2019

Examining Persistence: the Influence of Joining of Pan-Hellenic Black Greek Letter Organizations on African-American Male Students Attending Predominantly White Institutions

Charles R. Smith, Jr.
William & Mary - School of Education, Crssmith238@gmail.com

Recommended Citation

EXAMINING PERSISTENCE: THE INFLUENCE OF JOINING PAN-HELLENIC
BLACK GREEK LETTER ORGANIZATIONS ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE
STUDENTS ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

_____

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William & Mary in Virginia

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

_____

by

Charles R. Smith, Jr.

May 2019

EXAMINING PERSISTENCE: THE INFLUENCE OF JOINING PAN-HELLENIC
BLACK GREEK LETTER ORGANIZATIONS ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE
STUDENTS ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

by

Charles R. Smith, Jr.

_____

Approved May 2018 by

Pamela L. Eddy, Ph.D.
Chairperson of Doctoral Committee

Eugene A. Roche, Ed.D.
Committee Member

Natoya H. Haskins, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the loving memory of my parents, Charles R. Smith, Sr. and Yvonne Thomas Smith. It was by way of the faith and character that you worked so hard to instill in my brother Curt and me that I was able to make it through this process. I regret that neither of you are here to see it, but I know that you are smiling down from heaven.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank Dr. Pamela Eddy. Your unwavering support, extreme vigilance, and encouragement made you the perfect person to serve as my committee chairperson as I navigated the dissertation process. I am truly grateful for your wisdom and guidance. I could never thank you enough for everything that you've done for me. I would also like to acknowledge and thank my committee members, Drs. Natoya Haskins and Eugene Roche. Both of you were an inspiration, and your feedback was vital to my research. Each of you were incredible mentors and valuable resources. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Dorothy Finnegan, who reminded me constantly that I was capable of academic success and dedicated countless hours to ensuring that I was.

I would also like to thank my family and friends who stood in support of me and gave me the strength to continue even when it was difficult. Specifically, I would like to acknowledge my brother, Dr. Curt L. Smith, who served as set an excellent example for me to follow. Also, I would like to acknowledge two people that were instrumental in achieving this goal. Kirsten Wood, who never stopped believing in me and Danielle Ferguson, who has always been in my corner.

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

EXAMINING PERSISTENCE: THE INFLUENCE OF JOINING PAN-HELLENIC
BLACK GREEK LETTER ORGANIZATIONS ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE
STUDENTS ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

ABSTRACT

The retention of African-American male students at predominantly White institutions is

an issue that continues to plague colleges and universities in the United States. African-

American men have the lowest college graduation rate of any segment of the

population. Pointedly, two-thirds of African-American male students who attend public

four-year schools do not graduate within six years. Yet, research highlights how social

engagement supports many minority students who find themselves on the campuses of

predominantly White institutions. Establishing social connections builds a support

system for these students and can prevent social isolation. One manner of social

engagement steeped in history is the presence of Black Greek Letter organizations

(BGLOs), which were mostly founded around the turn of the 20th century and have

encouraged the educational pursuits, social growth, maturity, and community outreach

that is often part of the successful African-American male educational experience.

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand and analyze how African-

American men now view their experiences as a member of a BGLO at a predominantly

White institution 25 years later. The dissertation examines how do the fraternity

members perceive the influence of their BGLO membership on their persistence and what

memories of their BGLO membership are most salient?

Specifically, this study aimed to collect information regarding the impact of

African-American male student retention employing empirical phenomenology. Data

collection included interviews with eight African-American males who were members of

one of the BGLOs. These men attended and graduated from a four-year PWI located in

the southeastern region of the United States. The data collected was analyzed using the

hermeneutic phenomenology method. This study found that African-American former

collegians who successfully persisted towards their college degrees used their BGLO

membership as a means of social engagement in order to establish connectedness to their

respective PWI campuses. Their BGLO membership gave them immediate access to

mentorship, campus leadership opportunities, heightened culture capital and an affinity

group where they inspire and lead.

EXAMINING PERSISTENCE: THE INFLUENCE OF JOINING PAN-HELLENIC

BLACK GREEK LETTER ORGANIZATIONS ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE

STUDENTS ATTENDING PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

African-Americans have been granted equal opportunity to a public education since 1954 as a result of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. However, the landmark case did not bring an end to Black exclusion or inequality in higher education as African-American students began to matriculate at White universities. It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that predominately White institutions (PWIs) began to reexamine and change their policies on race and gender. At this juncture, African-Americans began to attend PWIs in significant numbers (Wallenstein, 2011).

Today, African-American students have the choice to attend historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) or PWIs. On the one hand, African-American students now have equal access to institutions of higher education.   On the other hand, student persistence for African-American male students, in particular, lags behind Whites and African-American female students who attend a PWI (Strayhorn, 2008). The dropout rate for African-American males in college is 31.4%, the highest in comparison to other racial and gender groups (Redden, 2009). Research attention to issues of retention and persistence have increased as a result (Maryland's K-16 Leadership Council, Task Force on the Education of Maryland's African American Males, 2006). Harper (2010) recognized that using a deficit perspective does not build up outcomes for African-American male students, which is evidenced when African-American male students do not rise to the low expectations. Instead, significant studies are needed to improve African-American male success in education. Harper (2010) reasoned that researchers

should spend their time focusing on those African-American male collegians who have earned good grades, avoided trouble, assumed leadership positions on their campuses, and amassed social capital that they previously lacked in order to determine what factors contributed to their success. There is an intense need to understand the range of factors that may contribute to Black male students' success. Scholars should analyze and compare student resiliency that include a myriad of variables, including social competency, social responsibility, and personal success (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015).

Recently, new attention was given to the dearth of African-American males in colleges and universities, in part due to a student produced video at UCLA that blamed the university for its miniscule African-American student population (Jaschik, 2013). The video, titled *UCLA has more championships than Black male freshmen,* brought to stark relief the plight of African-American men on campus. At UCLA, African-American males make up 3.8% of the student population, yet more than 65% of those students are student athletes (Jaschik, 2013). The video sent a strong message about the lack of diversity at UCLA and almost as if on cue, other colleges and universities began to examine their African-American male enrollment (Jaschik, 2013). Of the incoming men in the freshman class at UCLA for the 2014-2015 school year, only 1.9% of them were African-American (Robinson, 2014). Nationally, African-American men account for 4.3% of the total enrollment at 4-year public postsecondary institutions in the United States, which is the same percentage that enrolled in PWI colleges and universities in 1976 (Palmer, Moore, Davis, & Hilton, 2010). Colleges and universities are working to find solutions to help educators, policymakers, and stakeholders increase the success of

African-American males (Robinson, 2014). The best way to find any cure is to understand the problem. Cuyjet (2006) offered that in order to assist Black male student matriculation, one must have a reasonable understanding of that population. In 2011, on the national level, African-American students comprised 14.3% of the college population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). In 2011, African-American men only accounted for 4.3% of that number. To provide some context, enrollment for African-American women has increased by 126% for the same time period (Harper, 2006a). What is even more alarming than the decline in enrollment for African-American men is their completion rates. Only 41% of African-American men complete their undergraduate degrees within six years (Henry, 2012).

The education of African-American males is often slowed by issues such as lack of academic preparation for college, social isolation; campus alienation, lack of faculty and peer mentoring, and financial pressures (Booker & Breward, 2017). Each one of these issues is significant in its own right. The effect of not being able to overcome these hurdles is an abundance of African-American males without the appropriate income-earning potential to contribute to their families, communities, and national economy. As one researcher noted, the United States has yet to realize that its future economic progress is inextricably tied to the fate of young African-Americans (Gibbs, 1988). Gibbs stated:

> They will drain more and more of the resources, if they do contribute to the economy. They will oversee urban decay and urban chaos, if they cannot participate in the revitalization of the cities. The United States will enter into the 21st century with more serious social, political and economic problems if they are just locked out of the technological and scientific professions. This will place the

nation at an even greater competitive disadvantage and threaten its position as the

leader in the Western World (p. 28). Essentially, educators must realize that the

success of African-Americans is necessary for the success of all Americans in

order to compete the burgeoning world economy. (p. 28)

The combination of these factors along with the anemic measures by PWIs to

combat them, often result in the below average academic progress for African-American

males and their eventual inability to persist towards the completion of their 4-year degree

(Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Research focus and attention must be given to what

factors of college life provided the best support for them during their college years (J.

Johnson & McGowan, 2017).

As has been discussed and as is evidenced by statistics, having a higher level of

education provides better opportunities for greater income and the potential for

career advancement. Given that a relatively large percentage of African-

Americans entering college are students and considering the low competition rate

among this group, it is of importance to explore the means to improve their

college completion rates. (Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince, 2010, p.

293).

Institutions of higher learning can no longer only give lip service to the idea of the

prosperity of all its students without figuring out a solution for those racial and gender

groups who are more likely to drop out than they are to graduate.

African-American male college students face a significant attrition rate at four-

year colleges and universities despite a slight increase in their enrollment in higher

education. One study noted that African-American males are not only the least likely to

enroll in college but are the most likely to drop out without obtaining a college degree. Mentoring programs designed specifically for African-American male students have the potential to increase retention and graduation rates (Gibson, 2014). For example, in the fall of 2011, of the 18,078,700 students enrolled in the nation's 4-year institutions, enrollment for African-American men increased from 10.0% to 12.5% from 2000 to 2010, in comparison to all other ethnic groups and women. Overall, from 2000 to 2010, Black student enrollment increased from 11.8% to 14.8%. Hispanic student enrollment during the same time period increased from 10.3% to 14.1%. With respect to gender, Black male student enrollment increased from 10% to 12.5% and Black female student enrollment increased from 13.2% to 16.5%; Latino male student enrollment increased from 10.1% to 13.8% and Latino female student enrollment increased from 10.4% to 14.3% from 2000 to 2010. More women of color are enrolling in college then men. To add further perspective, in 2012, the 6-year graduation rate for Black male students, attending public colleges and universities was 33%, compared to 48.1% for students overall (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012).

Table 1

College Student Enrollment Percentages by Race/Ethnicity Over Time

Race	1996	2000	2002	2003	2004
White	54.8	57.1	57.3	58.2	58.8
African-American	32.8	35.6	34.0	33.9	34.2
Hispanic	41.3	44.6	44.1	44.6	45.6
Asian/Pacific Islander	59.5	62.9	64.0	65.0	65.7

Source. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2016)
Note: This table includes information for those students who identify racially with the categories listed herein.   Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data.

The statistics in Table 1 confirm that African-American males entered 4-year colleges and universities at a lower rate than any other racial groups (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Conclusively, the persistence rates for African-American males are lower than the rates for any other segment of the American population. This study intends to discover the factors that provided support systems and a means of social engagement for African-American males who have graduated in order to address Black male student persistence rates today. Other scholars have begun to identify and study the variables that impact African-American male students' experiences distinctly. To date, these studies have included a focus on academic achievement and outcomes (Cuyjet, 2006; Dancy & Brown, 2008; Flowers, 2006; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001; Harper 2006a; Gasman & Palmer, 2008; Palmer & Young, 2009), with special attention given to the impact of the student's purposeful participation in extracurricular activities (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2005, 2008; Harper & Harris, 2006). Yet, more research is needed to identify and analyze the effect of BGLOs on engagement and persistence of their members. Previous studies only examined the experiences of students that were

members of Greek fraternities and sororities without delineating along racial and gender lines.

Pike (2000), a leading researcher on collegiate Greek life, used Astin's (1993) input-process-output model to assess the influence of Greek life on the cognitive development and college experiences of first year college students. Pike (2000) found that Greek-affiliated students reported both higher levels of social involvement and gains in general abilities than non-Greeks. However, his study did not focus on African-American males. Further, Henry (2012) noted that more than half of the participants in Pike's (2000) study were high achieving White women. It is important to understand the role of BGLOs and African-American male engagement, as membership in these groups provides a conduit for African-American men to engage on campus. Colleges and universities would be wise to understand how BGLOs transformed the experiences of African-American male collegians at PWIs and use this information in order to undergird the experiences of their African-American male collegians, especially those African-American male students who may be the first in their families to attend a 4-year institution. Leading researchers in this area (Harper, Byars, & Jelke, 2005) found that membership in a BGLO acts to provide social and cultural integration and these groups are able to positively influence students' adjustment to college. Taylor and Howard-Hamilton (1995) asserted that specifically for African-American men, BGLO membership results in greater self-esteem and racial self-concept than non-affiliated African-American male students. Despite these and similar tangential studies, there is little to no research which qualitatively studies and discusses the effects of BGLOs on African-American male student persistence. Universities should support researchers that

seek to identify elements of support for African-American male students. Because of the small number of students within this population, it may be worthwhile to provide special support and a nurturing surrounding to assist this group to appropriately adapt to their environment and successfully move towards graduation (Owens et al., 2010).

Previous remedies to address the lack of African-American persistence and retention in higher education have not resulted in a change in the outcome, thus, African-American males are still lagging in college completion rates. Yet, the research highlights how social engagement can increase retention. What remains unknown is how African-American men now view their experiences as a member of a BGLO at a PWI 25 years later. It is also unknown how the fraternity members perceive the influence of their BGLO membership on their persistence and what memories of their BGLO membership are most salient.

Institutions of higher learning need serious attention to the issue of Black male student retention and must actively initiate changes in their own structures and practices to better meet the needs of diverse student bodies. What is clear is that the support of persistence decisions of African-American male college students will require learning, support, and a sincere desire to understand their unique life experiences (Owens et al., 2010).

Critical to understanding better retention rates for current African-American male college students are the forms of support that former African-American male college students required to persist. Knowing more about what contributes to completion rates is important because statistics show that African-American men continue to have the lowest

college graduation rate of any segment of the population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Problem Statement

Only 26% of Black males between the ages of 18 and 24 enrolled in a college or university in 2008 (J. Davis & Bauman, 2011). Contextually, this figure compares to 40% of White males for the same time period (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). In other words, a disproportionate number of African-American men attend college with graduation rates lower than those of the colleges attended by their White and Asian counterparts (Stoops, 2004). These statistics not only have countless implications for the socioeconomic status of African-American men, but also has ramifications for other students entering colleges and universities (Owens et al., 2010). The purpose of this dissertation is to understand and analyze how African-American men now view their experiences as a member of a BGLO at a PWI 25 years later. This dissertation examines perceptions of the fraternity members regarding the influence of their BGLO membership on their persistence and what memories of their BGLO membership are most salient.

Special attention and focus were given to those African-American, male students who joined a BGLO to examine the relationship between their persistence rates. This group of students has less cultural capital of college-going practices relative to others whose parents attended college. The study examined how African-American members perceived that their African-American fraternities contributed to their college experience at a PWI, and how this type of social engagement may have influenced their decisions to persist to degree attainment. Data analysis was guided by Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure, Delgado's (1995) Critical Race Theory and Assmann's (1995)

Collective Memory Theory. A focus on strategies used to persist leverages these theories.

Engagement in Greek life provides connections for fraternity and sorority members. Henry (2012) found three main themes listed as reasons that African-American men chose to seek membership in a BGLOs: 1) brotherhood; 2) fraternal identity and legacy, and 3) personal connections. What remains unknown is how, if at all, membership in BGLOs contributed to social connections and student persistence rates for African-American men who attended and graduated from a PWI.

Research Question

The following specific research question guided this study:

How do African-American men now view their experiences as a member of a BGLO at a PWI 25 years later?

    a.   How do the fraternity members perceive the influence of their BGLO membership on their persistence?

    b.   What memories of their BGLO membership are most salient?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand and analyze how African-American men now view their experiences as a member of a BGLO at a PWI 25 years later. How the fraternity members perceive the influence of their BGLO membership on their persistence and what memories of their BGLO membership are most salient can help inform current practice.

Specifically, this research aimed to examine how African-American men who joined a BGLO perceived the influence of their membership on their decisions to persist

towards degree attainment. Their experiences should be studied and examined to see

what common factors influenced their decision to remain and their determination to

graduate with their degree to provide illumination to today's colleges and universities as

they seek to find a solution to the problem of African-American male student persistence.

This study included the experiences of Black males who graduated from PWIs to learn

more about the proven factors that propelled them to success and to determine if any of

those success factors included their membership in a BGLO.

Methods of Overview

The voices of African-American men who attended PWIs are central to this study.

How these students experienced college at a PWI or university differs from their peers

(L. Patton, 2010). The research question identified for this study investigates forms of

social support and engagement as relayed by African-American men who attended a

PWI. Particular attention is paid to how BLGOs may have influenced the college

experiences of these men and motivated them to graduate.

Given the goal of representing the voices of African-American male graduates of

a 4-year university, the most appropriate data collection for this study included interviews

since this approach permits first-hand accounts of the on-campus experiences of these

participants, both positive and negative. Study participants provided responses to

specific and individualized semi-structured questions about conscious and sub-conscious

decisions to persist.

The qualitative method selected for this research study is hermeneutical

phenomenology, which is situated in empirical phenomenology. Much of the study's

data were reviewed using theory of student departure (Tinto, 1993); collective memory

theory (Assmann, 1995) as well as the critical race theory (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The qualitative method was most appropriate in order to delve deeper into the phenomenon of the impact of BGLO membership on African-American male students' decisions to persist until college completion at a PWI. Specifically, this study used individual interviews of approximately one hour and participant observations. The sample size included eight participants. The participants included representatives from two of the five BGLOs on two campuses. The rationale for including only two of the five BGLOs is the most recent member of the Panhellenic council is Iota Phi Theta Fraternity. This fraternity did not have a chapter on either of the campuses of the schools that are part of this study. Currently, there is a chapter of Iota Phi Theta on each of the campuses selected to be a part of this study.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Several assumptions exist in this study. First, I describe the assumptions related to the participants. Second, I list the limitations that relate to the research design and methodology of the study. Finally, I present the delimitations of the research study.

Assumptions. Following is a listing of the assumptions I have regarding this study.

1. I assume that African-American males are capable of completing the requirements necessary to obtain a 4-year college degree at a public college or university. Each African-American male has an individual set of reactions to the college experience based on their own experiences with people (faculty, administrators, and students), campus culture and the university or college at

large, all of which impact their choice to persist or not persist to obtain their college degree (Perna, 2006).

