connections.

En route to these themes, participants discussed their perceptions of Greek life prior to joining a BGLO. They were generally uninformed of the benefits of Greek life prior to seeking membership and thought that Greek life solely consisted of partying, drinking, and socializing with girls. Many found little value in such activities. Some were unaware that there were different councils within Greek life. For many of the participants, Greek life was what they saw on television or in the movies. Participants who had foreknowledge of traditional fraternities thought that the espoused values of those organizations were incongruent with their personal values. Whether it was the

socializing aspect or the historical legacy of exclusion of African Americans, for many, membership in traditional Greek life organizations was not even considered.

Most of the participants were first-generation Greek, in that no one else in their immediate family had previously joined a Greek-letter organization. As a result, participants were generally as uninformed about BGLOs as they were about TGLOs. A few participants who had foreknowledge of BGLOs evoked stepping and chanting images from the 2007 movie *Stomp the Yard* and knew little else. Participants reported gaining an interest in BLGO membership once they had more substantive interactions with and observations of existing members of BGLOs. Participants also attended fraternity-sponsored activities to learn more about the organizations. Through these interactions, the participants gained a greater appreciation of BGLOs and desired membership. The subsections below discuss the themes that emerged from the study regarding why participants sought membership in a BGLO.

Brotherhood. The most discussed reason for membership in a BGLO was the desire for the bond of brotherhood. Although they had entered college with limited knowledge of BGLOs, participants were exposed to several instances that highlighted the brotherhood aspect of fraternal membership, and this attracted them to seek membership. Participants felt that the relationships forged in their fraternity were stronger than that of relationships developed in other peer groups because fraternity members are bound together by a common creed. This finding is consistent with the literature that provides that BGLO membership positively influences a sense of common purpose (Dugan, 2006) and an avenue for social integration (McClure, 2006). The National Pan-Hellenic Council, the coordinating body for the nine international BGLOs, stated that BGLOs

serve as “a haven and outlet, which could foster brotherhood and sisterhood in the pursuit to bring about social change through the development of social programs that would create positive change for Blacks and the country” (NPHC, 2007). Participants reported feeling a great sense of family within the fraternity with men they would consider their “brother” for life.

Brotherhood provided opportunities for participants to learn from a group of peers who served as role models in things from how to communicate and dress professionally, to the honing of leadership skills, to academic accountability. Participants were attracted to being a part of a larger group of African American men on campus joined together by a common purpose. One participant likened his decision to join a BGLO to a spiritual connection where things just felt right. The bond of brotherhood transcended age, location, and fraternity chapter affiliation. Participants discussed both domestic and international travel experiences where instant connections with fraternity members were made and enhanced their overall college experience. In addition, many participants indicated that they believed that they were still enrolled at their colleges because of their membership in their fraternity.

Knowing that they were connected to a group of individuals who understood them and genuinely cared about their academic progress motivated the participants to continue to persist at their institutions despite any barriers they faced. This finding is consistent with literature that states that African American student organizations, such as BGLOs, provide students a safe space on campus and allows them to be around others perceived to be like them (Guiffrida, 2003). This finding suggests that BGLOs continue to serve an integral role in the college experience of its members. Campuses that learn how to

leverage the social network inherent in BGLO membership may help to engage African American men at higher levels at PWIs.

Fraternal identity and legacy. Participants also noted fraternal identity and legacy as a reason for membership in a BGLO. Once participants learned about BGLOs, they were quickly introduced to the widely known "stereotypes" for each of the five national African American fraternities. In addition to the fraternal identity, many participants were attracted to membership because of the legacy of alumni members of the respective BGLOs. For some participants, the opportunity to become a member of the same organization as one of their lifetime heroes became the selling point for BGLO membership. Participants identified legacy members such as civil rights legend, Martin Luther King, Jr.; actor, athlete, musician, and social activist Paul Robeson; and first president and first prime minister of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah as specific influences on their selection of their respective fraternity. This mirrors McClure's (2006) findings that BGLO membership connects students "to African American history and to society in general" (p. 1042). This finding indicates that continuing the legacy of accomplishments by African Americans is still relevant to African American students. Further investigating the role that this motivation plays in the lives of African American men at PWIs may provide higher education administrators insight into ways to build stronger cultural communities on campus.