2. I assume that all African-American male students at PWIs have inherent strengths and weaknesses, which may or may not contribute to their ability to persist towards a 4-year college degree.

3. I assume that the study participants will answer the interview questions in an honest and candid manner.

4. I assume that the inclusion criteria for participants in the study is appropriate and therefore, the study participants have all experienced the same or similar phenomenon of the study.

5. I assume that the participants have a sincere interest in participating in the research study.

6. I assume that the culture on PWI campuses presents challenges for African-American male students. I assume that PWI campuses do not foster a sense of being involved and included for African-American male students.

7. I assume that involvement is critical for Black male collegians on the campuses of PWIs because a heightened sense of involvement leads to a desire to strive for academic success. Without such, the reverse is probably true. Student perception of institutional support and the friendliness of their peers contribute to their view of social support.

8. I assume that when African-American male students feel they have social support, they are better able to navigate the collegiate environment. Without

such support, African-American male students may feel alienated (Britt, 2014).

9. In an environment that is highly focused on academic performance and student persistence, I assume less attention is paid to co-curricular forms of student engage like BGLOs. The university's academic and social climate and culture may be a contribute both positively and negatively towards the persistence of African-American male collegians.

Limitations. Qualitative research requires participant awareness and perceptions in order to relate their experiences during the research study. If a graduate is unaware and unable to perceive appropriately, then he may not be able to answer questions about factors which caused him to be able to persist or not persist at a PWI. In this study there may be some areas over which I have no control. Examples may include the number of participants, length of the study, response rate, and methodology barriers. A limitation of the study may be the change in campus culture and environments since the time my participants graduated. Issues in the larger national landscape may also influence how my participants make sense of their college years.

Factors or conditions of the participants current work and living situations may also influence their perceptions. The culture and history of the southeastern United States, which is the location of the university, may also influence the environment of support or challenge present at the university during the time the participants were enrolled.

Delimitations. This study is delimited to two PWIs located in the southeast. The sites were selected based on the fact that they are PWIs which are located in the

southeastern region of the United States. They were also selected due to the number of

African-American male students that graduated from each university between 1985 and

1990 and the current number of African-American male college students. The first site in

the 2015-2016 school year graduated 51% of its African-American male students within a

6-year period (Kapsidelis, 2016). Whereas the second site institution in the 2015-2016

school year, experienced a graduation rate for Black males that hovered around 48-52%

(Forbes Magazine, n.d.). Although these numbers seem high, they are still far behind

those statistics of other gender and racial groups at the same institutions.

The first university selected for the study is Virginia Commonwealth University

(VCU) located in Richmond, Virginia. Specifically, the school is located on 173 acres in

downtown Richmond and is a major, urban public university (VCU, n.d.-a). The school

enrolls more than 31,000 students in 217 degree and certificate programs. VCU is

accredited to award baccalaureate, master's and doctorate degrees to its students (VCU,

n.d.-b). VCU has recently been recognized by the Education Trust as one of the nation's

top institutions of higher learning for their commitment to boosting the graduation rate

gaps between minorities and White students. Specifically, VCU increased their 6-year

graduation rate for Black, Latino, and Native American students by 15.5% from 2003 to

2013. The school also narrowed the gap between underrepresented minorities and their

White peers by 3.3% over the same time period. However, the above accolades have to

place into context. Table 2 provides a summary of VCU's 6-year graduation rates.

Table 2

VCU Six-Year Graduation Rates for 2016

Race/Ethnicity	Graduation Rate
White	61%
Black/African American	63%
Hispanic/Latino	56%
Asian	69%
American Indian or	69%
Alaskan Native	
Unknown	62%
Non-resident alien	49%

Source. Data retrieved from National Student Clearinghouse, 2014.
Note: This table includes information for those students who identify racially with the categories listed herein. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. VCU = Virginia Commonwealth University

The 6-year graduation rate at VCU for African-American students is 63%, edging out the total university rate of 62% and the rate of 61% for White students. But the credit for the improving rates for African-American students goes to the women. When disaggregating by gender, 68% of Black females graduate within six years. However, only 51% of Black males earn a degree within six years (Kapsidelis, 2016).

The second university selected to be part of the study is Old Dominion University (ODU). ODU is a major university located in the coastal city of Norfolk, Virginia. It is a major research university with more than 24,500 students, rigorous academics in an energetic residential community. The university contributes more than $2.6 billion annually to Virginia's economy (Saunders, 2017a). Today, ODU encompasses seven academic colleges, an honors college and a graduate school which offers a total of 75 bachelor's degrees, 41 master's degrees and 22 doctoral degrees, in addition to over 100 online programs (ODU, 2010). The institution was recently named a top 15 university in the nation for African-American student success. They were first named in 2010 as a

university with higher than average graduation rates for African-American students by the Education Trust (ODU, 2010). According to the report, 56% of African-American students at the university graduated within six years or less, far above the national average and only a few percentage points behind the graduation rate for White students (ODU, 2010). The campus boasts a chapter of the Brother 2 Brother program, a national organization that mentors and provides support to young minority males. The university makes it a priority to bridge the achievement gap by race. Johnny Young, assistant vice president for Student Engagement and Enrollment Services, believes that African-American students who attend ODU do so because they believe that minority students can thrive, and they know they are supported. African-American students have said that the faculty members and staff members understand their challenges and backgrounds (ODU, 2010).

Table 3

ODU Six-Year Graduation Rates for 2016

Race/Ethnicity	Graduation Rate
White	50%
Black/African American	50.8%
Hispanic/Latino	49.4%
Asian	50%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	62.5%
Unknown	52.5%
Non-resident alien	75.0%

Source: Scholarship.com, 2016. ODU. Retrieved from http://www.scholarship.com. Note: This table includes information for those students who identify racially with the categories listed herein. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. ODU = Old Dominion University.

Significance

The significance of this study is to access the thoughts and feelings of the study participants to either prove or disprove their perceptions that membership in BGLOs have a positive effect on the decisions of African-American male students to persist while in attendance at a PWI. If members of BGLOs found a sense of community, developed student leadership skills, and used their respective organizations to help them in engage and persist on campuses that at times can appear to be alienating, then the significant role that that BGLOs played for these African-American males should be analyzed and perhaps mimicked. PWIs of higher learning must look at every factor that influenced those African-American males that attended their institutions. Special attention should be paid to those influencers which helped them to remain and persist toward graduation.

The success of African-American male students will only become accurately predicted as researchers look at a holistic perspective of each student, their campus environments, and the ways in which these students may engage with their peers and faculty. Researchers tend to examine single indicators of student success; individual studies of student success obscure the extent to which success in one indicator contributes to success in other indicators. Yet, organizational properties of higher education institutions impact students experiences and influence their perceptions of and decisions about the institution. These features include administrative structure, institution size, resources, and mission and goals (McDonald, 2011).

Social engagement is often cited as a predictor of a student's persistence rates (Harper, 2006a). One of the ways in which Black males have engaged socially is through membership in a BGLO. This involvement can lead to persistence to graduation.

Because research suggests that there is a connectivity between social engagement and the persistence of African-American males more work must be done to study the viability of this phenomena. The findings from this research will inform administrators at PWIs and support staff working with students how to best support African-American men's persistence. Social engagement by minority students with others from a similar background can be critical in making students feel at home on a college campus and are a key factor in whether these students will continue through to graduation (Gonyea, 2006).

Although these previous studies proved that social engagement is a positive influencer for African-American males, this research stopped short of finding that membership in a BGLO is an overall positive influence on Black males' decisions to persist while attending a PWI. This study intended to fill this gap.

If students pledge a Greek letter organization at just the right time, it could end up having a positive effect on their academic performance (Daniels, 2011). Yet, more research is required on the sub-population of African-American men. As colleges place a greater emphasis on diversity, minority students have elected to engage by selecting those social networks that represents the familiar to them and those that in some way mirror their subculture (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). Essentially BGLOs eradicate two of the biggest factors in a student's decision to drop out of college student isolation and alienation and motivate students to feel connected to their campuses. The findings from this study will help inform practice and identify strategies for successful persistence of African-American men.

Definition of Terms

The following list of terms are used throughout this study. Where appropriate, I have identified when I am using terms interchangeably.

1. Academic Profiles: In this study, academic profiles will refer to the contextual background of a student. It is the narrative of the student (University of British Columbia, 2017)

2. Academic Integration: Academic integration will refer to the adherence of specific learning standards set by the college or university. In the narrative form, students have integrated when they identify with the prescribed standard of structure of the academic system (Tinto, 1975).

3. African-American: For the purposes of this study, *African-American* will be used interchangeably with Black and will refer to a United States citizen with both African and American heritage (Merriam-Webster, 2018).

4. Alumni: This term will specifically reference former students of any college or university (Dictionary.com, n.d.).

5. Black American: For the purposes of this study, Black person will be used interchangeably with African-American and will refer to a United States citizen with both African and American heritage (Thefreedictionary.com, n.d.).

6. Black Greek Letter organizations: In this study *Black Greek Letter Organizations* (BGLOs) refer to those fraternities and sororities which comprise the National Panhellenic Council. Special emphasis is given to the following fraternal organizations, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated;

Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Incorporated; Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated; Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Incorporated; which are part of the council since the study focuses on student persistence for African-American males (L. Patton, Flowers, & Bridges, 2011). As mentioned, Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Incorporated will not be included in the study. Although Iota Phi Theta is a BGLO and currently has a fraternity chapter at both of the campuses selected to be a part of this study, during the years 1985 to 1990, they did not.

7. Caucasian: This term refers to Americans of European descent and ancestry. Caucasian, White are used interchangeably (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.).

8. Collegians: Students who are currently enrolled in college (Vocabulary.com, n.d.).

9. Individual Interviews: This term signifies a qualitative research methodology that is used to gather and information and data from individual subjects (Dilshad & Latif, 2013).

10. Inter Fraternity Council – The governing and programming body of traditionally White fraternities and sororities on college campuses. Their purpose is to advance fraternity on campus and provide interfraternal leadership to the entire community (North American Interfraternity Conference, n.d.).

11. Learning Community: For this study, learning communities will refer to the academic learning environment at PWI campuses (James, 2016).

12. Non-Persistence: As used in this study, non-persistence is a student's decision not to remain at the college or university in order to obtain their 4-year degree (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000).

13. Peer Group: This term refers to students of the same general age group, educational level and other similar backgrounds (L. Patton et al., 2011).

14. Persistence: As used in this study: *persistence* will be used to refer to student who have enrolled consecutively in a fall and spring semester and have completed their first year of study at a PWI of higher learning (Elkins et al., 2000).

15. Predominantly White Universities: As used in this study, this term or PWIs will refer to those institutions of higher learning that are predominantly White in their racial composition of their student body (L. Patton et al., 2011).

16. Resiliency: A student's ability to overcome obstacles and achieve end goals despite challenges and difficulties (Elkins et al., 2000).

17. Retention: Efforts made by colleges and universities to attract and retain students successfully (Elkins et al., 2000).

18. Social Engagement: student connections and peer support through a student's social community (L. Patton et al., 2011).

19. Social Integration: Refers to high levels of engagement with the social system of the institution. Social integration stems from occurs when a student interacts with their peers, faculty staff and administration (Tinto, 1975).

20. Social Isolation: Student alienation from their peer groups, campus life and faculty connections caused by a number of various factors (Elkins et al., 2000).

21. White American: This term refers to Americans of European descent and ancestry. Caucasian, White are used interchangeably (Cole, 2018).

22. White Greek Letter Organizations (WGLO) – Those fraternities and sororities that are predominantly White in membership and are governed by the IFC. (North American Interfraternity Conference, n.d.).

Summary

The purpose of this study is to understand and analyze how African-American men now view their experiences as a member of a BGLO at a PWI 25 years later.   The study will also examine whether the fraternity members perceive the influence of their BGLO membership on their persistence and what memories of their BGLO membership are most salient?

The relationship between social engagement and higher persistence rates among African-American male students is especially important. The statistics underlying, existing problems that need ongoing scholarly research and discussion. The next chapter reviews the relevant literature, beginning with the content foci of this study, African-American male students' experiences while attending PWIs, and a brief history of BGLOs. The chapter examines Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure, Delgado's (1995) Critical Race Theory, and Assman's (1995) Collective Memory Theory. The last section of the literature review examines and reviews African-American male student social engagement, including Greek life, and BGLOs specifically. The literature review

concludes with a conceptual argument for this study, which considers BGLOs as positive

factors in an African-American male student's decision to persist while attending a PWI.

The methods chapter presents the research design of the study and justifies the qualitative

research methodology. The findings from the study are presented in Chapter 4, and a

discussion about the findings occurs in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to understand and analyze how African-American men now view their experiences as a member of a BGLO at a PWI 25 years later. It is also unknown whether the fraternity members perceive the influence of their BGLO membership on their persistence and what memories of their BGLO membership are most salient?

Researchers have become intentional in their efforts to explore the experiences, challenges, and success factors for students of color. And even though much can be said about African-American women and their significant strides in their baccalaureate educational goals, it is not enough as African-American men lag behind. In 2014, African-American men accounted for 4.3% of the total enrollment at post-secondary institutions in the United States. The number of African-American men enrolled at post-secondary institutions in the United States in 1976 was also 4.3% (Cambridge College, 2014), and this lack of growth over time is alarming. The racial composition and gender composition of those students who enter college quite often represent America (E. Thomas, 2010). However, if you follow that same class to graduation day, the graduates are still the largely White, upper-income population (E. Thomas, 2010).

The promise of high enrollment numbers of African-American male college students is not enough. Even where a campus prides itself on being diverse, Black males can feel under-supported. In order to prevent current African-American male students from feeling isolated and deciding to leave college, more research is necessary to

understand what made their African-American male predecessors persist in the same or similar environments. The low levels of persistence and degree completion for African-American male students symbolize existing problems that need ongoing scholarly research and discussion.

The relationship between social engagement and higher persistence rates among African-American male students is especially important to explore because PWIs have not developed solutions to combat persistence issues that plague African-American males, especially college goers. Yet, as noted in Chapter 1, some institutions in Virginia are making progress. This chapter reviews literature that has identified the lack of persistence among African-American males and identified the need for a solution. Chapter 2 goes on to include past and current statistics for African-American male student enrollment and persistence to set the context for the study, which focuses on the phenomenon of African-American males college outcomes posting at the lowest gender and racial group to persist towards degree attainment.

A discussion relating to the gender enrollment disparity between African-American males and females, which is the largest amongst all other racial groups, is presented. The latest statistics of the graduation rate of current African-American males will be reviewed and analyzed to present a portrait of this group of college students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). This section includes a review of Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure, Delgado's (1995) Critical Race Theory and Assmann's (1995) Collective Memory Theory.

The final section of the literature review presents a discussion of existing research in three areas, namely targeting studies regarding African-American male student

experiences at PWIs, outcomes of membership in a BGLO, and the role of membership in a BGLO on Black male collegians decisions to persist.

The literature review synthesizes an argument for the need for this study, which posits that BGLOs provide a significant form of support for African-American men in college and that membership contributes to their persistence at a PWI. An intention of the study is presentation of a narrative as it relates to African-American males in higher education today. Without more research, levers for change remain unknown. Colleges and universities that are PWIs must find a way to create a sustained and collaborative effort to support African-American male persistence on their campuses. Without figuring out why persistence remains an issue for African-American males at PWIs, these men will have limited potential to transform their lives through education. The consequence of low student persistence among African-American males is decreased economic, political, and cultural capacity to improve the lives of all of the world's citizens (Robinson, 2014).

African-American Male College Enrollment and Persistence Rates

Despite decades of academic literature on the topic, the graduation rate for African-American college students lag behind that of their peers. Only 35.2 % of Black men who began college in 2006 graduated by 2012, whereas 43.1% of Black women graduated in the same timeframe. Likewise, their White counterparts graduated at a rate nearly 25% higher—59% to be exact—and their White female counterparts nearly doubled their graduation rate at 64.9% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). According to the 2014, U.S. Consensus Report, African-Americans make up 42,158,238 of the country's population. Of the over 42 million people in this group, only 5 million

have a college degree from a four-year institution of higher learning (Eakins & Eakins, 2017). It is fair to say that there is a significant achievement gap between African-American males and other ethnic and gender groups. What remains unknown are the factors that could contribute to the elimination of these achievement gaps in degree attainment for African-American students. This gap underscores why a study of this type is needed. If the gap in persistence was eliminated, Nichols and Evans-Bell (2017) posited that at the institution they studied an additional 11,992 Black college students would graduate each year and would considerably reduce the national completion gap.

Table 4

Six-year Graduation Rates for First-time, Full-time Baccalaureate Students at 4-year

Colleges and Universities

Cohort	1996	2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
All students	55.4	57.5	57.2	57.4	58.3	58.7	59.2
White men	54.8	57.1	57.3	58.2	58.8	59.5	59.8
Black men	32.8	35.6	34.0	33.9	34.2	33.7	35.2
White women	60.9	62.8	62.5	63.0	63.8	64.2	64.9
Black women	43.0	46.4	44.2	42.7	43.1	43.1	43.6

Source. Data retrieved from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS),* 2014. Note: This table includes information for those students who identify racially with the categories listed herein.   Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data.

Table 4 highlights how the graduation rates for Black men have remained stagnant over time and are the lowest among comparative groups.

African-American Males' Persistence at PWIs

As evident in Table 4, little progress in graduation rates at PWIs occurred for African-American men. Minority students as a group made up 42% of the student body on college campuses in 2013 as opposed to 28% in 1994. Yet, this increase in the presence of minority students is largely due to the recruitment of Hispanic students who represent the largest minority group in the United States. But indifference to Black students is not an issue that colleges and university can ignore. By the year 2050, ethnic minorities are predicted to 50% of the population of the United States. Little growth is predicted for Whites, so the future college population and resulting workforce will be comprised of minorities and immigrants (Hayworth, 2014). Given the predicted population growth trends, institutions of higher education must improve their record for graduating students of color, especially Black males. Institutions of higher learning will need to use every human and financial resource available to them in order to graduate these students (Hayworth, 2014).

It is critical to the success of the African-American male college student's persistence rates to understand better what best supports African-American men in college. Because African-American men have the lowest college graduation rate of any segment of the population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), it is important to understand components of persistence to determine what contributes to these statistics. African-American male college students face a significant attrition rate at four-year colleges and universities despite a slight increase in their enrollment in higher education. What remains unknown is how different levels of social engagement and social integration, in particular with BGLO, influences African-American men to persist.

Persistence is defined as one form of motivation for college students as it relates to a student's decision to remain at a college or university and continue to enroll there despite obstacles and hurdles and remain until they obtain their degree (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). Students who persistent toward their baccalaureate degree are willing to expend the effort to do so even when faced with challenges. Without the motivation and the effort that it engenders, a student's persistence to graduation is unlikely (Tinto, 2016).

Beginning in the 1970s researchers have focused on the reasons that students remained enrolled and how colleges and universities could make the necessary changes and/or develop their programming to increase student retention (Nutt, 2003). Tinto's (1993) Theory of Persistence emerged as an institutional issue over time as institutions of higher education faced calls for accountability. In his theory, Tinto (1993) defined persistence as a student's desire to stay and complete their degrees despite challenges they may face. Their decision to persist is influenced by many variables and colleges and universities should make note of those elements which shape a student's motivation. And in turn, which of these positive elements are within the universities ability to promote (Tinto, 2017). Tinto (1993) supported the idea that student involvement is critical to student persistence and positive student outcomes for college students. He believed that there was a positive link between college student involvement on their campuses and the quality of student effort. Essentially, Tinto believed that involvement with one's peers and faculty, inside and outside of the classroom leads to both learning and student persistence (Tinto, 1993). The concept that the more students learn, the more that they will persist ideology is Tinto's revised model of his original conceptual model (Tinto

1975). Tinto focused his revised research on the ways in which students experience and interact with their campus environments. This expanded model implied that academic and social integration were the keys that college students could depend on in order to persist until graduation (Milem & Berger, 1997).

Despite Tinto's seminal work on the theory of persistence and persistence models, the existing persistence research frameworks are antiquated and negative because they support a limited view of persistence based on the experiences of White students and approach the issue from a deficit point of view. Thus, how African-American male students experience college is influenced by the context and culture of the PWI collegiate environment, and on larger societal factors.

African-American Males as College Students

The college success of African American men can involve different supports than the requirements necessary for the college success of other African-American men, or others in general. Research on this population of students requires recognition of the challenges faced by this ethnic and gender sub-group, and attention to the strengths that have been necessary for successful graduates to overcome those challenges. There is very little literature on the specific college experience of African-American males (Cuyjet, 1997; Irby, 2012; Owens et al., 2010). The lack of attention and research on this population serve as main reasons why this study focuses on strengths of this sub-group. Research, albeit limited, points to four major contributing factors that lend themselves to the academic success for African-American males: family support, high school academic readiness, supportive peer relationships with same-race peers to include academic and extracurricular activities, and mentoring programs (State University, 2012).

Overall, African-American males will have to spend their time focusing on never giving up (persistence), blocking out the negative, and building positive relationships in order to become successful as college students and persist until graduation (Irby, 2012). Stress management is critical to an African-American student's ability to succeed. Whether the stress stems from working to avoid negative perceptions from home and on campus, explaining and educating White peers about their experiences, or extra burdens of leadership, learning to handle this level of stress and distraction is imperative to persistence. Overall, for African-American, students, a college degree is a means to more job opportunities and financial security. These reasons are different comparted to second-generation students who may see a college degree not as a privilege but a rite of passage and a means of learning how to enrich their lives as did their parent(s) (McCorkle, 2012).

In order to build on society's understanding of student persistence for African-American male college students we must learn more about how former students within this ethnic and gender sub-group understand their college experience. Student persistence can be examined from a variety of perspectives (McCorkle, 2012). This study will focus on the perspectives of African-American male former students who attended a PWI of higher learning and the factors that influenced them in persisting to graduation.

Social engagement and persistence. Researchers to date, acknowledge that African-American students' norms and values often differ from those of the White majority at PWIs (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Tinto (1993) has theorized that it is especially important for African-American college students to become socially integrated

into the life of the university in order to succeed. Tinto found that unlike many White students, whose social integration into the college environment occurs largely through informal associations with peers, social engagement and social integration for African-American collegians at PWIs occurs mostly through more formal associations like those inherent among members of minority student organizations (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). This idea has been supported by research that concludes that involvement in minority student organizations can assist minority students in bridging the cultural gap that exists between their home environments and the environments at PWIs (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 1987; McClung, 1988). Participating in minority student organizations allows minority students to scale down the larger, foreign campus environment by providing ethnic enclaves (Murguia, Padilla, & Pavel, 1991; L. Patton, 2010). Researchers (Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997) found that participating in minority student organizations allowed minority students to achieve a sense of ethnic identity on campus (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). BGLOs provide this type of formalized social engagement forum for African-American college students.

Guiffrida (2003) conducted a qualitative study with 88 African-American students attending a PWI to shed light on the social/cultural benefits to African-American students at PWIs. Students have to see themselves as a member of a community of other students, faculty, and staff who value their membership and who tell them that they matter and belong (Tinto, 2016). A sense of community and belonging is especially important for African-American male students who often have lower persistence rates than their peers (U. S. Department of Education, 2015). The need to establish peer connections and to have social outlets can influence their decisions to persist and remain until graduation,

34

especially on college campuses that can be completely foreign places in which all too often African American students experience instances of outright hostility or microaggressions (Harper, 2006b). These groups of students need to find a group that is socially inclusive to help support their transition to college and to support their decisions to remain in college and persist towards degree completion.

For African-American men, early engagement into the fabric of campus life in particular is significant to their persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For these students, campus involvements and social networks provide the social and cultural capital necessary to succeed at PWIs (Strayhorn, 2008). Therefore, sustained levels of social involvement and networking can stimulate African-American men to successfully negotiate their higher education environments and persist toward a college degree (Simmons, 2013). Student organizations serve as a gateway for enhancing retention and persistence, for bridging the gap toward academic achievement (Kuk & Manning, 2010), and for attaining higher levels of degree attainment (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Padilla and associates (1997) found that minority student participation in ethnic-based organizations fostered persistence and allowed these students to "retain and nurture a sense of ethnic identity on campus" (p. 134). Feelings of ethnic identity help bridge the cultural gap between the home environment of minority students and the environments at their PWI (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010).

In their 2009 study, Harper and Quay 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. 5). Yet, students' involvement in campus life is not enough to encourage their persistence. They must be engaged and their

social engagement must be positive. Harper and Quay (2015) noted that there is a measurable difference between involvement and engagement. A student becomes engaged when they identify with the peers by means of curricular or extracurricular groups or activities, suggesting that student engagement and persistence through baccalaureate degree attainment are inextricably bound. Graduation rates for African-American men will remain unreasonably low as long as Black men are continually disengaged. Research highlights how membership of African-American men in BGLOs played a positive and identifiable role in the improvement of the quality of campus life for these students (Green, 2014). Yet, what remains unknown, although suspected, is whether seeing other African-American males who are doing or who have graduated (and thereby have done) well academically serves as a motivating factor for those African-American males currently matriculating at a PWI and who are struggling with their decisions to persist. The question that needs further research is whether seeing and engaging with other positive male role models within the microcosmic Black community present on many PWI campuses impact or impacted their decisions to remain until graduation.

Many researchers have findings that support aspects of the type of support structures beneficial for African-American men, but there is a dearth of studies on this precise topic that intersects the various elements of the proposed study. More information is important since African-American males presently have the lowest graduation rates of any other racial and/or gender group as noted earlier in this study. As one student noted in an earlier study,

It wasn't until I met members of my fraternity that I was able to be around

positive male role model figures that it occurred to me that people actually

graduate and graduate with good GPAs. So, my primary reason for staying in

school was brothas [*sic*] from my fraternity which I could say were big motivating

reasons personally and socially because seeing other Black men do well was

definitely a motivating factor. (Green, 2014, pp. 141-142).

There is a suspected strength gained from seeing and knowing that those that look like

you and those that have come before you have persisted. The impact of this phenomenon

needs further study and is the focus of this research.

Minority student survival strategies. Social isolation is a barrier to persistence.

In one of the first in-depth studies about African-American college students, Fleming

(1984) found that African-American men experienced more stress at PWIs compared to

their White male counterparts due to the spread of negative images that others have of

them. The dilemma of negative images of African-American men is not new. Many

social behaviorists believe that African-American men live in a world where they are

assumed to be a problem (Henry, 2012). 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 & Quay, 2015). Given the current status of African-American men on PWI

campuses, institutions of higher learning must implement effective retention practices

that promote a culture of high degree attainment among African American men. The

relationship between student persistence and social engagement has a positive effect on a

student's decision to attain their college degree. Social engagement creates a feeling of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012a).

Supportive peer relationships especially for African-American men are connected to the continued pursuit of academic goals and school-appropriate behavior (Hudley et al., 2009). This can be especially true for African-American males who may be attending college without the educational, social, or family support thought to be typical for other students or those African-American students who are not (Owens et al., 2010). When college students surround themselves with other students who have the same educational aspirations, they receive support and opportunities to grow. This is especially true for African-American males as they attend a PWI because the experience can tend to make them feel isolated (Britt, 2014). During these encounters, these African-American male college students develop academic skills and learn how to navigate social encounters with other students who are going to college (Hudley et al., 2009). These Black male college students also see their college-bound peers interacting with school personnel and feel more comfortable asking for help with college. There is strong statistical research which supports the linkage between Astin's (1993) theory of involvement and persistence by proposing that students' psychosocial engagement or the energy that a student invests in social interactions, directly influences the degree to which they are socially integrated into college life (Kuh, Bridges, Hayek, Kinzie, & Buckley, 2006).

As introduced and discussed by Nagasawa and Wong (1999), minority student survival strategies include instances where minority students on PWI campuses will seek out other minority students on campus to form ethnic social networks rooted in their ethnic subculture. The ethnic social networks serve: (1) to reinforce excellence in

academics; (2) to provide social support and information for students in navigating the

college maze; and (3) to increase solidarity and pride in members. These minority

survival strategies and their resulting minority student social networks help to integrate

minority students into the college social and academic systems and thereby maximize the

students' survival in college (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999).

Student retention and persistence rates increase when an institution of higher

learning highlights social engagement. In fact, the assumption by any college or

university that minority students are solely responsible in assimilating and incorporating

themselves to the culture of the college excuses institutions from dealing with their own

barriers to cultural and racial isolation, unfamiliarity with college life and hostility

(Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). This is where the survival strategies of minority students on

PWI campuses becomes important. Recent research studies on coping strategies for

students of color on college campuses showed that minority student survival strategies

involved either behavioral or psychological responses to stressors or how one thinks

about it (Nangendo, Sebbudde, & Nalwadde, 2006). This principal is especially

applicable to African-American males as they encounter stressors in their PWI college

campuses. Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, and Stanley (2007) found that African-

American men at a PWI identified racism as an overall stressor in their lives. In a recent

study involving African-American males and their experiences as a college student at a

PWI, one participant noted that

>the fact that Black men have to process so much to try and figure out the different
>
>dynamics of their peers and the different perceptions let me know that I am

dealing with a lot more psychological pressure and stress than the average person

would be. (Watkins et al., 2007, p. 111)

One of the key elements derived from Watkins et al.'s (2007) study is that these African-American male students were successful because they developed a survival strategy by learning to adapt to their new collegiate environments and by providing social support for one another (Watkins et al., 2007). In another study, one researcher spoke with a group of 18 alumni students of color all of whom attended a public PWI, they found that students of color attending a PWI consistently deal with race-related stressors. Even though these students, which includes African-American males have developed survival or coping strategies, the study provided significant implications to the area of student retention (persistence) and satisfaction. Institutions should make deliberate efforts to provide access to a network of supportive relationships, or at the very least, enhance existing relationships. PWIs should not assume because resources are available that student will use them nor should they assume that such resources are appropriate for all students. Careful analysis of minority students needs should be an on-going activity and access to a supportive social academic network should be put in place (Maina, Burrell, & Hampton, 2011).

Given that student persistence is still a reflection of institutional practice, research must examine models of institutional action by first considering the nature of theory and research on student persistence and the evidence as to the nature of institutional environments that promote student persistence (Tinto & Pusser, 2006).

The arguments about persistence are not to say that individual attributes do not matter. Individual attributes and motivations are strong indicators of a student's success

(Tinto & Pusser, 2006). College campuses are already within institutional control, reflecting past decisions about their prioritization of student persistence. These environments can be changed where necessary, if institutions are serious in their pursuit of student success (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Institutions must share the responsibility of successful cultural and social integration of students into college (Jensen, 2011). Prioritizing student persistence necessarily means prioritizing all factors that contribute to its success. The way to identify those factors with laser-like precision is to study those African-American college alumnae who attended PWIs and obviously obtained their degrees.

I speculate that social engagement for my student participants will consist of their BGLO membership (peer mentorship), financial support and educational preparedness. The successful interrelationship between student persistence and engagement should be studied and offered as a viable tool in a college or university's attempt to assist its minority students as they move toward graduation (Hall, 2017). PWI college campuses that experience student persistence issues for their African-American men will improve when they focus on and spotlight the factors that move them (and their African-American male predecessors) toward graduation. In short, college administrators need to find out what has worked amongst Black males who have persisted. African-American males who engage socially expressed that they felt a sense of community and did not feel adrift and isolated. A way to develop a fostered sense of community would be to identify and encourage those means of social engagement that work for African-American male students. What will be tested here is whether membership in a BGLO as

a means of social engagement affected the decisions of African-American, former college students to persist and if so, in what way.

What is clear is that campus relationships matter to student persistence (Davidson & Wilson, 2013). This finding has important implications for colleges and universities. Involvement theory suggests that the more students engage with faculty, staff, and other students, the more likely they are to learn and to graduate from college (Endo & Harpel, 1981). According to Astin (1984), an uninvolved student may neglect studies, spend little time on campus, abstain from extracurricular activities, and have little contact with family members or other students and as a result, dropout of college (Astin, 1984). Students who do not perceive that they belong within the college community graduate at reduced levels, possess diminished academic achievement, and report less satisfying social experiences (Strayhorn, 2012b). Student involvement is more important during their first-year of college because most postsecondary education student attrition occurs during the students' freshman year (Tinto, 1998). One of the best ways for students to get involved and tied into their campus community is with social engagement. As has been researched in relationship to minority students and their survival on PWI campuses, the connection with other minority students (often of the same race) is critical for their survival and thereby persistence. This connectedness aids in the reduction of feelings of alienation, hostility, and a lack of preparedness for college student life (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999).

Six high impact practices. The goal of African-American student persistence research must be to explore students within multiple concentric environments that they inhabit, recognizing that different students engage differently within those environments.

Knowing that PWIs and their faculty, staff and administrators have a responsibility to advance the institution's agenda for Black male student success (Harper, 2009), it is important to understand what factors support engagement. One support structure for engagement are the six High Impact Practices (HIPs) of the National Survey of Student Engagement ([NSSE], 2015). NSSE measures college and university student participation in the United States and Canada. The NSSE HIPs results show these educational experiences can shift a student's trajectory of success. The HIPs include the following features: 1) learning community, 2) service-learning, 3) research with faculty, 4) internships, 5) study abroad, and 6) senior capstone project (NSSE, 2015). The most powerful recommendation Kuh (2008) made came from a single conclusion: high-impact practices have a pronounced effect on the experiences of underserved students. Using NSSE data, Kuh showed a link and resulting positive relationships between high-impact or engaged experiences and different measures of student learning and achievement. These different measures of student learning and achievement include self-reported gains, grade point averages, and student retention. In several cases in Kuh's research, these positive effects were more pronounced for students in identified groups: African American, Latino/a, and students with relatively low ACT scores (Kuh, 2008).

Researchers have demonstrated that BGLOs have a positive effect on student-faculty relationships. Student-faculty relationships are another means by which an, African-American male student can visibly see another Black male accomplishing the goals that he seeks, namely, to graduate with his baccalaureate degree. Another reason why student-faculty relationships help these young men to overcome the difficulties that can sometimes be present on PWI campuses. This connection is especially true where

43

faculty or administrators are members of a BGLO themselves (L. Patton et al., 2011).

Organizations such as the Center for the Study of College Fraternity, which is a research

organization devoted to the educational experiences of BGLO members. One example is

that the Center for the Study of College Fraternity has partnered with other similar

organizations to produce a series of research projects and publications to highlight and

advance the strategies that deal with the cultural and educational outcomes associated

with BGLOs (Weathers, Mitchell, & Jones, 2013).

What BGLOs offer as a means of social engagement and thereby minority support

for African-American males, is to eradicate the low satisfaction with their college

experience as reported among African-American undergraduate students, in comparison

to other respondents to the NSSE (2005). Given that social engagement positively

influences student persistence for African-American males and it is, perhaps the most

important influential driver of student decisions about persistence (Kimbrough &

Hutcheson, 1998). Colleges and universities must examine those factors have

successfully impacted former African-American male students who have persisted and

eventually obtained their degree and why. They should be seeking more research and be

aware of the possibility of the presence of BGLOs as a means of positive social

engagement for African-American males in order to aid their current students in

persisting towards graduation. Specifically, how should PWI colleges and universities

increase student engagement among underrepresented minority groups, taking into

account the increasing diversity of students, their experiences and institutional dynamics

(Reason, 2009).

Title IV and student persistence. Understanding more about persistence rates for African-American males is significant because of the relationship between student persistence and a college or university's Title IV funding. An undergraduate student who decides to drop out of college is less likely to pay back their school loans. In fact, these former students are less likely to obtain jobs that allow them to get jobs that earn enough money to allow them to pay back their loans, which results in the loans going into default status (Huelsman, 2015). Kelchen (2018) found that the default rates for African-American students were 49%, whereas the default rate for White students was 20%, and the default rate for Asian students was 11%. Among the students had dropped out of college, African-Americans represented 65% compared to 38% of White students (Kelchen, 2018). When colleges or universities experience high number default rates on student loans, they risk the loss of their Title IV funding (U.S. Department of Education - Federal Student Aid, 2017).