Personal connection. Participants also indicated that they joined a BGLO because of personal connections with fraternity members while attending the PWIs. Interactions with members created an awareness of, and interest in, BGLOs for several of the participants. Participant relationships with more senior African American male

student BGLO members positively shaped their perceptions of BGLOs. Participants discussed the support mechanism gained through developing relationships with BGLO members. A few participants desired membership in order to emulate the choices made by brothers, father figures, and other role models within the organizations. These relationships resulted in personal invitations to BGLO events as well as invitations for membership. Much of the scholarly literature is focused on the benefits of BGLO membership once individuals join. This finding suggests that the antecedents to such membership also warrant investigation. It would be interesting to study whether the reasons for BGLO membership at PWIs differ from those at historically Black colleges and universities, and how these differing reasons may shape students' experiences and influences.

Theoretical connection. Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure and Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival were used to frame this study. The construct of brotherhood—strong relationships formed through shared experiences—was linked to Tinto's (1993) construct of congruence. The theory of student departure indicates that congruence with one's peers is fundamental to social integration. Furthermore, according to the theory, as long as a student connects to a subculture of the institution, the need for congruence is met (Tinto, 1993). The findings of the study indicated that participants joined BGLOs in search of strong ties with other African American men on campus. Participants reported developing a sense of connectedness from BGLO membership. For the participants, the construct of brotherhood provided a much needed support system on campuses where they at times felt stereotyped and marginalized (themes addressed in the findings for Research

Question 2). The desire for brotherhood led participants to join a social network that helped them to establish the bonds necessary to develop a sense of belonging at their PWI (Tinto, 1993).

Axiom 1 of Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival also links with the construct of brotherhood. Axiom 1 states that students seek to solve the "problem" of hostile environments and social isolation at PWIs. The theory provides that minority student organization membership solves this problem by creating a support network that "creates a smaller terrain through which students navigate" (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999, p. 82). When minority student organizations provide a niche or enclave that helps members meet the social and academic demands of college, the survival of their members is enhanced (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). Some participants credited the construct of brotherhood found within BGLO membership with motivating them to stay in school. Accordingly, the findings indicate that the core fabric of a "niche or enclave"—the shared experiences of members—is found within the "brotherhood" experienced through BGLO membership.

A notable observation is that, beyond the construct of brotherhood, there was limited theoretical applicability to the results of the study for Research Question 1. Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure does not reference the antecedents of student membership in organizations. Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival only addressed reasons for minority student organization membership as a problem-solving effort (as found in Axiom 1). As such, the remaining constructs of fraternal identity and legacy and personal connection were not directly supported as reasons for membership by either of the theories that framed this study.

Although African American students may still perceive PWIs as hostile campus environments, the data show that students may join BGLOs for other reasons. The findings showed that participants desired the benefits of the brotherhood, sought to align themselves to the fraternal identities and legacies of the respective BGLOs, and wished to emulate the decisions of African American men with whom they had close relationships. The theories of student departure and minority student survival were developed during a time when PWIs were not as diverse or welcoming and accordingly may too narrowly focus on the barriers in the college environment of PWIs as the main reason for minority student organization membership. The findings suggest that an updated theory that takes into account the multitude of other reasons students seek membership in BGLOs, in addition to combating hostile environments, is needed.

Research Question 2: Influence of Greek Membership

What perceived influence does membership in BGLOs have on the college experiences of African American male students enrolled at these selected PWIs?

Eight main themes emerged as influences of membership: (a) peer accountability, (b) leadership development, (c) networking, (d) service opportunities, (e) notability, (f) stereotyping, (g) marginalization, and (h) competing priorities.

Peer accountability. BGLO membership provided participants a group to which to be held accountable. The participants felt they were a part of a network of men who cared about their individual successes. Because of the small fraternity chapter sizes, not doing well academically affected the overall GPA of the BGLO. As such, participants were motivated to do well academically, not only for the effect it had individually but also for its effect collectively. This is consistent with Harper's (2007) research that found

that BGLO members were cognizant of the impact of individual GPA on chapter GPA and were accordingly motivated to succeed academically. This finding suggests that the sense of communal responsibility remains an important factor in the decision-making process of BGLO members. By understanding the importance of communalism, higher education administrators may be well positioned to leverage communal bonds to create initiatives and support mechanisms that impact the larger African American experience at PWIs.

Leadership development. As a direct result of BGLO membership, participants were taught technical skills of leadership and held executive board positions. Participants reported learning parliamentary procedures and how to dress for professional situations. In addition, participants were provided opportunities to attend local and national leadership conferences. This finding mirrors existing research, which affirms that BGLO membership provides opportunities for members to develop and apply leadership skills (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). Particularly since students may join BGLOs as early as their sophomore year, BGLO membership provides students earlier opportunities in their college careers to develop and hone leadership skills.