Title IV of the Higher Education Act 1965 and its amendments in 1972 and 2008 provided students with access to education through grants and financial aid programs. Through this Act, Congress made a commitment to the American people to ensure that no student is denied the opportunity to pursue a college education because he or she lacks the financial means to do so. The HEA created funding opportunities such as the Pell Grant, Family Educational Loan, and the Ford Federal Direct Loan Program (20 USC §1070) to provide an ease of access for all students who so desire to obtain a college education. Funding sources also include access to campus-based work-study and tax policies that assist in the Congressional commitment to ease of access to obtain a post-secondary education (20 USC §1070).

For an institution of higher education to be eligible to receive these funds, the school must enter into a Program Participation Agreement (PPA) with the Secretary of Education (34 CFR §668.14(a)(1)). The PPA "conditions the initial and continued participation in any Title IV, HEA program upon compliance with the provisions of this part, the individual program regulations, and any additional conditions specified in the PPA that the Secretary of Education requires of the institution" (34 CFR §668.14(a)(1)).

The effect is that four-year colleges and universities are to be held accountable for their effectiveness in retaining students and graduating them (20 USC §1070). The HEA requires that colleges and universities be legitimately accountable for the federal funds that they receive; meaning that they must monitor and maintain an acceptable persistence rate. When students end up dropping out, they are more likely to default on their student loans and lower completion rates of the institution in which they were enrolled. A high default rate can result in an institution losing its ability to draw down Title IV funding. Most often colleges and universities have faced heightened scrutiny regarding Title IV and/or cash monitoring due to high numbers of students who default on their school loans (Stratford, 2015). A college or university that has their Title IV funds withheld to date due to unacceptable student persistence rates represents a college or university that has given little to no attention to those factors that influence students to persist and to obtain their degree (Hillman, Hicklan Fryar, & Crespin-Trujillo, 2017).

Colleges and universities depend on Title IV funding. The Department of Education uses Title IV funding as an incentive for schools to plan, develop, and execute acceptable persistence measures, which is intended to result in acceptable persistence rates for all students. When a college or university fails to develop a student persistence

plan for those racial groups that are historically lower than all other ethnic and gender groupings, the institution may face Title IV withholding and eventual closure. Another reason is that the college or university had failed in its purpose to prepare their students for gainful employment. Historically, schools have landed on the Title IV default list and have lost their federal funding due to student loan default rates topping 40% for one year or at least 30% for three consecutive years (Snider, 2014).

  Long-term effects of the lack student persistence. African-American males who withdraw from college will suffer adverse social, economic, and educational consequences. Pointedly, one's quality of life tends to be highly correlated to one's educational attainment (Astin, 1984). A college education is valuable since it opens the door to many opportunities that would not otherwise be available to most individuals. College-educated adults are more likely to be employed and they are more likely to earn more than others (Fisher, 2015). Many occupations are open only to those with specific degrees or certificates. Furthermore, higher levels of education are consistent with more access to health care and to pensions. People who have completed their 4-year degree are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors, to be active and engaged citizens, and to be in positions to provide better opportunities to their children (Baum, Ma, & Kurose, 2013). In other words, a college education not only affects the graduate, but has a positive influence in the lives of the graduate's family as well. An education determines, in large part, the degree of social mobility one has or will have in American society. Research has shown that children born to the highest-income families in 1984 were 74.5% more likely to attend college than those from the lowest-income families (Chetty, Hendren, Kline, Saez, & Turner, 2014).

Higher education is no longer an ideal but a necessity in order for the recipient to remain competitive in the work force. In order to obtain economic opportunity skills and education will determine an individual's success (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). As a result, a college education remains the best investment a student can make in his or her future (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). College graduates with a bachelor's degree typically earn 66% more than those with only a high school diploma and are far less likely to face unemployment. It is projected that by 2020, two-thirds of jobs will postsecondary education and/or training (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Ultimately, higher paying jobs usually require a college degree.

In the current climate in which half of all well-paying jobs require a postsecondary degree or technical training, a graduation rate of 50% for Black males effectively means that 50% are condemned to poverty. Because of the strong relationship between higher education and higher earnings, college attendance is a good proxy for income mobility (Chetty et al., 2014). When African-American males have such a high risk of poverty, it makes sense that their families will bear the economic, social, and educational consequences as well. Another circumstance that African-American men encounter when they fail to graduate is their inability to return to college as a non-traditional student. Thirdly, Black males with college loans, but without a college degree are more likely to default on those loans. Current statistics show that one third of people who owe for their student loans did not complete their college degree. The racial composition of the one-third is as follows: Hispanics and African- Americans are about twice as likely to carry student-loan debt: 34% of blacks and 28% of Hispanics have it, compared with 16% of Whites and 19% Asians.

Defaulted school loans are another barrier for Black males who seek to complete their degrees. These unpaid loans only contribute to a downward financial spiral for these African-American males. Regardless of race, women are no more likely to carry student loan debt than are men however (O'Shaughnessy, 2013). Lastly, there is some information that shows that African-American males who drop out of college have a higher propensity of jail time, whether short term or long term. A Black male born in 1991 has a 29% chance of spending time in prison at some point in his life. The figure for White males is 4% and for Hispanics, 16% (Mauer, 1999). When Black men are unable to reach their potential, the Black community and America suffers (Miller, 2017).

The nation is not immune from the spiraling effects of the high withdrawal rate of African-American male students either. The effects from a lack of student persistence among this racial and ethnic group affects the country as a whole. For example, as the United States attempts to be a leader in domestic and in global economic races, it will have to pay systemic attention to graduation minorities, not just enrolling them (E. Thomas, 2010). Recent reports have focused on the trends and challenges that higher education must address in order to enhance the effectiveness of the nation to compete in the global. When a significant portion of the country's population experiences high rates of unemployment and a lack of preparedness due to a lack of educational achievement, then the country as a whole lags behind other nations in the world's global economy.

The educational disengagement of African-American males does not exist in a vacuum. The United States can no longer afford to disregard this loss of human capital (R. Davis & Palmer, 2010). There are multiple reasons that colleges and universities

must examine what factors are the most successful in moving African-American males towards graduation.

BGLOs and social engagement. BGLOs have been a long-standing means of connectedness for African-American students at four-year institutions (Henry, 2012). (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001) found that sororities and fraternities are among the most popular out-of-class engagement venues for contemporary African-American undergraduates at PWIs (Harper, 2007).

African-American men may opt to engage in one of the historic BGLOs, most of which were founded around the turn of the 20th century (Henry, 2012). The BGLOs represent a common set of ideals that relate to serving one's university, community engagement and academic achievement at the undergraduate level (Avery, 2014). These social organizations have encouraged the educational pursuits, social growth, and maturity and community outreach that is often part of the successful African-American male educational experience (Henry, 2012). To date, there are few studies that document and examine the interrelationship of the efficacy of BGLOs as tools of support for student persistence and outlets for social engagement for African-American men studying at PWIs. Previous research highlights how BGLO have long been a venue of support and development for African-American males since their inception in the early 20th century (Harper & Quay, 2015), yet it remains unknown how African-American men who have successfully graduated from a PWI describe the influence of membership in a BGLO on their persistence.

Historically, BGLOs have been a successful way for students to find a means of social and academic support on college campuses. For example, in their 1992 study of

the student persistence rates of African-American students at a PWI, Schuh, Triponey, Heim, and Nishimura (1992) found that participation in BGLOs served as a much-needed source of social support for African-American undergraduate students on PWI campuses. They are the most popular out-of-class engagement venues for contemporary African-American students at PWIs and the organizations sponsor most of the culturally appealing social activities that members and non-members alike come to enjoy, and they provide a sort of haven of sorts from the racism, isolation and underrepresentation that African-American students often experience (Harper, 2007).

BGLOs have provided African-Americans with options as a learning community since their inception. They helped to shape the landscape of higher education and created avenues of social justice and civil reform at a time in our country's history where discrimination was not only legal but was part of America (Weathers et al., 2013). These organizations continue to produce leaders in the African-American community and the world through support of service-learning and giving back to those communities in which they may live, and work. Fraternities that are members of the NPHC emerged out of a movement that is in alignment with higher education values and goals (Weathers et al., 2013). What remains unknown is how is BGLOs provide social engagement for African-American males and if the reason or reasons that BGLO membership positively influences their decisions to persist.

As one research study discovered, data from interviews with 22 study participants revealed themes and patterns of student bonding, role modeling, service projects as examples of mentoring and leadership and cooperation among members as a means of minority student survival. Findings have implications for student affairs practitioners

interested in designing educational interventions to help those students with historical

statistical issues with persistence with one such group being African-American males

(Schuh et al., 1992).   Implications for practice identified include for college

administrators to engage fraternities as a means of social engagement (Asel, Seifert, &

Pascarella, 2009). Participation in fraternities can make students feel more emotionally

invested in and tied to their academic success (Pike, 2003). These groups improve peer

relations, student involvement as well as faculty-student relations (L. Patton, 2010).

  The supposition is that BGLOs, in addition to promotion of shared identities,

provide mentoring relationships and structured opportunities for thoughtful reflection that

contribute towards African-American male students increased retention and persistence

(Fisher, 2015). My study intends to determine how participants view their membership

in BGLOs and what lessons are culled for changes to practice. A few research studies

exist to support this idea. Notwithstanding the potential positive influence of BGLOs as

agents of social engagement, Black male collegians benefit from factors that include;

common aspirations and goals; social integration; minority faculty engagement and

student organization involvement. These factors contribute to higher education's way of

knowing about retaining African-American men (Simmons, 2013). African-American

students who join BGLOs seem to engage as they take part in campus life, perform better

academically, and seek to develop meaningful student-faculty relationships. BGLOs are

means of social engagement because they help students eradicate potential feelings of

isolation especially among African-American male students. When Black male students

at PWIs strongly identify with their cultural heritage, there is an increase in their self-

esteem, self-efficacy and academic motivation, which is important to the academic and professional development of Black students at PWIs (Ross, Powell, & Henriksen, 2016)

BGLOs appear to be a critical tool that has proven to be successful in assisting African-American males to feel connected to campus life and faculty while students at PWIs. Campus involvements and social networks provide the social and cultural capital necessary to succeed on a PWI campus (Strayhorn, 2008). To date, the published empirical studies and articles on the subject matter fall short of examining the academic-related outcomes and the in-class behaviors of African-American fraternity members at PWIs (Harper, 2007). These opportunities, in turn, may help students in their interactions with faculty and collaborative learning (L. Patton et al., 2011). One example of a positive outcome of BGLO membership is found in a study in which college seniors who were members of Greek organizations scored higher than non-Greek students on three of four measures of student engagement and both measures of student learning (Pike, 2003).

One reason that NPHC fraternities help to influence student persistence among their members is because their membership is a desirable means of cultural connectedness and the organizations lend themselves as an influential factor in an African-American male collegian's decision to persist. BGLO membership creates and fosters a sense of campus belonging for their members via chapter membership. African-American males feel a nearly tangible sense of community (R. Johnson, 2013) when they become members of a BGLO due to the organization's sense of connectiveness. A sense of belonging, whether with their peers, in the classroom or on campus is a crucial part of

the college experience. It can affect a student's degree of academic achievement or even whether they stay in school (Strayhorn, 2012a).

The GPA requirement to pledge a BGLO and their social attractiveness work hand in hand as part an agent of social engagement. Because aspiring members must have a GPA requirement of 2.5 or better in order to join, a student typically decides that not only will they remain a student at the college or university, but they also engage academically to satisfy the GPA requirement for membership. Thus, students looking to earn their way into BGLOs start moving toward enhanced engagement at the very moment that they decide to pledge. By peer involvement and observation of campus life, an incoming freshman can figure out early on that, if he wants to be in one of these groups, he has to spend his entire first year academically engaged. The student sees the value in the membership in the BGLO and they become invested in their own academic success in order to earn the grades in order to get into the fraternity.

Most importantly, the membership offered by BGLOs provides a much-needed outlet for cross-cultural engagement, community service, civic participation, campus politics and social support (Harper & Harris, 2006). African-American fraternity members tend to embrace a stronger sense of self-esteem and racial identity than do their non-Greek African-American male counterparts (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). It is common to see minority students create their own social communities, a sense of belonging and social organizations that can often take the form of a BGLO (J. Thomas, Wolters, Horn, & Kennedy, 2014). What remains unknown is how this level of connections influences persistence.

Where colleges and universities fail to acknowledge their roles in establishing the importance of cultural capital such as BGLOs and the importance of social integration of all of their students, those students who are neglected often experience student isolation and a student's subsequent decision to leave becomes imminent.

The Conceptual Models

Tinto's (1987) student development theory suggests that there are patterns to students' departure from a campus. After analysis of the multiple causes of the reasons why student's leave college, one may deduce that student attrition is a barometer of the social and intellectual health of college life and the student's experience at the college. The quality of faculty-student interaction and the student's integration into the school are central factors in student departure under this theory (Tinto, 1987). This theory prophetically suggested that effective retention lies in the college's commitment to students. Tinto (1987) theorized that there is a vital connection between learning and persistence that arises from the interplay between involvement and the quality of student effort. Student involvement means involvement with one's peers and with the faculty, both inside and outside of the classroom (Milem & Berger, 1997).

However, the answers that institutions of higher learning seek to help with African-American male student persistence are not plenteous despite long-standing conceptual models. Research on why students leave a postsecondary institution prior to completion does not tell institutional leaders or state policy makers what to do to help students, especially underrepresented groups like African-American males, stay. Another problem is that research on African-American male student attrition and persistence tends to be conceptualized in terms that, while theoretically appealing, are too abstract to be

practically useful. These ideas continue to be abstract due to a lack of research done specifically on this group of men. For example, it is useful to know that student engagement matters for student success, but PWIs still remain clueless as to how to promote and support the types of social involvement necessary for persistence and academic success for Black males. Third, a good deal of research, especially deficit-focused research, focuses on events outside of college or on student attributes that are not easily amenable to institution action (Tinto & Pusser, 2006).

Nagasawa and Wong (1999) theorized that minority students face barriers on PWI campuses which include cultural and racial isolation, unfamiliarity with college life and open hostility. In the face of these hurdles, often minority students, to include African-American males, will seek their own and will attempt to find ways in which to survive the isolating milieu. One of these methods is to form and participate in ethnic social networks rooted in their ethnic subculture in order to replace the hostility with positive feelings of kinship and acceptance (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). These subgroups can be formal or informal and often serve as the student's affinity group. Specifically, the ethnic social networks serve: 1) to reinforce excellence in academics for minority students, 2) to provide social support and information for students in navigating the foreign waters of higher education, and 3) to increase solidarity and pride in members (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). If they can identify minority students who look like them and see that they made it, the minority students are more inclined to follow suit. For many minority students, social networking and social engagement on PWI campuses integrate minority students into college social and academic systems and thereby maximize the students' survival in college and thereby their persistence.

Fischer (2007) found that minority students are more likely to have a negative perception of the racial climate at a PWI. Because of a sense of alienation, these students are less satisfied with their college experience and are more likely to leave college (Baker & Robnett, 2012). Racial minorities at PWIs often express feelings of invisibility and discrimination from other students and members of the college community (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Hurtado, 1992; Nettles, 1991). According to many researchers (Feagin et al., 1996; Hurtado, 1992; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999; S. Smith & Moore, 2002), minority students who attend traditionally White colleges are less likely than other racial groups to feel that they are a part of the campus environment, and racial minorities are more likely to be unsatisfied with their college experience than are Whites (Feagin et. al, 1996).

Today, the terms *academic* and *social integration* have become linked to improved student retention and, by extension, categories by which to differentiate certain predicator variables (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). Many of the studies that focus on the persistence issues of Black men focus on their deficits and fail to provide any attention to the ways in which they can succeed at PWIs (Harper & Quay, 2015). This approach is often referred to as deficit-focused research (Irby, 2012). Going forward, researchers should avoid focusing on the alleged deficits of Black male students and instead examine the strategies Black men have used to resist and overcome the internalization of misconceptions of members of their racial groups and how they responded productively to stereotypes (Fisher, 2015). For African-American males to succeed on a PWI campus in today's society, colleges and university faculty and staff must examine those factors that positively influenced those African-American males that have already graduated from a PWI. PWIs must do more than theorize and give lip

57

service to their desires to ensure the success of their African-American male students. Actions have to follow their words as they prioritize research that gives them the answers that they need. Without the success of their African-American male students, their campuses are not nearly as diverse as they purport to be. With significant attrition in this racial and gender group, there is a social dominance of the prevailing culture on their campus which is ratified by the school's lack of action. A fresh focus is needed to pursue insights that clarify the distinctions between academic success via integration and social integration.

Student development theory examines how students learn and grow during their college years (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Many college faculty and staff members use student development theory in their attempts to understand how some students can succeed where others fail given the same set of stressors. These observations of student behavior become important where college personnel attempt to provide student programs that are based on the needs of their students in comparison to their developmental stages (Evans et al., 2010). Student development theory helps researchers and academicians to understand where a student is developmentally within a human development continuum. College personnel can use student development theory to complement the academic offerings on campus with co-curricular activities/organizations that lend themselves to the development and needs of their entire student population, not just the majority. One important element of this theory is the idea that student development tasks are skills and competencies that become mastered by the student when they gain mastery over their environment. Optimal student development requires an environment that is balanced between challenge and support. Crisis in

student development will always result from prolonged disequilibrium or a lack of skills to manage a situation.

Arthur Chickering (2018) developed vectors that established opportunities for student development. They include, developing competence; managing emotions, autonomy to independence; developing mature interpersonal relationships; establishing identity; developing purpose; and developing integrity (Chickering, 2018). Colleges and universities use critical race theory to create and implement policies and practices in higher education. This study considers critical race theory due to its importance in the development of college student programming and which existing programs are fully supported.

Summary

More research and study are needed to advance the literature that aims to examine the success strategies of undergraduate African-American men pursuing their educational goals at PWIs. Qualitative case studies provide a good opportunity to capture and identify the experiences of former African-American collegians as they sought out campus organizations, affinity groups, institutionally sponsored assistance in their attempts to achieve academic success. It is suggested that the persistence of these former collegians is largely attributable to their formation of personal and academic networks to persist until graduation (Asel et al., 2009), but gaps in the literature exist regarding African-American men who are members of BGLOs (Black & Bimper, 2017). More work is needed to reflect those experiences of those former African-American college students in order to help current African-American male college students.