Networking. Participants reported networking as an important aspect of BGLO membership. Participants were able to connect with peers on campus and at local universities, as well as with nationally and internationally located BGLO members. Networking provided personal benefits resulting most notably in opportunities for internships, fellowships, and other career development opportunities. Research indicates that BGLO membership provides a great social network for members not only during

their college careers but also beyond graduation (McClure, 2006). As such, higher education administrators could utilize these findings to connect alumni male BGLO members with currently enrolled African American male students to serve as academic and career mentors.

Service opportunities. Participants discussed the commitment to service found in BGLO membership. Research states that minority student organizations provide members the opportunity to give back to their communities (Guiffrida, 2003). Participants were engaged in local service projects, such as mentoring and tutoring. In addition, participants were involved in national initiatives that encouraged young men to attend college and raised research dollars for worthy causes. The findings of this study indicated that community uplift was particularly important for the participants. Participants voiced wanting to do more than just give money to causes. They wanted to leave an indelible impact specifically on local African American communities. Participants utilized service initiatives such as Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.'s "Go-To-High-School, Go-To-College" to encourage college attendance among young men. In light of the strong affinity to service that BGLOs foster among their members, higher education administration may consider looking into opportunities to utilize service-learning classes to academically augment the service work already being done by BGLO members.

Notability. BGLO membership gave participants instant credibility and an influential voice on campus. Participants were raised from relative obscurity to celebrity-like status among their peers. Participants were also identified as leaders in the community simply because of their Greek affiliation. Despite being minorities at a PWI, notability brought a heightened visibility on campus among students and administrators.

Participants felt that they were held in high esteem among peers and had a level of influence they may not have had were they not BGLO members. As a group of student leaders, BGLO members were able to establish their presence on campus, and for many, their fraternity experience defined their overall collegiate experience. The findings of this study indicate that BGLOs serve as a venue for social connectivity among African American men at PWIs. Higher education administrators should work collaboratively with BGLO members to utilize these positive peer relations to enhance the African American male student experience at PWIs.

Stereotyping. BGLO membership was not without its disadvantages. The high visibility on campus came at a cost to the participants. BGLO members were not always viewed positively by members of the campus community. In fact, participants reported dealing with stereotyping from both peers and administrators. Cuyjet (2006) affirmed that African American men at PWIs deal with stereotypes of being underachievers in society. This was confirmed in the study, as some participants reported dealing with negative stigmas associated with BGLOs. BGLO membership was not always viewed as conducive to academic excellence. In addition, participants felt that they were no longer seen as individuals, but as members of one large group. Accordingly, anything that happened to one BGLO member reflected back on the larger organization. Joshua explained that "even if I'm not wearing letters, I am wearing letters at all times." These findings indicate that despite newfound celebrity, BGLO members were still subject to negative stereotypes related to organizational membership. Research states that BGLO membership is beneficial to its members in that it provides a space that is safe from stereotypes (Guiffrida, 2003).

Marginalization. Another negative influence on the college experience of BGLO members was that of marginalization. Participants felt that the values of their organizations were always being questioned. One participant had a conversation with a campus administrator who questioned whether having BGLOs on campus was beneficial. Some participants felt that BGLOs were considered a "liability" or a "menace" to the university community. Others stated that they felt that the BGLO presence was "tolerated" but not appreciated by university administrators. As such, participants felt that they dealt with stricter scrutiny and unfair policies by university administrators. The role of BGLO membership in the college experiences of these participants mirrored research that found that minority students at PWIs join peer groups to buffer themselves from marginalization and perceived antagonism (Guiffrida, 2003; Brown, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007). The findings suggest that university officials should be aware of how existing policies may contribute to further marginalization of BGLOs at PWIs.

Competing priorities. Research suggests that for students of color, minority student organizations are the primary vehicles for collegiate involvement (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Guiffrida, 2003; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). Participants reported high levels of engagement both on and off campus. Participants were involved in leadership development activities, service opportunities, and social activities. The findings of the study, however, demonstrated that BGLO membership was not only the *primary* vehicle for involvement but, for many of the participants, was the *only* vehicle for collegiate involvement. Participants reported a decrease in engagement in other campus activities once they became BGLO members. These results diverge from findings that involvement in BGLOs positively contributes to increasing overall involvement in campus activities

(Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Patton et al., 2011; Pike, 2000). Many stated that the time commitment to their BGLO was at times overwhelming and required preplanning in order to accomplish everything that was needed. As well, participants expressed difficulty in balancing participation in their fraternities and being active in other student organizations. The demands of BGLO membership not only affected participants' involvement in other campus activities, but at times competed with their academic demands as well. Participants felt that although academic achievement was an espoused goal of the fraternity, the social demands of BGLO membership were sometimes in direct competition with the academic demands. These findings suggest that Greek life administrators should investigate ways to provide more support to BGLOs that will enhance members' experiences in these organizations and promote academic success. In addition, these findings challenge BGLOs themselves to prioritize their members' academic progress by promoting practices that foster and realize the organizations' commitment to academic excellence. The researcher must note that the academic challenge was reported almost exclusively by members of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. The implications of this finding warrant further investigation.

Participating in BGLOs is important to overall social adjustment for students of color at PWIs (Guiffrida, 2003). The findings of this study demonstrated that BGLO membership influenced all aspects of the participants' college life. Participants' college experiences were influenced positively in the areas of peer accountability, leadership development, networking, service opportunities, and notability among peers. Participants also reported negative college experiences of stereotyping, marginalization, and competing priorities. The results of this study confirmed existing studies, which insist

that BGLOs play "a positive role in improving the quality of campus life for African American students, as they provide much-needed outlets for cross-cultural engagement, community service, civic participation, campus politics, and social support" (Harper & Harris, 2006, p. 149).

Theoretical connection. Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure defines isolation as "the absence of sufficient interactions whereby integration may be achieved" (Tinto, 1993, p. 56). The theory suggests that social and academic integration are critical for students' persistence and that membership in organizations is key to their social integration. The findings of this study echo Tinto's assertion. The participants consistently stated that their collegiate social experience was directly influenced by their BGLO membership. Participants reported an overall heightened level of engagement both on and off campus. Participants were involved in leadership development and networking activities and service opportunities. Participants also traveled both locally and internationally as BGLO representatives. In addition, participants reported increased notability among peers as a result of BGLO membership.

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure states that students who connect with a subculture on campus can lessen their feelings of isolation and increase the likelihood to persist. While the findings of this study affirm this assertion, Tinto's theory appears to overly focus on the positive aspects of student membership in organizations. In fact, the participants of this study communicated an almost equal number of positive and negative aspects of their college experience due to their BGLO membership. For example, participants discussed dealing with stereotypes attributed to BGLO members by peers, administrators, and members of the off-campus community. Despite the increased

notability among their peers, participants were not exempt from being viewed negatively by members of the college community. Participants also discussed being marginalized by university administrators and police. This marginalization resulted in restrictive policies by administrators and profiling practices by university police. Lastly, the heightened level of engagement in on- and off-campus activities brought about by BGLO membership created competing priorities for participants. Participants reported having to learn how to balance their time more effectively in order to continue to be successful. The competing priorities of time, involvement, and academic demands required that participants had to choose, at times, between fulfilling academic or social responsibilities. The findings of this study demonstrate that although the theory of student departure attempts to represent the influences of social and academic integration on the college experiences of students, it does not completely capture the complexity of the phenomenon as described by the participants in this study.

Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) theory of minority student survival allowed for greater description of the influence of BGLO membership on the college experiences of the students who participated in this study. Postulate 1 regarding the BGLO as a "niche or enclave" was previously discussed as a reflection on students' decisions to join BGLOs. The remaining postulates—(2) ethnic student networks serve to "help its members meet the social and academic demands of college" and (3) ethnic student networks serve to "facilitate integration into the social and academic systems on campus for survival"—are well aligned with this study's positive perceptions regarding peer accountability, leadership development, networking, service opportunities, and notability among peers (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999, p. 83).

Axiom 1 (the problem-solving effort) of the theory of minority student survival was also previously mentioned in the reasons African American men seek BGLO membership. Axiom 2 states that through the group membership experience, students learn how to adapt to, and interact with, the dominant culture of the institution. This means that students connect and participate with social networks on campus to help navigate the larger collegiate culture. The constructs of networking and notability provided support for Axiom 2.

Axiom 3 asserts that social networks lead to successful social and academic integration into the larger collegiate institution. This means, in the context of this study, that BGLO membership facilitates engagement with the social and academic systems of the collegiate environment (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). Accordingly, the constructs of peer accountability, leadership development, and service opportunities provided support for Axiom 3.