The significant trend of the lack of persistence among African-American male collegians has been well documented by other researchers like Harper (2007), Asel, et al. (2009), and Giuffrida & Douthit (2010). Researchers have identified statistics for this underrepresented minority group and discussed the idea of why these students do not succeed on many PWI campuses. A deficit-centered analysis of why African-American males do not remain until graduation have been offered and only recently have researchers reasoned that this approach is faulty (Harper & Quay, 2015). The findings from this study can inform colleges and universities about important elements identified by the participants, all of whom are successful graduates who can speak to their persistence decisions. More research is needed to identify the ways in which Black males who have previously graduated from PWIs have engaged socially in such a way as to that positively influenced them to persist and to ultimately remain until graduation. The following chapter details the methods of this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The following section describes the qualitative methods used for this research and reviews the epistemology guiding the study and the research design. A discussion on site and participant selection, data collection, and data analysis is also included. Data were examined as it relates to Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure, using Delgado's Critical Race Theory (1995) as well for analysis. Chapter 3 concludes with my subjectivity statement and a review of the study's trustworthiness and ethical consideration.

The purpose of this study is to understand and analyze how African-American men now view their college experiences as a member of a BGLO at a PWI 25 years later. Another element of the study is whether the fraternity members perceive the influence of their BGLO membership on their persistence and what memories of their BGLO membership are most salient?

Given the research intentions, qualitative methodology was selected to analyze the impact of BGLO membership on African-American, male student's decisions to persist at a PWI. This methodology provides a good match for the research questions because qualitative research methodology begins with the observations and experiences of the participants (van Manen, 2014). Those observations are then used to create theory and generate conclusions on the topic. The participant's observations give life to their real-life experiences of African-American male students at a PWI and bring their voices to the center of the findings.

Qualitative method is most appropriate for this study because it allows for discovery and exploration. Essentially, qualitative methods seek to explore and explain phenomena through the use of data that is provided by narratives, memories or pictures/object (Creswell, 2012). Another characteristic of qualitative studies is that they have less structured interview techniques. The researcher can gather information through interviews and observations. Often these interviews use questions of the participants that are open-ended in order to allow them to expound on their memories and/or observations. With qualitative studies, the research design is more flexible than rigid on purpose and the results may be subjective. That is, the results from the study may reveal inherent biases, values and/or experiences that can affect the results (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative methods merge participant data collection and analysis. The overall goal is to understand the perspective of these former collegians with the perspective that their prior experiences are no longer marginalized and instead are brought to the center of focus. Specifically, I will employ phenomenology as a method. Phenomenology is a branch of the study of philosophy which examines the human experience. In phenomenology, the ultimate source of all meaning is the human experience. Human experience also serves to attach value to those experiences (Armstrong, 2005).

For this qualitative research, I conducted an in-depth study in which the participants will be asked to explain the phenomenon of their college experiences while students at a PWI (Creswell, 1998; Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 1998, 2002; M. Patton, 1990; Whitt, 1996). Their experiences will provide a holistic view through the use of open-ended questions via participant perspectives in their natural setting (Creswell, 1998). Accordingly, my study addressed the following research question:

How do African-American men now view their college experiences as a member of a BGLO at a PWI 25 years later?

      a. How do the fraternity members perceive the influence of their BGLO membership on their persistence?

      b. What memories of their BGLO membership are most salient?

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a tool in qualitative research methodology and arises out of a strand of philosophy. It became a distinct philosophical project in the mid-1890s by sociologist Edmund Husserl. Husserl (1970) argued that we are already in the world and most fundamental and basic experiences are already full of meaning. Midway through the last century, hermeneutic phenomenology became a basic way to understand human existence (van Manen, 2014). The task of the philosopher, scientist and/or theorist, according to phenomenology, is to have study participants describe the structures of their experience and their imaginations, in relationship to other persons, and the situatedness of the human subject in society and history (Armstrong, 2005). The overall purpose of hermeneutic phenomenology as we know it today is to open nearly any human experience, bring to light and reflect upon the meaning of it. Researchers using this method select this methodology as they attempt to describe phenomena as they appear in everyday life, before they have been theorized, interpreted, explained, and otherwise abstracted, with the knowledge that his process is ever-evolving (Goble, 2011). The best manner in which to understand human experience is not to read about it or study it from a distance but rather to engage in the collection of reflections of experiences.

Hermeneutic phenomenology was important to this study since it helped build understanding regarding the factors that contributed to African-American male student

63

persistence at 4-year PWIs of higher learning. Specifically, study participants, African-American former collegians, were asked about their experiences as minority students at a PWI in the southeastern region of the United States. Their memories and encounters as a student will be studied in relationship to why they chose to remain in school and obtain their degrees. This phenomenological approach also involved my own experience as an African-American male and a member of a BGLO. The incidents and occurrences during my matriculation at a PWI acted as a guide to assist in the understanding of human experience and meaning.

The hermeneutic circle theory describes the circularity of interpretation and it suggests that no individual memory can be understood without reference to its cultural, historical and literary context (Laverty, 2003). The whole text as well as the individual parts must be understood within reference to one another. The hermeneutic circle theory is logically based and would seem to, on its face, prevent the possibility of objective knowledge (Laverty, 2003). The whole point of this type of research is to make sense of the jagged pieces of memory and experience in relationship to the world. While the limitations of the hermeneutic reasoning are acknowledged, there are grounds for the reasonable interpretation and understanding of the findings in qualitative studies, even though these findings cannot be absolute. The basic beliefs of hermeneutic phenomenology are that the world is external and objective. Another basic tenant is that the observer is independent. Lastly, another final element of this type of qualitative approach is that science is value-free (Cassell & Symon, 2004).
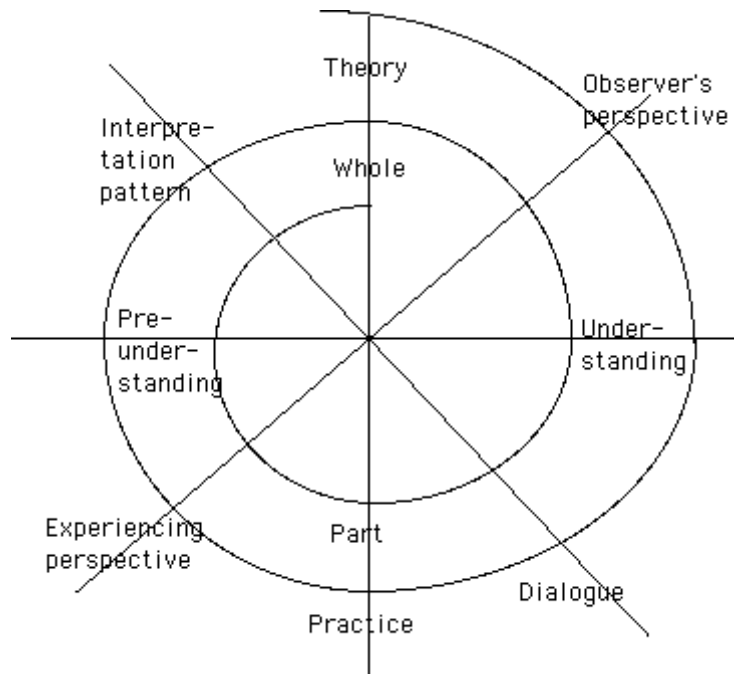
Figure 1. Diagram of how the reader moves between the text and context to get closer to the meaning of the text. Reprinted from *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research* (3rd ed.), by M. Alvesson & K. Skoldberg. Copywritten with permission 2018 Alvesson and Skoldberg.

Central to a hermeneutic approach is my role and experiences. I, as the researcher, need to focus on facts as they are relative to this study. It is the researcher's role to look for causality and connection among the fundamental laws of hermeneutic phenomenology. It is the responsibility of the researcher to reduce the phenomena down to its simplest form and proceed from there. Validity as it relates to phenomenological research is best described in its relationship to intentionality (Cassell & Symon, 2004). Because the study's credibility corresponds with and through my intentional relationship with the phenomenon, a dynamic and intentional relationship ties me and the participants. Thus, the produced text and all the positionality of me and the participants becomes vital to the study (Vagle, 2009). Because of this relationship, I must resist the urge to define or find meanings as the study progresses. Yet, I cannot bracket my own experiences in

65

this case given my intimate experiences with BGLO and being an African-American man. Instead, my background becomes important to the study.

In practical application, this means that my personal beliefs, theories, experiences and/or assumptions must be suspended because they could mislead the meaning of the participants information and limit the required openness of the study. I must also refrain from defining what is yet unknown. The interaction between participant and researcher must be freely given. As such, they must bridle the event of any meaning or understanding so that they do not conclude prematurely.

In conducting this research, it is impossible to ignore my own experiences as they relate to the topic. Bridling seeks to direct researcher-participant communications in an open and respectful way (Vagle, 2009). Bridling has three components.

> 1. Like "bracketing," bridling is "the restraining of one's pre-understanding in the form of personal beliefs, theories, and other assumptions that otherwise would mislead the understanding of meaning and thus limit the research options. 2. It is also about the "understanding as a whole" not just the "pre-understanding"- this is done so as to not "understand too quickly, too carelessly." It is an "open and alert attitude of activity waiting for the phenomenon to show up and display itself within the relationship. 3. It is forward looking rather than backward looking, allowing "the phenomenon to present itself." (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008, pp. 129- 130)

Obviously, it is imperative to remove biases that may taint findings, but my analysis is certainly informed by personal history. However, as I conducted the research, I constantly did a pulse-check to be sure to avoid closemindedness and I allowed the data

to tell the story. I grew up aware of Greek life on college campuses, because my mother pledged Delta Sigma Theta sorority as a college student before I was born. She was part of the "marching line" process and her sorority sisters constituted a significant portion of her peer group. After college they remained a substantial part of my mother's life as I remember them as they babysat for my brother and me, we played with their children, and we would even use her conventions as our family vacation every other year. My brother and I attended family friendly events sponsored by her sorority or sponsored by the NPHC. As a young person, I participated in community service projects and social activities dating back to my formative years.

By my late high school years, members of my peer group were starting go off to college where they would either join a BGLO or come home and regale those of us left behind with fantastic stories of Greekdom. This, along with beginning to realize that many of leaders in my church and/or community at-large were Fraternity men. So, by the time I began studying at VCU in 1987 I had a spent nearly a lifetime exposed to Greek culture. I had never seen a marching line firsthand, but that changed in Fall. By the Spring of 1988, I had seen several.

I did not become an Omega until 1992, which is outside the time period of this study. Marching lines were no longer allowed, but I was certainly aware them by way of local folklore. My own membership did, however give me certain credibility or culture capital amongst the participants, and each of them acknowledged that my membership made them feel more comfortable about sharing experiences.

In my research, I have found that my attempts to bridle require me to focus on the experiences of the participants and resist the urge to define their memories with those of

67

my own as an African-American male student who attended a PWI in the southeastern region of the United States. I observed in my own college experience that individuals who sought membership in BGLOs did so as a means of social engagement and this experience helped them persist to graduation. Bridling is imperative given my parallel experience to those of the participants. The meaning of their experiences as told in their narratives will be defined by analysis, not by similarities to the collegiate experience of this researcher.

My own experiences help inform my understanding of what the participants are saying, but do not override the data that I collected. According to Vagle (2009), bridling best practices include the responsibility of the researcher to create a bridling journal to capture their wonderings, questions and ideas. I wrote an initial bridling statement, which includes all of their pre-understandings and assumptions about the phenomenon. Lastly, I used bridling during the data collection and analysis phase of the research (Vagle, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for my study employs Delgado's (1995) Critical Race Theory (CRT), Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure, and Assmann's (1995) Collective Memory Theory. Many social scientists have use critical race theory in qualitative research. They understand and acknowledge that CRT is an invaluable weapon for critical scholars who seek to examine the role of race, racism, and other forms of oppression in the lives of people of color within education (Huber, 2008). Most often qualitative research is a tool to represent or give voice to the powerless and excluded. The viewpoints of those individuals in the world of higher education that felt

powerless were expressed through qualitative research. In discussions of the element of race, social scientists viewed racism as a regular element of American culture (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Through storytelling, those people who have been previously marginalized could narrate their own personal stories and expound upon them where necessary. Critical race theory tells the stories of average Americans and has contributed to the research in education and the experiences of African-Americans (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

CRT began as a theory in American law schools in the mid to late 1980s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The theory suggests that White supremacy and racial power are maintained over time and that the law plays a major role in the maintenance of this power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theory has been adopted in many other fields, such as education. Critical race methodologies, such as counter stories, allow researchers to have the tools they need to conduct critical race research, guided by an explicit anti-racist, anti-hierarchical, racial, and social justice agenda (Huber, 2008). As it applies to the field of education, the theory identifies the dominance of White culture and norms in education. These expectations are most apparent at PWIs and the practice continues to be problematic because it leaves little space for other cultures and societal norms.

Carter G. Woodson (1990) wrote that the same educational process which inspires and stimulates an oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples in his attempt to identify a school's role in structuring inequality and demotivating African-American students. The result is that non-White

students feel estranged from the very institution that they are attempting to call home for the next four to six years. Yet, critical race theory falls short because it does not offer ways in which institutional actions should address student experiences. Again, a PWIs may acknowledge that critical race theory highlights the structures in place that play a role in their attrition of minority students, but the theory fails to offer a solution for persistence decisions for minorities like African-American males beyond pointing out that problems exist in current structures and cultures.

The paradigm of CRT provides a useful perspective for this study given the focus on African-American men. CRT as used in this study will inform and expand the approach used by PWI to understanding race as it applies to their campuses. One of the tenets of CRT is that society accepts racism as an ordinary and permanent fixture in life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Therefore, for the administration of any PWI to remedy its issues surrounding the failure to persist among its African-American male student population, there will need to be an unmasking and exposing of the true nature of subtle racism in all of its possible permutations (Naidoo, Pillay, & Conley, 2018).

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure provides an explanation of why student's leave college. His theory of student departure offers guidance for institutions of higher learning about the factors that influence college student's decisions to leave college or to remain and obtain their degree. Students start school with pre-college education and preparedness, family and individual attributes, and commitments to finishing college. However, these same students often leave college because of academic difficulties, their inability to resolve their educational and occupational goals, or because of their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the

70

institution (Tinto, 1993). What is most important is how these students see themselves

fitting into the collective campus culture in both an educational and social context. The

manner in which students view themselves and conduct self-assessment is characterized

by their grade performance and intellectual development in the academic arena and the

manner in which they socially interact with peer groups and faculty (State University,

2012). This type of academic and social integration work together to influence their

institutional commitments, which mirrors their decisions to persist.

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure was later amended to add as an

influential variable, a student's extraneous commitments outside of the college or

university and their intention to remain enrolled (Tinto, 2016). The overall theme is that

any college student who does not achieve some level of academic integration or social

integration will make the decision to leave the school (State University, 2012).

Sampling

This study used purposeful sampling, which is a non-probability sample selected

by the characteristics of a population and the objective of the study (Crossman, 2019).

This type of sample is most often used when the researcher needs a targeted sample

quickly and where proportionality is not the primary focus (Crossman, 2019). The

participants for this study were selected using the following parameters: Critical race

methodologies provide researchers with the tools needed to conduct critical race research,

guided by an explicit anti-racist, anti-hierarchical, racial, and social justice agenda

African-American, male, attended one of the two PWIs that are used in this study

between the years of 1985 and 1990; joined a BGLO during their time as an

undergraduate students; and who persisted to graduation. Purposeful sampling allows me

the opportunity to achieve intensity and variation in the sample (M. Patton, 2002). Intensity focuses on identifying and examining information-rich cases, and variation refers to the discovery of themes that cut across diverse areas (Creswell, 1994). Next, I outline how I will use purposeful sampling to pick the case sites and the participants.

PWI site selection. The PWIs selected for this study are both located in metropolitan environments in the southeastern region of the United States. Both sites are located in the same state to allow for similarity of context. As Whitt (1996) noted, campus culture is a deeply embedded aspect of the institution, and the relationship between aspects of culture and students' experiences can be difficult to identify and understand.

Both campuses are public universities and are both are located in Virginia. VCU is located in central Virginia and ODU is located in the Tidewater area of the state. I selected the institutions for two primary reasons. First both institutions are large PWIs. For the purposes of this study a large PWI contains a minimum of 18,000 undergraduate students enrolled. Both institutions have the requisite number of enrollees now and had them during the time period that is the focus for this study (1985-1990). From the 15 public universities throughout the state of Virginia, only five met the undergraduate enrollment criteria of being large universities. These five universities consisted of James Madison University (JMU), Virginia Polytechnical University (Virginia Tech), George Mason University (GMU), VCU, and ODU. Of all the universities that met the initial enrollment criteria, VCU and ODU graduated the most African-American students between the years of 1985-1990.

With all of the schools, the statistics provide a flashlight into the number of degrees awarded to different gender and ethnic groups. The number of degrees awarded to African-American males are compared to those awarded to White, Asian, Native American and Latino males. For example, at JMU, in 1991, there were 908 White males awarded degrees, 52 African-American males were awarded degrees, 13 Hispanic males received degrees, 8 Asian-American males received degrees, and 1 Native American male received a degree. Alone, the numbers do not communicate the lack of student persistence among African-American males. Far fewer of them decide to continue their studies to the point of graduation. What standalone numbers also do not show is that although at JMU for the same time period there were a total of 144 degrees awarded to African-American students. However, 92 of those degrees were awarded to African-American females. The tables located in Appendices A to H show the actual numbers which are grouped by race and gender for the school years 1987 through 1991. The information in the tables provide appropriate perspective since they allow comparison between groups to show the disparity among African-American men at various institutions in Virginia. Thus, the selection of each institution was based on the assumption that the social significance of race and culture in the campus environment would maximize the likelihood that students could identify, comprehend, and articulate how campus cultures shaped their college experiences. Additionally, both campuses have undertaken to improve their completion rates for African-Americans overall with programming and mentoring geared to serve the specialized needs of African-American students, thus serve as good sites for this exploratory study.

Also, VCU and ODU demographically mirror the population of many PWIs with the presence of BGLOs. For example, both campuses had individual undergraduate chapters of each of the four historically Black Greek fraternities during the years focused on by this study. Beginning with the 1985-1986 school year to the 1989-1990 school year, this study focuses on African-American students who attended and graduated.

The years of focus for this study are of particular interest and importance since in 1985, the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) voted to standardize the pledge process for its member organizations to a 4-week indoctrination period. The NPHC serves as governing body of all of the traditional nine BGLOs. It acts as an advocate for issues that affect member organizations and promotes unity among all of the Black Greek fraternities and sororities. Currently its membership is made up of over 1.5 million individuals nationally and internationally (NPHC, n.d.). The organization was founded on May 10, 1930, on the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C. and became incorporated in 1937. In 1985, the NPHC was comprised of only contained eight organizations; Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. (NPHC, n.d.).

In 1985, the NPHC became increasingly concerned about the way in which undergraduates were joining member organizations. In turn, they introduced a policy to regulate the membership initiation process by allowing new members to join with an "above ground process." This term referred to the fact that this type of process involved members completing their initiation activities in the open view of their peers. Students

and faculty members were able to see "pledges" or "lines" as they were required to dress alike, eat at the same time and perform the same tasks. This change required the local graduate chapters for each fraternity and sorority to take a more active role in the selection and education of new members. However, despite their attempt to control the new member initiations, there were still incidents of hazing outside of what was allowed (Greene, Walden-Cole, & Cromwell, 2017). These complaints involved students that had been had been abused, or in some instances, fatally wounded. So, the NPHC took reformative action once again (Marriott, 1990).

The NPHC's Council of Presidents met in February 1990 and reformed the pledge process in an effort to prevent and eliminate all incidents of hazing. The NPHC suspended pledge classes altogether hoping to remove the negative patina from the beauty of their dedication to traditional image of scholarship, leadership, and service (Marriott, 1990). The NPHC essentially decided that pledging would no longer be a requirement and that the new membership intake process would be more appropriate to accomplish the goals of mentorship, scholastics and community service (Marriott, 1990).

From the 1985-1986 school year to the 1989-1990 school year, both campuses had chapters of the first four BGLO fraternities on their campuses. The most recently founded BGLO fraternity, Iota Phi Theta was specifically excluded from this study because it was not a member of the NPHC until 1997 and therefore was not a member of the council during the selected years of this study (NPHC, n.d.).

The following BGLO fraternities were included in the study, Alpha Phi Alpha and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. These two organizations were chosen because they were then, and are now the largest of all four BGLO. Alpha Phi Alpha (2018) has over

200,000 members. Omega Psi Phi (n.d.) Fraternity currently has over 250,000 members.

Phi Beta Sigma (n.d.) reports its membership totals over 185,000 members. And Kappa

Alpha Psi (n.d.) has more than 125,000 members. In addition, to having the largest

membership base, these two organizations stand out as having a long list of distinguished

members. The respective rosters of both Omega Psi Phi and Alpha Phi Alpha are stellar

and include several noteworthy members. Omega Psi Phi boasts of members which

include: L. Douglas Wilder, Dr. Bill Cosby, and Carter G. Woodson to name a few while

Alpha Phi Alpha can count Dr. Martin Luther King, Thurgood Marshall, and W.E.B

DuBois along with many others among their ranks.

Importantly, each of these BGLOs benefitted from the internal support from the

university and external support such as the graduate chapters, graduate advisors, other

community fraternal members and alumni chapter members. During the proposed years

involved in this study, each campus created a particular and identifiable culture for the

African-American men attending college at this time which more than likely served as

their means of social engagement. The involvement of these BGLO members and

collegiate men in this study will shed light on their experiences in this type of social

engagement. The goal is to learn more about how these experiences of involvement

influenced the college persistence decisions of these men.

Participant selection. Participant selection included African-American males

who graduated from one of the two PWIs that are part of the study, and the participants

were undergraduates between 1985 and 1990, and who during their undergraduate years

joined a BGLO. The time period between 1985 and 1990 was selected because it

included a time frame in the BGLO history in which new members were pledged through

an organized process of initiation that was very visible to the student observer. New members were brought in on new "lines" often in the spring semester. During the process, students had the opportunity to see their peers join an organization that was dedicated to scholarship and service. The fraternities of each chapter allowed their new member process to act as the commercial for future members and as a means of social engagement. The final criteria in the participant selection process will be that the participants successfully graduated with their baccalaureate degree. Each participant made a decision to persist until graduation in order to be included in the study. This study focused on how African-American men now view their college experiences as a member of a BGLO at a PWI 25 years later. It also examined how the fraternity members perceive the influence of their BGLO membership on their persistence and what memories of their BGLO membership are most salient?

The fraternities on each campus allowed their new member process to be the commercial advocating that students should join as a means of social engagement. The final criteria were that the participants persisted and graduated with their baccalaureate degree. BGLO membership and its ability to serve as a type of social engagement for each of the study participants was the focus of questions in creating participants' collective memories.

Data Collection

This study used a qualitative approach to understand how fraternal membership in a BGLO enhances the retention and persistence decisions of its African-American male members. Specifically, I examined the positive impact and influence that membership in a BGLO had on African-American male members and the way in which their decisions to

obtain their college degrees was positively impacted and influenced. To gain appropriate

sample participants, I emailed solicitations in order to identify other African-American

males as participants (Appendix A). Each potential participant was asked a series of

initial questions via email in order to see if he was a proper fit for the study using the

criteria set forth herein. I also used snowball sampling, a nonprobability sample

technique whereby existing study subjects help to recruit more participants from among

their acquaintances (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004). Most often researchers use

snowball sampling in which the sample pool is rare or limited to a small number of

potential members. With snowball sampling, the researcher asks the initials subject or

subjects to help identify or locate people who fit the study criteria (Lewis-Beck et al.,

2004). This referral phenomenon helped to provide a larger pool of study participants.

Once I identified my participants, I set up an initial interview with each of them.

At this first meeting, I asked them to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix B).

The goal was to elicit participants' responses and to gain their perspectives on factors

they perceive as vital to their decisions to persist towards graduation. Open-ended

questions are the preferred method that allow study participants to provide detailed

accounts of their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

I visited each of the site universities to gain an understanding into the fraternities'

organizational structure and other relevant behaviors and activities. Supplemental data

for each BGLO and PWI was obtained from each organizations' and institutions'

websites. The data site visits aided in understanding the context for the lived experiences

of the participants.

One of the characteristics of qualitative research calls for participants to create data using their own voices (Simmons, 2013). The memories of African-American male college graduates who attended and graduated from large PWI located in the south eastern region of the United States were elicited and recorded. Pseudonyms were created to protect the identities of the study participants.

Interview protocol. An interview protocol is an instrument used to guide inquiry. Researchers develop interview protocol to plan out the manner in which they ask questions for specific information related to aims of the study (Castillo-Monyoya, 2016). Researchers can enhance the reliability of their interview protocols and the quality of their data refining them through the interview protocol refinement framework. A strong interview can elicit rich, focused meaningful data that captures the experiences of the participants. The interview protocol refinement framework encompasses the following four steps: 1) ensuring the interview questions that align with research questions, 2) constructing an inquiry-based conversation, 3) receiving feedback on interview protocols, and 4) piloting the interview protocol (Castillo-Monyoya, 2016; see Appendix C for a copy of the interview protocol). The interview protocol was piloted with a former BGLO graduate who does not meet the timeline requirement (graduated 1985-1990). Adjustments to the protocol were made based on this feedback.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of the collected data, I assumed that the results reflect a careful description of the precise details of the descriptive memories as presented to the consciousness of the researcher (Giorgi, 2009). This presumes that the experiences of the participants are real while the objects at which those acts are directed are reduced to what

79

appears as psychologically relevant to the particular experience being described (Giorgi, 2009). The stages of analysis included 1) assuming phenomenology, 2) reading the entire interview to attain a sense of the whole experience of the participant, 3) determining the primary meaning units, 4) transforming the meaning units to psychological statements, and 5) synthesizing the general or essential structure of experience based on the memories of the participants (Giorgi, 2009).

The process of coding and writing memos in the analysis of qualitative date is important the aid the researcher in remembering the research question. A code in qualitative research is a word or a short phrase that is used to summarily describe the language or visual data to which it refers. The code will usually summarize or condense date, not simply reduce it. Coding can be done in a number of different ways. It can be predetermined by being deductive or a priori, coding can be emergent or a combination of the two (Saldana, 2009). Most researchers find that a combination of priori codes and emergent codes are used in qualitative analysis.

Coding helped keep me focus on summary topics as they relate to the study (Stuckey, 2015). Supplemental memos helped me construct and interpret the codes. I used a combination of both priori coding and emergent coding. There are phrases and wording that came from the individual interviews since I share some of their similar experiences as an African-American male who attended a PWI and joined a BGLO. However, I remained open to the idea of emergent coding out of necessity since critical race theory and collective memory theory allowed participants to discuss their own singular experiences will may differ from the norm. Coding techniques included extensive review of the interview transcripts and the placement of comments in the

80

margin where appropriate. The coding process helped reveal patterns in the data (Stuckey, 2015).

The second cycle of coding methods used the grounded theory approach of axial coding. Axial coding identifies the core category or phenomenon and related categories. It then looks to examine the features and dimensions of that causal conditions for that core category and strategies to deal with it. Additionally, axial coding attempts to look at intervening conditions that may lead to the core category and any associated consequences (Creswell, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Researchers, Lincoln and Guba (1985) established evaluative criteria whereby they reason that trustworthiness of a research study is critical to evaluating the worth of the study. Trustworthiness involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility surrounds the truth of the findings of the study in question and tends to be the most important of the criteria for trustworthiness. Credibility looks at internal validity and determines whether standard procedures were used in the study. In this study, credibility was established as I used established qualitative research procedures and protocols to conduct this study. Transferability shows that the findings have applicability in other contexts. With transferability, researchers want readers to know how applicable the findings of the current study are to their situations. Here, transferability is indicated in the application of the study's findings to those African-American male students who are having trouble persisting towards graduation. Dependability means that the study's findings are consistent and could be replicated. Most often, dependability refers to the stability of the

data over time and over the conditions of the study. Confirmability denotes that a degree

of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents

to the exclusion of the researcher's bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A statement which acknowledges the researcher's limitations surrounding this study is

included herein. Additionally, I kept detailed notes about their observations concerning

the study as it progressed. To effectively establish trustworthiness, I established the

procedures and protocols necessary for the study's efficacy.

Trustworthiness was established by the use of respondent validation throughout

the study. All study participants were asked to provide feedback as to the accuracy of the

collected data. I received this feedback via emails, phone calls and text messages. In the

case of any inaccuracies, I altered the transcripts to reflect the corrections (Merriam,

2009). I used established techniques for conducting qualitative research to achieve and

ensure trustworthiness, such as, prolonged engagement, persistent observation (from the

participants), triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy

and member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each member's individual interview

was examined for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Triangulation in the collection of data helped to compare and contrast data that was

collected at different times and different locations (Simmons, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

The nature of qualitative studies requires ethical guidelines to govern the

researcher's interaction with the participants. Explicit guidelines are helpful regarding

the researcher's role and the immense responsibility of the researcher to evaluate, observe

and interpret information. In all phases of the study, I considered the ethical

responsibilities as I designed and reported findings (Steffen, 2016). Specifically, these ethical challenges include anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, my potential impact on the participants, and the participants potential impact on me. Roles were well-defined and ethical guidelines established for every stage of the qualitative study (Steffen, 2016). It was critical to obtain the informed and voluntary consent of the participants; to maintain the confidentiality of the information shared by the participants; to ensure the anonymity of the research participants; to practice the beneficence or no harm to the study participants; and to grant reciprocity (Halai, 2006).

To fulfill the ethical considerations for this study, I submitted an application to the College of William & Mary's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to conduct this study. Part of the process for the IRB included completion of an ethical training module, identification of the ways in which I have kept the participants' information confidential, and information regarding how I structured the interviews to allow participants to end their participation at any time. I documented the means by which I will keep the study data secure and note how I will share information with participants.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine experiences of eight African American males who attended one of the two PWIs in Virginia that produced the most graduates in the years between 1985 and 1990. A phenomenological qualitative research approach was used to obtain the richness of these experiences as they related to the participants' decision to persist through graduation.

The study was not aimed at the generalization of findings, but rather for exploration of the depth of the individual experiences that led each participant to

accomplish one specific goal, graduation. However, it is conceivable that the findings of the study may be transferrable to other African American males attending PWIs.

An ideal data group would have involved securing two participants from each of the two groups from each of the two universities. However, in actuality, from the group of potential respondents, there were initially four members of Omega Psi Phi fraternity and five members of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. Of the total nine respondents, one of the Omega interviews had to be excluded since his interview was short and devoid of any recall of his college engagement and fraternity experience. The remaining participants included three members of Omega Psi Phi and five members of Alpha Phi Alpha (Table 5). Despite the uniqueness of each member's experiences, they all shared commonalities as well. It was from the multitude of common experiences that topics began to emerge. These topics resulted in five emergent themes by way of coding.

Table 5

Study Participants' BGLO Affiliation

Pseudonym	BGLO
Lorenzo	Alpha Phi Alpha
Jimmy	Omega Psi Phi
Bill	Alpha Phi Alpha
TDR 88	Alpha Phi Alpha
Dillinger	Alpha Phi Alpha
James	Omega Psi Phi
Michael	Alpha Phi Alpha
George	Omega Psi Phi

Note. BGLO = Black Greek letter organization

It is my hope that this qualitative study will create another resource in the area of African-American male student persistence. It is clear from the few prior studies, that

84

once a college or university decides to understand and commit to their African-American male student's need to belong (Strayhorn, 2012a) to the college campus and surrounding community, it is more likely than not that they will find an increase in the persistence towards of their African-American males students.

Summary

This chapter outlined the research design for this project. Further, I identified the procedures for participant selection, data collection and analysis, and outlined the theoretical framework. I will use semi-structured interviews to obtain demographic data on each of the eight study participants. The study participants were limited to African-American males who attended one of the two PWIs that served as the sites for this study. All of the study participants initially enrolled in their respective PWIs and remained at the same school until obtaining a college degree. While in attendance the students' age range was from 17 to 23 years old prior to their graduation. All participants were former collegians. Their college years extended from 1985 to 1990. Additionally, all members were members of a local undergraduate chapter of a fraternal BGLO

CHAPTER FOUR: THEMATIC FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to understand and analyze how African-American men now view their college experiences as a member of a BGLO at a PWI 25 years later. Participants were also asked how they perceived the influence of their BGLO membership on their persistence and what memories of their BGLO membership are most salient?

I interviewed eight study participants and used their experiences, perceptions, and personal perspectives as they remembered them as a means to identify elements that they identified as positively influencing their persistence to graduation from their respective universities.

There are several themes which emerged from this study as its participants relayed their experiences and memories as an African-American male student attending a PWI, and who joined a BGLO fraternity. The rich data gives vivid descriptions of their time at their respective universities. All eight of the study participants offer memories about their exposure to college life and Greek life, social engagement, leadership, campus connectedness, and connectedness amongst the other students. The commonalities among the participants that emerged points to the salient factors that motivated each participant to persist until graduation.

The primary data collection technique used to harvest data are outlined in chapter three. Overall, analysis of the data focused on the prominence of words, phrases, concepts, and experiences. This approach to coding and data analysis incorporated a

number of participants memories directly related to the interviews. Despite the uniqueness of each of the study participants, shared themes of experiences of African-American alumni surfaced. These experiences are presented in this chapter. Rich, thick descriptions in the words of the participants help support the study findings.

Emergent Themes

Five themes emerged from the line by line coding of the transcribed interviews. The first theme presented is the pre-college connections the African-American male students had prior to their matriculation at their PWI. Secondly, the theme of brotherhood appears consistently throughout their experiences, with some of those brotherhood relations developing prior to joining a BGLO and others developing after joining a BGLO. The third theme centers on the leveraging power of their membership in a BGLO in supporting their persistence to graduation. The thrust of this study was to understand better the role of BGLO membership for African-American men who graduated from a PWI, thus the ways in which their fraternity membership supported student persistence was of particular interest. This third theme highlights the important role this membership held for how the participants reflected on their success in college. Fourth, the participants identified a pay it forward perspective, specifically concerning the manner in which these graduates continue to give and contribute to others after their graduation from the PWI. Finally, the fifth theme centers on memories. In looking back over time, the study participants reflected on the role of their BGLO membership on their life path and noted how knowing what they know now, they would still join a BGLO. Their memories also pointed out to them areas they wish they could change.

Pre-College Connections

Pre-college connections in this qualitative study is as an umbrella term that discusses the means of exposure to college life for the African-American male participants in this study. As they discussed their experiences, all eight former collegians had direct or indirect exposure to campus life, academic expectations, social engagement and BGLOs as a means of student support. Most often, the participants discussed family members or peers that were enrolled in college, and their interactions with others prior to their own entry, as sources of college experience; pre-college bridge programs were also a part of some participant's pre-college connections. Essentially, they were able to take advantage of a pre-college orientation program and gained exposure to academic expectations and coursework. For those who attended, they talked about how this experience allowed them to make new friends as their college networks burgeoned. University community engagement was also a predominant factor for some of the participants. For the African-American males who lived near a college or university, they talked about the ways in which the university engaged the residents of their community. This type of social engagement served as pre-college exposure to college life because it provided a glimpse into campus living and other collegians who already attaining the same goals that these participants hoped to attain.

The theme of brotherhood emerged prior to college entrance and was also prevalent throughout their experiences. The data provided by the participants discussed bonds of friendship with their cohort members and fraternity brothers. These friendships developed into an informal network for the participants who relied on these bonds as sources of comfort and inspiration. Many of the former students talked about how all of

these emergent themes inspired them to persist towards graduation. They were very clear

about they were inspired, encouraged and challenged to not only obtain their college

degrees but develop plans to be successful that extended beyond college. These emergent

themes should be closely examined as enabling factors in the quest for student

persistence among African-American male students attending a PWI.

      Family/peer group pre-college exposure. Each of the study participants

provided reflections of their pre-college connections to college life and/or Greek life.