Axiom 4 highlights the result of the problem-solving effort—as evidenced through minority student organization membership. This axiom provides that once students identify and create buffers against environmental barriers, social and academic integration as well as persistence are more likely (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). This axiom was only marginally supported through the construct of competing priorities, in that if participants were able to successfully manage all of their time demands, they were able to engage in various aspects of the student experience. For students who were less successful in finding a balance, social and academic integration, as well as persistence, came less easily.

However, the same drawback to Tinto's (1993) theory is found in Nagasawa and Wong's theory (1999). The negative aspects of BGLO membership—stereotyping, marginalization, and competing priorities—are not reflected in Nagasawa and Wong's theory of minority student survival. The theories are focused on student success or retention and assume that membership in student organizations will have positive results in that regard. However, neither theory leaves room for negative experiences associated with such membership. This is an area that deserves further exploration.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study provide strong implications for higher education policy and practice. The conversations with male African American undergraduate members of BGLOs revealed several reasons why membership in these organizations was desired. The researcher began this study with cursory understanding of the inner workings of BGLOs. Listening to the stories of these students revealed a depth to organizational membership that transcended the flash of the colors, calls, step shows, and Greek letters. The researcher initially assumed that she would encounter resistance from the participants in sharing their stories. The participants, however, seemed excited to discover that someone wanted to know more about who they are and what they do. Given the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to higher education administrators seeking to enrich the college experience of underrepresented students on college campuses.

The findings of the study indicated that membership in a BGLO 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 BGLO membership creates an environment that makes the experience at PWIs 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 and/or multicultural affairs 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 BGLOs. Non-Greek African American men can benefit from the peer accountability inherent in BGLO membership. The social network found in BGLOs also presents an opportunity for Greek life offices to partner with alumni development and admissions offices to develop programs with BGLOs 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 give back to PWIs.

Participants noted peer accountability as a notable influence of membership. Although participants shared that the heightened level of engagement that came with BGLO membership often produced competing priorities between social and academic responsibilities overall, these BGLO 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. Despite a lack of national academic mandates, several of the organizations instituted chapter-specific incentives and sanctions for academic progress. These findings suggest that Greek life offices should

reward chapters not only for their social contributions but also for their academic contributions to the larger community. Greek Excellence programs should reconsider point systems to give greater value to academic programs and initiatives. In addition, awards that recognize improvement in overall GPA in addition to highest GPA will recognize more organizations and may provide the academic incentive needed to bolster the academic performance of fraternity members in BGLOs. Considering the role that alumni members play in these lifelong fraternities, Greek life administrators may also consider creating intentional opportunities for university faculty and staff who are also members of BGLOs to become involved with the BGLO chapters at the university.

Finally, participants mentioned dealing with negative or limited perceptions of what BGLOs represent from not only fellow students but also university administrators and university security. Participants shared barriers in policies and practices on their campuses. One participant stated that the director of Greek life on his campus questioned the value that BGLOs bring. However, research indicates that "African Americans who are members of Greek letter organizations benefit from this membership significantly more than their European counterparts" (Severtis & Mizell, 2007, p. 109). There was also a general lack of knowledge on the part of university officials of the nuances that differentiate BGLOs from other Greek letter organizations. These findings indicate that BGLOs need a more representative image on campus. Typically, these organizations can be seen stepping or strolling, or heard making "calls" or "throwing up signs." To relegate BGLOs to this limited definition, however, does these organizations an injustice. Greek life offices should work to ensure that BGLOs are just as prominently integrated into semester-based Greek Weeks as the traditional Greek letter organizations. Multicultural

affairs offices should be sure to provide a balanced image of BGLOs. Many of these offices request BGLO attendance at block parties, step shows, and the like. However, opportunities to showcase these organizations' mentorship and service commitments are needed to provide a wider perspective of the BGLO experience. In addition, university security should be trained on cultural competencies related to BGLOs. Sometimes "calls" and "signs" could be interpreted as hostile behaviors by individuals who have little to no exposure to Black Greek life. In addition, BGLOs should take responsibility for ensuring that they provide programming that is open and available to the university community so that all students have the opportunity to learn about the history, legacy, and relevance of their organizations. Lastly, higher education administrators are encouraged to eradicate the deficit view through which African American male students are seen. Administrators are encouraged to focus on the factors that caused African American men to enroll in college and that are making them successful in college.

Findings of this study highlighted the role of BGLO membership on the college experience of African American men at PWIs. Higher education administrators should investigate ways to utilize the influences of membership in these organizations to enhance the services provided to BGLO members and to inform the policies and practices that affect these organizations directly. Finally, the findings of this study challenge university administrators to provide adequate financial support and other resources to strengthen the efficacy of BGLOs at PWIs.