Some of them came from small towns and had limited exposure to what college life was

about. Other participants had direct exposure to college life and Greek life from family

members. One such participant, Bill (Alpha, VCU), talked about his pre-college

exposure to Greek life:

> Actually, my attractiveness [to my BGLO] started before college. My brother,
>
> who is 13 years older than me, went to VCU and became a member of Alpha Phi
>
> Alpha fraternity. And, I would often see his friends, his fraternity brothers. He
>
> would bring them home for different things, holidays or different things that
>
> were happening in our neck of the woods. So, I had an opportunity to model his
>
> fraternity brothers and see they are bonding before I ever attended VCU. So, my
>
> brother always, kind of, instilled those college values and fraternity life in me. It
>
> was one of those things that when I started at VCU, I knew what I wanted to do
>
> and, as far as social organizations. I knew which organization I wanted to
>
> pledge.

Bill had a front row seat to observe what it meant to be an African-American male who

attended a PWI. He had open access to the experiences of his brother and his brother's

friends, and could develop his own perceptions of college connectedness, the culture of

fraternal life, and graduation expectations given these examples.

Another participant, Lorenzo, was from a small town in the Tidewater area of

Virginia. He had very little idea of what it was like attend a PWI but managed to gain his

pre-college exposure through a peer and through a family friend. He spoke about his

older sister's best friend in one part of his interview. Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) stated that

the summer before college began, "My sister called me and she said… 'Oh yeah when

you get to Old Dominion, Anthony said…you should look up his fraternity brothers.'"

His sister encouraged Lorenzo to make contact with Anthony, his sister's best friend who

was already an African-American male successfully navigating the waters of the same

college that Lorenzo planned to attend. Anthony was already attending ODU and

provided Lorenzo with an opportunity to gain insight on what it meant to matriculate

there. Secondly, Lorenzo also remembered one of his close friends of his who had

already started college and had come back home for the summer. This friend detailed his

college experiences to Lorenzo. Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) remembered:

> So, I had a friend that was two years older than me and lived in my
>
> neighborhood. And this was a guy that I kind a looked up to. He was a friend
>
> but he was also a role model being just a couple of years older than me. He
>
> came back home and we hung out some during that summer. He told me a little
>
> bit about what college life with like at North Carolina Central University.   And
>
> the summer before I was to start at ODU, he was at home again. And this was
>
> the summer after he pledged…he was telling me about all of his exploits from
>
> the social life to the service projects. Giving me a really vivid and exciting view

of…Greek life more generally. And so, my first real understanding of what

Greek life was…was through him.

From his peer and family friend, Lorenzo gained an invaluable amount of information

about what being an African-American male in college was going to be like for him.

From them, Lorenzo was able to form ideas about student persistence expectations, the

importance of academics, college life, social engagement, and BGLOs. Although one

friend attended a PWI and the other friend attended an HBCU, through them, he could

look through the lens of their experiences and increase his opportunities for success and

persistence from the amount of pre-college exposure he obtained. Essentially, he was

afforded a bird's eye view of what college life was like for each of them as African-

American males.

Finally, another participant, George (Omega, VCU) mentioned that his pre-

college exposure came from his older brother. He recounted, "Now, I knew something

about Omega Psi Phi before attending VCU because my brother…my brother had

pledged and so I knew a lot about the fraternity." George (Omega, VCU) went on to say:

Again, having some knowledge of the fraternity before I got to VCU, I knew a lot

of the requirements beforehand. So, I knew that there was a minimum grade point

average. I knew that community service that was one of the things that was

paramount in the fraternity. I knew that you had to have certain letters of

recommendation. So, I knew all of this and had already prepared myself for when

I actually arrived on campus. I knew it was something that I wanted to do. It was

only a matter of time. But first and foremost, I knew that academics was, not only

important for Omega Psi Phi, but it was important for me being in school. Once I

91

felt comfortable with that and, you know, took a few exams did well in them and

then once I got to that point, I started to think more about, I need to get more

actively involved in certain of the activities that were on campus.

As reflected in their comments, Lorenzo, George, and Bill were able to gain first-hand

knowledge about what each of them could hope to experience as an incoming student at

VCU and ODU based on the interactions they had prior to even starting on campus.

For all of the study participants, their pre-college exposure to college life was

fundamental as a tool to set the tone for their upcoming college careers. Their

perspectives and ideas about undergraduate life were formed based on the information

provided to them before their arrival on campus and factored heavily into their ability to

become both socially and academically engaged. The participants' pre-college exposure

appears to highlight the value of education they perceived prior to starting college, and an

understanding of the supports needed to persist. Despite the potential individual barriers

documented in the literature, such as social isolation, inadequate preparation, lack of

mentorship, and financial aid issues, the study's participants were poised to set up a

pathway to success and graduation via the examples of others. This pre-collegiate

priming helped the participants avoid some of the common pitfalls African-American

males face when they attend a PWI. In addition to individuals who helped prime the

participants prior to starting college regarding what to expect once on campus,

institutional programming also helped set the stage for ultimate success.

Pre-college bridge programs. Michael recounted another manner of pre-college

experience that influenced him heavily. He was able to take advantage of a college

bridge program offered for incoming VCU students. Incoming freshman students were

allowed to take two courses during the summer before they entered the university in the fall. The two courses included a substantive course and a preparation course. Students' participation in the college bridge program was conditioned upon them passing the two classes offered in the program. Importantly, the bridge program offered students the ability to begin the fall with college credits and first-hand exposure to college life, campus connectedness and their peers. Michael (Alpha, VCU) remembered the summer before he began at VCU:

> When I started at VCU, VCU had this program for kids who didn't have maybe the best grades or didn't have the best SAT scores. I think we called it the ESP, the Educational Support Program. And it was basically an introduction to college courses. You took…I think I took maybe two classes that summer. They were an English class and maybe a college prep type class that, you know, a college orientation, I would say, course. And…uh…it kind of got you prepared for the fall. Which I thought was very effective for me. Because one, being in those classes all day would improve my GPA and when the fall came around, I wasn't surprised by anything.   I was…I was ready for the course load and the work that was put in front of me."

Essentially, Michael began his social and academic engagement with his participation in these pre-college courses. In taking the two courses that were offered in the program, he was exposed to college life directly before college even began. The bridge program helped decrease Michael's initial anxiety about being a new student in a foreign environment and to increase his connectedness to the school. TDR 88 (Alpha, VCU) also mentioned the same pre-college program at VCU,

the exceptional student program, it was a program for students who had lower

GPAs or lower SAT scores. VCU would do a pre-acceptance based on the

student's ability to pass the 00 level courses…during that summer. And with

them being able to pass those type of courses they had full acceptance.

This type of pre-college exposure to academic life set the tone and most importantly, it

provided them with access to the rigors of college academic life for these African-

American males who were able to take advantage of it. They gained not only course

credits, but they were able to experience what it meant to be an African-American male

collegian. The pre-college exposure and purposeful connectedness to campus appears to

have had a positive effect on Michael and TDR 88 since they both cite the experiences in

their interviews and since both men graduated.

Michael (Alpha, VCU) talked more about how he was introduced to fraternities

during his summer program prior to beginning college. He remembered,

So, when I got to VCU, I met Lee McCombs. He was an Alpha on campus. He

was a senior at the time and he actually introduced me to the whole thing. He was

a counselor in the summer program I was in. He actually pulled me into his room

and asked me had I heard about the organization; if I was familiar with it and he

gave me sort of a history lesson on some of the distinguished members; some of

the things that the organization has done and some of the things that they stand

for. And I was sold right there.

Michael experienced two types of pre-college experiences, first in the bridge program

and second, with a personal connection with a fraternity brother. He was introduced to

college life and his campus through the bridge program. He was introduced to Greek life

as a means of social engagement through a peer. These experiences stuck with Michael some 30 years later, signifying the important role they help for him during his college time. This researcher surmises that the pre-college bridge program supported Michael's motivation to continue college and identify themselves as a college-goers, something that appears to factor in importantly for African-American male student persistence.

University community engagement. James, in his interview, spoke about the fact that he grew up in central Virginia. As a young man, he became aware of university life and Omega Psi Phi fraternity because of Virginia Union University's (VUU) involvement in his community. James (Omega, ODU) reflected on his pre-college experience:

> When I was a junior in high school, we would just go to different events on campus. Sometimes, it was parties or basketball games or football games. I actually had some relatives of mine that resided right next to VUU in those apartment complexes over there. They resided there. So, as a kid, we used to go to different things over at Hovey field, whether it was…ummm…I remember Easter egg rolls or Easter egg hunts, whatever you call them. So just kid activities like that and once I got into high school, more recreational stuff on campus.

The community involvement at a local HBCU provided James with the opportunity to gain pre-college exposure to college life and Greek life as an African-American male. He could witness what it meant to become a collegian. Because of his first-hand experiences taking part in the social and community events offered by a local university, he was able to take advantage of seeing other students who look like him that were actively pursuing higher education.

In their individual interviews, each of the study participants actively described the ways in which they were exposed to college life and BGLOs. They provided rich, detailed accounts of their pre-college experiences and revealed family, friends/peers, pre-college preparatory programs, and university community engagement as methods of pre-college exposure to college. Of import, they noted how these experiences involved not only other African-Americans but other African-American male students who were successfully navigating campus life at a PWI. Even though the manner in which their pre-college exposure differed, the commonality is the pre-college exposure and the ways in which these experiences set them up for their own academic journey. They were able to use what they saw and perhaps avoid some social and academic obstacles and overcome others. The participants began to develop a support network via these pre-college experiences that helped support them once in college and helped paint a picture of success for African-American collegians. The commonality of all of their experiences emphasized the emergent theme of pre-college exposure to university life and BGLOs. Most importantly, the support network they developed from their pre-college experiences lent itself to the bonds of brotherhood that they still enjoy.

Brotherhood

Brotherhood appeared as another emergent theme in the interviews. The larger theme of brotherhood is sub-divided into three different types, including; college brotherhood relationships, brotherhood developed during the pledge process, and post-college fraternal brotherhood ties. Themes of brotherhood were most important when these relationships helped the participants to establish a level of individual connectedness to the university. These types of social connections influenced the African-American

96

male students in this study to feel like the PWI campus was their campus too. It identified ways in which they could socially engage.

Non-fraternal relationships. Many of the study participants talked about the peer groupings they developed as new college students. They discussed their experiences within their student cohorts as they came together and bonded over the experience of being new college students. One study participant, TDR 88 (Alpha, VCU) remembered,

> As a college student and a person who left my hometown…to come up to
>
> Richmond, Virginia, it [the bond developed amongst the other African-American
>
> male students] definitely was a connection. It felt like a family affair. No
>
> different than when you're on a high school campus, and you built your bonds
>
> with your peers there.

Clearly, the bonds of brotherhood and friendship were important to TDR 88. They were so important that he could recall the relationships that he formed when he first arrived at VCU decades later and likened it to the same deep ties, he had with his family and his high school friends. The support he received from his peers provided a bond based on going through the collegiate experience together.

Another study participant, Bill (Alpha, VCU), framed his close friendships and cohort relationships by saying, "That's what brotherhood is all about man, support and encouragement." The friendship group Bill formed was a central source of support and encouragement as he adjusted to college life. Lorenzo, too, provided example after example surrounding the theme of brotherhood. He remembered, "In fact, two of my…three of my closest friends from my freshman year were my dorm mates. They were not my roommates but we all lived in the same dorm." The continued reference to

support and encouragement obtained from the individuals the participants identified as brothers pointed to specific factors contributing to their decision to persist until graduation. He went further and provided a rich description of his college comrades as Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) detailed the nature of their support of one another,

And we were apartment mates at the time. So, we were providing for each other. I don't know of any other way to say it. We were providing a social support for each other. So, the residence hall helped. But, we got connected to each other as much as we got connected to campus life. And we would go to parties together, we would hang out with each other and we would study together in the student center. We would play basketball together. So, all of these things were part of how I got connected to campus before I got on line.

Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) went on to describe the ways in which he was able to interact with other African-American students. He said,

I met with guys who were members of the original four fraternities who were members of the NPHC. I interacted with a lot of guys in the student center. I went to some of the dances and parties on campus. Some of them lived in the dorms. So just occasionally, I would have someone in a class of mine.

Pointedly, the friendships that these young men formed as young college students were vital.

Dillinger (Alpha, VCU) addressed how important his non-fraternal relationships were as an incoming student in one of his first new classes on campus: "There weren't many Black men in there and we happened to be in two or three classes together in one semester. So, we definitely worked together a lot. You know, we were on the same

team." These relationships of brotherhood developed by living together, studying together, working together and being around one another. Participants detailed their individual and shared experiences with the other African-American males they encountered at their PWI, and this social engagement and campus connectedness contributed to their sense of belonging at college.

Brotherhood during the pledge process. The pledging process provided time for the participants to build relationships with others. They described the pledging process as an experience of operating as one. Michael (Alpha, VCU) described the extensiveness of the process in depth:

The pledging process, at least back then, was referred to as being on line. Depending on the number of pledges…you got a number. Some people do it differently. We did it by height. So, the shortest guy was number 1. The next tallest was number 2. I was number 3 and so on and so forth. And in that line, that's how we walked, stood, that's how we lived for whatever period of time your line lasted. And you did…we dressed identically. We walked in synch. We didn't talk unless …uh…one of the brothers gave us permission to talk. There were, you know a lot of drill and ceremony, a lot of soldier-like activities. And at the same time, we had things…we had projects that we had to work on together. We had problems that we had to solve as a team. The whole process was designed to make us a stronger team so that when you came into the organization, we were coming in as a unit.

The bonds of brotherhood were developed, strengthened, and cemented by the pledge process. Being around each other, completing tasks together and experiencing the same

things together helped to create unbreakable group relationships. Another study

participant, James (Omega, ODU), remembered the bonds of friendship created during

his pledge process:

> Well, once we made the line, I mean of course, it was different back then.
> Everything was…you know, there were marching lines so, once I got accepted, it
> was...on my line, we kind of bonded over Spring Break a little bit. We started
> hanging out together a little bit more and tried to prepare ourselves. So, basically,
> we looked up to the brothers that were already on campus. Which was kind of
> new to me because I'm the oldest kid. I'm the oldest kid and the first to go to
> college in my immediate family. So, just having somebody you could talk to and
> rely on and then my line was…there were four of us and we just kind of starting
> doing more and more activities together so that we could bond individually and as
> a group and also, we tried to learn as much as we could about the fraternity.

The bonds of brotherhood and peer relationships deepened in the BGLO fraternal

process. And these deepened bonds of brotherhood did not appear to be exclusive to one

fraternity or another. It also seemed to be true across the board regardless as to which

PWI was discussed by the participants. Essentially, the pledge process created a larger

network for these African-American males. As George (Omega, VCU) put it, "I mean

you have to understand that you know when you have…50 to 100 brothers…now can you

imagine what you can do?" This sense of group potential was potent for the participants

and helped create a space for them on their PWI campuses.

In many instances, their fraternal bonds replaced their non-fraternal peer friends

or at the very least expanded their peer groupings. As Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) put it, "So,

my fraternity experience was very instrumental in all of those developmental experiences as an undergraduate." By joining a BGLO, these young African-American males gained membership into the organization, but more importantly they related how they were able to create a bond of brotherhood that served them in both their academic and social endeavors. As one study participant, Michael (Alpha, VCU) remembered,

Well, one of the other things that [a fraternity brother] did, was he introduced me to some other guys who were interested. The three of us…the three of us connected. And we met…how do I put this…and we started the recruiting process because we started to reach out to the guys that we thought might be a positive figure on our line. So, what did we do? We studied. We did things together. One of the interesting things we did…I think back on it…and it was very helpful to me, was we changed our whole appearance. We started wearing slacks, dress shirts and ties to class, you know. I was a shorts and T-shirt kind of guy my whole life. You know, so we started wearing this and…it got results as far as my teachers and professors noticed it and would comment on it, like; "Wow, you're taking this serious. You're taking this college thing serious." You know, it didn't hurt with the young ladies either. So, we changed our appearance, I'll say that. We started studying together because we knew that if we were to make line, we'd…ummm...it may be tough to maintain…you know, our line life and our school life at the same time.

These friendships were a boon to them academically as well as socially. These young men did not just hang out with one another socially, but they challenged each other and

helped one another academically. The goal was understood amongst them. As James

(Omega, ODU) mentioned during his interview,

> So, the goal was to really get our grades and our GPAs in a real high place just in
>
> case there was a dip because we were so busy on line. So, we studied together,
>
> we looked out for one another, you know, if I can help somebody with something
>
> that I was strong at. I was pretty strong at the social science aspect and history.
>
> Other people may have been stronger in math. So, we looked out for one another.
>
> And found other people within our…you know, we all had our own friends and
>
> people we dealt with. If somebody needed help with something, I could reach
>
> out. For example, I could go to Bill and I could say, "Hey I need help with this
>
> Biology class." He might know someone who was strong in Biology if he wasn't
>
> himself. And the same with me. I could connect him with other people so, you
>
> know, it increased our network of friends.

Bill (Alpha, VCU) noted how the founding of his fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha, in 1906,

was built around brothers supporting brothers academically. He recalled,

> You know we [Alpha Phi Alpha] started out as a study group, of course, and a
>
> support group at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, because you know we
>
> were fighting…uh, we were faced with prejudiced from a socio-economic
>
> perspective…. racism from a collegial perspective. So, we needed to ban together
>
> as a group and support each other.

These brotherhood bonds acted as a home base for them socially and academically

because the participants were instantly connected to other Black males due to the

pledging process, which built on decades of traditions and practices in which they could

link themselves with other African-American males on their campus and on campuses across the United States.

Fraternal brotherhood: The college years and beyond. Another emergent theme of brotherhood highlights relationships for the participants that go well past their initial fraternal experience. Many of the study participants readily talked about fraternal experiences they continue to have in the more than 25 years since they initially joined their respective BGLOs. Sometimes these experiences were same organization to same organization and sometimes they involved members who were in different organizations that have lasted long past their college years.