Implications for Future Research

This study was designed to better understand the role that BGLOs play in the college experience of African American men at PWIs. Students enrolled in today's

colleges and universities are unlike any other generation before. They are exposed to a level of technological advancement that gives them access to the world and each other at unprecedented levels. What students need to be successful on college campuses remains a persistent focus of university administrators.

Research on BGLOs has not kept pace with the change in student type on our campuses. The literature on BGLOs is dated, with most occurring in the late 1990s or early 2000s, and most research on Greek life was conducted almost exclusively on traditional Greek letter organizations (Kimbrough, 1995). BGLOs continue to be an understudied population, and future research will help to elucidate more information that will enhance the African American college student experience at PWIs. In order to better support this segment of the collegiate population, research on BLGOs and their impact on student engagement is crucial. Research has shown that there is a positive relationship between Greek affiliation and the probability of graduation (Severtis & Mizell, 2007). In their study on Greek affiliation and student engagement, Patton et al. (2011) stated that "campuses that incorporate Black Greek culture into the larger campus culture may promote higher levels of student engagement" (p. 119). The recommendations in this section are based on the findings of this study derived from the interviews of 20 African American men attending four PWIs in a metropolitan region.

One recommendation for future research is to conduct a similar study with undergraduate Latino American males who attend PWIs. With a rate of 44.1%, Latino men are second to last in completing a bachelor's degree within 6 years (as compared to African American men at 34%). According to the American Council on Education (2010), only 10% of Latino men in the United States have earned a bachelor's degree.

Culturally based Latino fraternities promote unity, culture, and academic excellence. Although birthed out of the traditional and Black Greek letter organization traditions, Latino fraternities have identities, missions, and purposes of their own. Understanding the role of membership in the college experience of Latino men may assist administrators with constructing appropriate interventions to improve their persistence and graduation rates as well.

Another recommendation for future research is on the role BGLO membership plays in African American men pursuing education beyond the bachelor's degree. We live in a competitive economic environment where many executive-level jobs require advanced educational attainment. To be able to compete globally, African American men must be encouraged to not only complete a 4-year degree but also consider pursuing a graduate degree. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), African American men represent 3.5% of total postbaccalaureate enrollment. Of all African Americans enrolled in postbaccalaureate programs, only 29% of them were male. Research that includes graduating seniors and currently enrolled master's students is needed to examine whether the supportive nature of BGLO membership affects academic success beyond the undergraduate years.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that must be mentioned. First, the data collected for this study were based on participants' personal experiences and opinions. Participants recounted their experience of Black fraternity membership which may not, necessarily, be applicable to other individual experiences. Therefore, the generalizability of the interview data must be viewed with caution.

Second, two of the fraternity chapters included in this study were city-wide, including members from different universities in the same chapter. They were a part of the same intake process, held leadership positions on the same executive board, and participated in the same on- and off-campus activities. The experiences of participants in city-wide chapters, though enrolled in different institutions, are more alike than different. Being a part of a city-wide chapter may dilute institution-specific experiences that participants may have had.

Third, although all five African American fraternities were included in this study, only one member of Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. was included due to the relatively small number of available members of this fraternity. Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. members are more readily accessible at historically Black colleges and universities, which was outside the scope of this study. So although there were representatives of all African American fraternities in this study, Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. was the most underrepresented.

Fourth, the participants of this study represented a localized sample from a major metropolitan city, which may affect the type of student exposed to Greek life. Experiences and influences attributed to membership may be different for students attending college in a more rural area or another region of the country.

Lastly, although the data collected in this study may reflect similarities of other multicultural populations on campus, they are only applicable to membership in African American fraternities in a metropolitan region.

Conclusions

We are now well into the 21st century, and education has progressed with the times. 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. More specific to this study, African American men are the most at risk of dropping out of college. Colleges and universities cannot ignore the achievement gap that continues to persist on campuses across America. To continue to develop policies and practices based on data that are 10 to 20 years old means that institutional practices will continue to mischaracterize the needs of BGLO members and accordingly struggle for relevancy with the needs of today's African American students.

This study sought to move beyond the research that focuses almost exclusively on hazing and stepping (Kimbrough, 1995, 2005; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Kimbrough & Sutton, 1998) to garner more information about the role of BGLOs on the college experiences of African American men attending PWIs. What was learned was that there are mechanisms on college campuses that do support African American men and make them more likely than not to persist. Harper and Quaye (2009) stated, "Weak institutions are those that expect students to engage themselves" (p. 6). BGLOs can be leveraged to engage African American men at PWIs and can be utilized to strengthen institutions' efforts in the academic achievement of African American men.

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APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

At Start of Interview

- Thank student for participating in the study
- Provide a brief overview of the purpose and structure of the study
- Clarify that their participation is completely voluntary and review the confidentiality of collected data

Demographic and Precollege Information

1. What is your name?
2. What is your race?
3. When referring to your ethnic identity, how would you describe yourself?
4. How old are you?
5. Describe your high school experience, including types of activities you were involved in, your friendship groups, etc.
6. While attending high school, did you reside in the suburbs, the inner city, an urban area, or a rural area?
7. What is your year in school (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior)?
8. What is your major?
9. What is the name of your fraternity and what year and semester did you join?
10. Why did you choose to attend this institution?

Theoretical Construct: Barriers

11. What is it like to be a college student at your institution?
12. How would you describe your college experience to date?
13. Do you feel accepted and supported at your institution?
14. How do you think your membership in an African American fraternity is viewed by other student groups and campus administrators?
15. Is feeling connected and involved in general campus life important to your academic success?

Theoretical Construct: Group Membership Experience

16. Is your mother or father a member of a fraternity or sorority?
17. Describe the perceptions that you had of Greek life prior to joining your fraternity.
18. How would you describe your fraternity in regard to its characteristics, membership, types of events it's known for, etc.?
19. Did you consider joining a traditional White fraternity? Why or why not?
20. Describe any challenges you have faced as a member of your fraternity.
21. Why did you decide to join your fraternity?

Theoretical Construct: Integration/Engagement

22. What other campus organizations are you a member of? Do you hold any leadership positions in them?
23. How has your involvement in college been impacted as a result of your membership in your fraternity?
24. How has your participation in an African American fraternity affected your participation in general university activities or organizations?
25. What are the major advantages and disadvantages of being a member of your organization?
26. Is there anything about your fraternity membership experience that I have not asked that you think is relevant to this study?

Theoretical Construct: Outcomes

27. What general college experiences and/or outcomes do you specifically attribute to being a member in your fraternity?
28. What academic programs or activities have you participated in because of your membership in your fraternity?
29. What do you think your experience would have been like at this university had you not joined an African American fraternity?
30. How has your membership in your fraternity influenced your academic success at this university?

At Conclusion of the Interview

- Thank student for participation
- Provide follow-up information concerning transcript verification (member check)

APPENDIX B:

SITE PERMISSION LETTER

Date: November 10, 2010
To: Director of Greek Life/Multicultural Affairs, <institution name>
From: Grace Henry, Doctoral Candidate at the George Washington University
Re: Site Permission Letter

I am conducting a research study exploring African American male student participation in Black Greek letter organizations. The goal of the project is to describe why African American men join fraternities and the influence fraternity membership has on college experiences. I am writing to obtain permission to recruit students from your institution.

Research shows that participation in formal student organizations not only provides a sense of satisfaction for African American students but also leads to academic success (Fischer, 2007). Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) found that African American males at predominantly White institutions who were members of Black Greek letter organizations had higher GPAs than non-Greek African American students.

While research exists that examines the effects of Black Greek letter organization membership on in-class African American student engagement (Harper, 2007), researching why African American males seek membership in Black Greek letter organizations and understanding their perception of how membership influences their experiences at predominantly White institutions can fill an important gap in the literature. Your institution will be one of four universities participating in this interview-based research study. The following protocol will be used to identify and recruit students:

1. The Director of Multicultural Affairs, Director of Greek Life, or designated administrator will email the researcher's recruitment email to prospective student participants who are (a) African American males; (b) currently enrolled sophomores, juniors, or seniors; (c) members of African American fraternities for at least one semester.
2. Interested students will be asked to contact the researcher via email.
3. Students who contact the researcher will be screened to ensure they meet the eligibility criteria.
4. The consent and audio-release forms will be read and signed by the participant prior to the interview.
5. The interview will last approximately 1 hour.
6. At the conclusion of the interview, participants will receive a $10 gift card.

If you have any questions about this study, I can be reached at henryg@gwu.edu.

By signing below, you are indicating your permission for me to recruit students at your institution.

_____ _____

Signature Date

APPENDIX C:

RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Date:

Dear Student,

I am an African American doctoral student conducting dissertation research exploring the reasons why African American men join African American fraternities. Through this research study, I would like to understand the influence fraternity membership has on college experiences.

I am writing to ask you to participate in an hour-long interview. Your participation in this study is very important and will greatly add to the current body of knowledge about African American fraternity membership. Your personal experiences in deciding to participate in an African American fraternity make you an invaluable source of information. I would like to assure you that our discussions and conversations will be strictly confidential. To protect your anonymity, at no time will your name, perspectives, and email be shared with anyone else. Before presenting the final work, I will compare and contrast your perspectives with those of other students that I interview and look for common themes that may emerge. After completing the study, I will present the research findings in my doctoral dissertation.

Please feel free to ask any questions at any time. I can be contacted at henryg@gwu.edu. I value your participation and input in this study and thank you for your time, support, and participation in this study. In an effort to show my appreciation for your time and consideration, I would like to offer you a $10 gift card.

Sincerely,

Grace E. Henry, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D:

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

The African American Male Student Experience in Black Greek Letter Organizations at Selected Predominantly White Institutions

GW IRB number: 02119
Principal Investigator: Susan Swayze, PhD Telephone number: [redacted]
Sub-Investigator: Grace E. Henry, M. Ed. Telephone number: [redacted]

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1) Introduction

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted under the direction of Dr. Susan Swayze of The George Washington University's Department of Education Leadership, Higher Education Administration program. Please read this form and ask us any questions that will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Taking part is completely voluntary, and you can decide to quit at any time. Your academic standing will not be affected in any way should you choose not to take part or to withdraw at any time.

2) Why is this study being done?

This study is being done in an effort to explore why African American men join fraternities and the influence membership has on college experiences. Since there are few empirical studies related to this topic, your insight can add to the current professional body of knowledge in the areas of African American male student success at predominantly White institutions and Greek life–related research.

3) What is involved in this study?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to meet with the subinvestigator for an audiotaped interview that will last approximately 60 minutes at a mutually agreed upon time and private location that is convenient to you. The audio-taped interview will be transcribed by a professional transcriber, with all your identifiers removed. Once the transcribed interview is read by the subinvestigator, you will be contacted again to read through the transcript of your interview to ensure its accuracy and confirm that what you said during the interview has been appropriately heard and transcribed. The total amount of time you will spend in connection with this study will not exceed 1.5 hours.

4) What are the risks of participating in this study?

This study is designed to minimize possible risks and discomforts to participants and is expected to cause you no harm whatsoever. However, if the questions that are being asked as part of this study make you feel uncomfortable, you may refuse to answer, take a break at any time during the interview, or stop participating at any time. If you feel distressed as the result of the interview, you will be referred to your institution's student

support / counseling services. Your refusal to answer questions or withdraw from the study in no way will negatively impact your academic standing at your college.

5) What are the benefits to taking part in this study?

Taking part in this research will not help you directly; however, the benefit to society will be a better understanding of the experiences associated with membership in an African American fraternity. This study will provide a voice to a segment of Greek life that according to the literature is understudied. This study seeks to uncover the nuances that make membership in African American fraternities unique.

6) What are my options?

You do not have to take part in this study if you choose not to do so. If you decide to participate now and later change your mind, you can do so at any time.

7) Will I receive payment for being in this study?

You will not be compensated for participating in the hour-long interview. A $10 gift card will be given to you as a token of appreciation for your participation in this study.

8) How will my privacy be protected?

All participants will be assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. The records of this study will be kept private. If you decide to sign this consent form, all information that could be linked to identify you will be removed from the audio-taped interview transcripts. A list matching you to your pseudonym will be kept separate from the interview data in a locked file cabinet in the subinvestigator's home office. Upon publishing the final results of this study, the list linking your identity to your selected pseudonym will be destroyed.

9) Problems or questions

The Office of Human Research of The George Washington University can provide additional information about your rights as a research participant. Should you choose to contact them, they can be reached at (202) 994-2715. Additional information about this study can be obtained by contacting the subinvestigator, Grace E. Henry, at email henryg@gwu.edu or telephone number [redacted].

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign below:

10) Documentation of Informed Consent

_____ _____

Subject's Name (Printed) and Signature Date

_____ _____

Name (Printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

_____ _____

Principal Investigator's Signature Date

APPENDIX E:

AUDIO RELEASE FORM FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

I hereby authorize Grace Henry to use my audio recording in her dissertation, "The African American Male Student Experience in Black Greek Letter Organizations at Selected Predominantly White Institutions." I understand that by signing this form, I am releasing all recordings to her for this expressed purpose. I further certify that I am over the age of 18 years.

Name (Print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Investigator's initials _____