Brotherhood for these young men as they went through university life meant that they looked out for one another as students. And in looking out for one another, they inspired one another to perform better academically in order to ensure they graduated. They challenged one another in order to inspire their best efforts. Individualism was not the main focus, group effort was. Michael (Alpha, VCU) remembered that, "There were 5 of us on line and when we came in, we were 5 strong and our voice was bigger as opposed to 5 individuals coming in." And after he became a member of Alpha Phi Alpha, Michael (Alpha, VCU) talked about the importance of hands-on help for other members,

> So, I made it a point that if I ever had, like a younger brother or even a pledge…I
> remember one time, I had a group of pledges in one of my science
> classes…Biology or Chemistry…but uh…ordinarily I would have been happy
> with a C, but because those guys were in my class, I made sure that I got an A.
> So, you know, they knew what the standard was. Even though that might not

have been realistic in most cases, I had to let them know…you are on a whole

new level now. You're coming into this organization so; I'm getting an A…what

are you getting?

George (Omega, VCU) too remembered his Omega Psi Phi fraternal connections,

"I mean even though we pledged together, they still looked at me somewhat like

the older brother during that time. So, they pushed me. They actually…my

successes…they were part of it. When I graduated, they were there."   Michael

(Alpha, VCU) recounted his experience when older brothers who had already

graduated came back and continued to inspire the undergraduate brothers. He

commented,

> It was always kind of neat when brothers graduated and came back. You know,
>
> they were working. And you could talk to them because they were truly were
>
> your peers. So, you could get the inside scoop. Like, [fraternity alumni], the guy
>
> who introduced me to the frat, he actually…he actually joined the Army. He was
>
> ROTC at VCU and when he graduated, he did a short stint in the Army. So here
>
> is somebody that, when he came back around, I heard from him, knowing that I
>
> was going to go into the army at the time. He was somebody I could talk to about
>
> to be successful, what do I need to do, what should I look out for. And you don't
>
> get the standard pittance, you get the real story, the story behind the curtain kind
>
> of story.

Fraternity brothers and graduates were seen as a source of valued insider information on

the college experience and what to expect in post-college life.

There are several accounts of how brothers made sure one another got to class and that they had the resources they needed in order to succeed. They provided practical advice to their younger members as an informal type of mentorship. A prime example is an account from Jimmy (Omega, VCU) regarding his fraternity members and the advice that they gave him early on. He remembered:

> Just the good advice from the brothers. You know, I'm a listener, so you never can have too much into it. Make your decisions from the information that you get. I would say along the line, there were brothers who reminded me not to lose focus. They would say, "The chicks are going to be there. The parties are always going to be there, so maintain what you are supposed to do."

The participants felt that the valuable advice they received on how to survive and thrive in college helped to reinforce that the end goal was graduation for all of them.

Clearly, the intra-fraternal relationships noted about brotherhood appeared among the members of the same fraternity brotherhood associations, within the same chapter, as well as associations among current members of the chapters and graduate members. Interestingly, inter-fraternal relationships also emerged under the theme of brotherhood as well. Here, members of one BGLO fraternity helped and inspired those members of another BGLO fraternity.

A few of the study participants mentioned how they were also friends with members of other fraternities. Their memories of these intra-fraternity relationships helped to deepen their descriptions of brotherhood and added to the tapestry of connection and engagement. Fraternal relationships were not just limited to graduate and

undergraduate men inside of each organization, but also included others that bridged past

fraternal organizational lines. Jimmy (Omega, VCU) addressed this point in his

interview. He recalled, "It's just funny because some of my best friends, we all came in

freshman year and we all planned to join different fraternities. And to this day, we are

super close. We just made different decisions." Bill (Alpha, VCU), mentioned

something similar, "We're from different organizations but you know my struggle too

because your organization is built on some of those same foundations." The bonds of

brotherhood crossed fraternity lines. Dillinger (Alpha, VCU) added,

> So, I think having that network of people within your fraternity and even within
>
> the other fraternities and sororities kind of…inter-fraternal connections…you
>
> worked together to be able to say, "hey you need to get in this class. You need to
>
> get in this class to be able to graduate and you need to talk to so and so."

The sharing of information and watching out for one another contributed to brotherhood

that reached across the lines of individual organizations. Bill (Alpha, VCU) summed up

the importance of these relationships as follows:

> That's what brotherhood is all about, whether you're an Alpha or an Omega. You
>
> should understand those basic principles. You have basic principles. Kappa's got
>
> basic principles. Alpha's have basic principles. Sigma's have basic principles.
>
> Iotas have basic principles. They're the same basic principles.

As members of Omega Psi Phi and Alpha Phi Alpha fraternities, the participants relied on

one another in the fraternity and beyond to build what they described as an incredible

network of encouragement in order to acquire their degrees. These relationships proved

crucial to the ultimate success these African-American young men obtained.   One of the

participant's, Jimmy (Omega, VCU), remembers his experience with relying on his fraternity brothers as a new member of Omega Psi Phi:

Just that expectation of graduation is really one of the strongest points because, like I said, it was, "We're going to work hard. We're going to play hard. We're going to…you're going to graduate. You're expected to graduate." I mean, if you aren't serious academically, you can't be serious any other way. I mean, you can't participate in step shows. You can't do some of the fun activities if you're not serious about your work. And then, having Omega, it's been pretty much a constant in my life since that time.

In a word, these brotherhood connections were vital to the educational success of these young African-American men. The commonality of experience inspired these young men to support one another. That commonality of experience widened the support network and brotherhood that led to their student persistence decisions.

Finally, several of the study participants gave examples of how their brotherhood ties extended past their college days. They remembered times where they would run into other members of their fraternities by happenstance. Other times, they intentionally tapped their fraternal resources in order to help them move along in the post-college world and they remained involved in each other's lives as well. One of the participants gave an example of how he happened to run into member of Omega Psi Phi while on vacation and the experience he had with this individual. Jimmy (Omega, VCU) recalled,

And that's [the brotherhood] worldwide, so I…it was interesting. I went to Jamaica in July. My wife and I are sitting at the pool and it's a brother beside me from my district. He just happened to be at the same resort in Montego Bay. And

come to find out, that one of his chapter brothers was getting married. The

brothers were just out…hanging out in Jamaica. Being a part of something, a lot

of people don't know what that feels like. To go anywhere and just run into…just

running into the brothers.

This sense of connection to brothers continued into post-college life. Jimmy provided

another example of his fraternal brotherhood bonds that have extended past college. He

talked about friendships and experiences that he has developed in Omega Psi Phi since

graduation. Jimmy (Omega, VCU) recounted using his fraternity brothers to help his son

who was applying to Morehouse College. He remembered,

So…my son, I have a college graduate and my son went to Morehouse. I

remember when he was in the process of going to Morehouse, I put a call in to

and said, "Hey, I need to talk to a brother from Morehouse." And sure enough,

someone put me in contact with one. That brother gave me a call and I talked to

him for at least an hour about Morehouse. And he was trying to convince me

about why I should send my son there. And….to…then once he got to

Morehouse, there was a brother in the admin department that I hooked up with

that kind of watched out for him while he was there. My chapter brothers that

were in Atlanta, were able to watch out for him as well. You know, my daughter

often tells me, every time you need something, do you have to call a fraternity

member? And I was like, "Yeah! If one is available, that's who I'm going to

reach out to." And it's…you know, from academics to career, personal life and

beyond, it's been you know, everything pretty much revolves around it.

This same participant expounded about the level of involvement that his fraternity members had in the process of getting his son to Morehouse. Jimmy (Omega, VCU) recounted,

> I didn't even visit the school. My wife and son went. I put them in contact with the brother in administration. They met with him. I think my son majored in Physics and the Chair of the Physics department was a brother. You know, he made sure, he had an internship every summer. But yeah, that one conversation…because I was on the fence…because he had never been in that type of environment and he was raised in the suburbs so…and I was 8 hours away, so, yeah, that one conversation pretty much made me comfortable enough to send him down there.

For Jimmy, being in Omega Psi Phi certainly did not end when he graduated. He, like many other African-American men in this study, enjoyed the bonds of brotherhood well into adult life. Finally, Jimmy (Omega, VCU) summed up the role his fraternity had for him:

> I mean, my friends now, some of them I didn't even know in college, most of them are in this fraternity. So, it's pretty much guided my life in the direction that I have ended up in. Even from expectation of graduation to career aspirations, to talking to brothers who were already in my field, to the friendships that I've developed over the years. Like I said, not only from my chapter or my time at ODU, but from just in life in general. One of my best friends now is…he's my neighbor, but he's a…he pledged at North Carolina State in 1989. So, we just

happened…I think we met because our wives are AKAs and they met. We ended

up meeting and we spend more time with each other than we do with them.

The participants underscored the role of their fraternity brothers in support during college

and after graduation. The level of support they felt reached beyond their own fraternity

chapter to brothers in chapters around the country and to brothers in other chapters. The

bonds formed during their college years have stood the test of time.

BGLO Inspiration and Support

As this study reviewed, African-American males as a racial and gender group,

have one of the lowest student persistence rates in the United States. Many

administrators actively seek support factors to increase the student persistence statistics

for African American men. Many of the study participants pointed out examples from

their experiences that helped ensuring that they graduated from their respective PWIs.

Support among fraternity chapter brothers. When asked about the issue of

student persistence specifically, James (Omega, ODU) remembered how his experience

as a member of Omega Psi Phi contributed to his staying in college and his success post-

college. He said,

> I mean, as an undergraduate, we were a little bit more focused on academics, you
>
> know, getting to graduation and then once we graduated, that's when we were
>
> connected with brothers who were in our field and to get exposure or to learn
>
> about jobs, careers and stuff like that.

The network amongst James' brothers helped support him along the way to graduation.

His Omega brothers did not simply talk the talk, but they walked the walk. A couple of

the participants recounted how they would have their class schedules reviewed by older

brothers and these same brothers would do pop up visits in class and even in the school

library to make sure that their younger fraternity members were maintaining their focus.

Bill (Alpha, VCU) talked about this practice during his interview:

> Our [fraternity] graduate advisors were very in tune with what we were doing.
>
> And they would show up at any time. If we were supposed to be in the library
>
> from 6-9 studying, you know the whole pledge line. And if, there were five of us
>
> on our line and only four of us were in there, they would ask where is Jimmy?
>
> Oh, I'm glad you asked. He had a 7:00 class. Oh, okay. And then they were
>
> going to check that out. …the whole thing was to…remember why you're here.
>
> You're here to graduate. You're here to get your education.

Another study participant, James (Omega, ODU), remembered, "if you needed any

mentoring, tutoring or any type of assistance for your specific major, we had a network

we could readily tap into." He gave specific examples of the ways in which he was

inspired and supported by his undergraduate brothers as an undergraduate BGLO

member. James (Omega, ODU) offered,

> You were put in contact with those people [BGLO members] and once you had
>
> that conversation, usually the specific brother would say, "Hey, you gotta do XY
>
> and Z. You gotta take these classes. This is what your grades need to look like.
>
> And if you need help, you should be on the phone calling me."

This example highlighted how student persistence and success were a priority for the

BGLO members in his fraternity. These young men may have initially joined their

fraternities as a means of social engagement, but that was not their sole purpose. They

were able to use their fraternity relationships to benefit from the network of support that

members provided. For example, Dillinger (Alpha, VCU) expressed,

> [Fraternity brothers] actually helped push and support each other going through
>
> that process [of academics]. So yeah, I would say…that kind of connection, that
>
> kind of support and push and pull was because of my involvement in the
>
> fraternity. And you wanted to make sure that you graduated because you wanted
>
> to make the fraternity look good.

Membership in the BGLO meant that individual actions and academic performance

reflected not just on the person, but also the larger group of members. Poor performance

of a member could result in a bad reputation for the fraternity writ large.

Support from members of other BGLO fraternities. It is important to note

how the network of support often reached across fraternity lines. Bill remembered how

his pathway to graduation took a little longer than most, and how it was both his inter-

fraternity relationships, as well as intra-fraternity relationships that helped provide

continuous encouragement to complete his undergraduate degree, no matter the length of

time it took him to do so. Bill left college shortly after becoming a member of Alpha Phi

Alpha to perform his military service in Desert Storm before he could complete his

degree. Bill (Alpha, VCU) recounted how he was supported along the way to ultimately

complete college.

> So, after I finished my tour of duty, I came back. I met my wife. I got married. I
>
> stayed in contact with my brothers. And in every conversation, man whether it
>
> was my immediate line brothers, or just brothers in general, the main thing they
>
> would ask is hey man, "What are you doing now? Did you finish school?"

Everybody would say, "Did you finish school?" Man, that thing bothered me…so when I saw brothers, I would actually be ashamed. I recall getting back in school and starting back out with a couple of classes at Strayer University…getting myself back in school mode and I actually saw you there. I think you were teaching and counseling. Man, it was great. It was like a sight for sore eyes. It was like we had never missed a beat, but I probably hadn't seen you in about 5 or 6 years. And you were encouraging as well. You were like, "Man, what are doing here?" You didn't know I didn't finish school. I said, man, I never finished. And you were like, "Man you're doing the right thing. Glad you're here. Let me know what I can do for you." Now, here's what I liked about that, I'm sure that you gave everybody that spiel but man I got the red carpet again, because of that relationship but also because we had something in common. We're from different organizations but you know my struggle too because your organization is built on some of those same foundations. So, I feel too…. but when I saw you, I was ashamed because when you gave me your card, you had your Master's degree and everything and I was like damn, this guy is doing it man. You know, I got to get it together. You know all my boys are making it happen. These included my boys within my organization and on the outside of my organization. It was that pressure of hearing in school, you got to finish. …And I got tired of people saying, did you ever finish school? And I finished man, and I didn't stop there. I went on and got my Master's degree and I'm looking at doctoral programs. I even have a couple of applications in to doctoral programs right now because I think that my calling is teaching.

113

BGLO membership provided the participants with an added form of support during college. As undergraduates and as men, they helped one another and urged one another towards the finish line of graduation. This support crossed fraternity lines as well. Participants noted how the help they received was invaluable. According to Dillinger (Alpha, VCU),

> We had a way of helping one another. And I think that kind of helped us as we moved along. Regardless of what fraternity you were in or sorority you were in, we all worked together to try and support each other. I think that worked. I never saw anybody exclude others.

Of note, most of the participants graduated within a traditional amount of time (150% is the typically timeframe used in calculating graduation rates; National Center for Education Statistics, 2016)—that is, five or six years after they began the university. George (Omega, VCU) remembered,

> I didn't see a lot of brothers that were, you know, in school for six or seven years. I mean, these brothers graduated. Several of them graduated in five years, which was, back then, probably the norm. So, when I saw these brothers had graduated, yeah…it encouraged me to graduate.

Fraternity members who had not yet graduated themselves were examples for the study participants and for other younger members.

Support from alumni fraternity members. Another way in which their BGLO membership provided them with inspiration to graduate was that it gave the study participants access to graduate members who were not necessarily part of a graduate chapter. These alumni members developed a network of brothers whose main focus and

114

goal was to reach back and support their undergraduate fraternity brothers as much as possible. One of the study participants, Dillinger (Alpha, VCU) remembers that:

> [Alpha Phi Alpha brothers] often joke and say that we have a quasi-grad chapter and that's an unassociated, unaffiliated group of us that have graduated. We would get together and do things on our own. A lot of the brothers who had already graduated would often come back to VCU. Having those guys around was a great tool.

The inspiration that the participants received as undergraduate members from alumni members who were not yet part of a graduate chapters was just as vital the help they received from other groups. TDR 88 (Alpha, VCU) also spoke of the same phenomenon while he was an undergraduate:

> Our organization [Alpha Phi Alpha], we created a club that supported that undergraduate chapter. That club is still in existence to this day. And they still support the undergrad chapter that we were all initiated into. And they're… primarily just participating in supporting the undergrad chapter.

The focus here is that these alumni brothers have an unofficial group of fraternity brothers who support their undergraduate brothers with their academic pursuits.

Support from graduate chapter fraternity members. Access to graduate members provided another example of the benefits of student persistence and an important road map to a overstep any pitfalls that were waiting. These examples were helpful for the participants as they contemplated obtaining their degrees and life post-graduation.   This was an important issue echoed by many of the participants especially because they, as students, had not thought that far ahead. For example, Jimmy (Omega,

VCU) talked about his experience, "The graduate chapter, they were involved as far as making sure that everything was on track. You could always go to the older brothers or go to the graduate chapter and you would have interactions and conversations with them." The graduate chapters were there for the undergraduate young men as well in a mentorship role. They were often tasked with helping these young men not only manage their chapters but also navigate college life. As TDR 88 (Alpha, VCU) said, "They assured our continuation for a couple of years on the campus, being a local guidance type mentor…and then also they were…they restricted the pledging process. They make sure that we adhered to the national rules as well."

The management of their college careers and their lives thereafter often came down to making the unimaginable seem real. Seeing a graduate chapter brother meant something to these young men. Dillinger (Alpha, VCU) echoed this same sentiment, saying, "it was good to see people who have been where you are now and now, they have graduated." He went further to explain that for himself and his Omega Psi Phi fraternity brothers, "it wasn't just looking at graduating college. It was looking at how you could participate in life." Seeing examples of those just ahead of them balancing work, family, and community service was helpful. Omega Psi Phi member, George (Omega, VCU) added,

> There was one brother…this brother graduated and the year after he graduated, this brother bought a house. So, I was really impressed with that. I was like, "Wow!" This brother graduated and you know, he was already on track. He's already planning, you know, his next step. He had gotten a job; he had bought a house and I was impressed with that.

The expectation of graduation and the access to African-American males who have done so was an invaluable benefit of their membership in a BGLO.   Their decisions to persist were due in various parts to their ability to see other African-American males who went before them and have done exactly what they came to college to do, namely graduate and get a good job. As Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) put it, "Not everybody was always as fast [in making it to graduation] …but the culture was, by and large, that we will do the best we can academically and will get the degrees that we came for." Essentially, graduation expectations and a culture of achievement led to these successful decisions to persist until graduation.

Theme of Pay It Forward

There was a fraternal expectation of giving back. Giving back to the other students, giving back to the community, and giving back to the college. James (Omega, ODU) explained that once he joined his fraternity, there was an expectation that he gives back. He stated,

> So, we weren't attendees and we weren't attending these service events or academic events we had on campus. We were actually spearheading them. So, we were involved in Achievement Week, setting up…. Achievement Week is annually for fraternities and their community service projects. We had a talent hunt looking for high school talent or talent to give scholarships to. So, we were spearheading all of this stuff. So, we went from learning about it, to…it's kind of like a process. We went from learning about it, to attending or participating, to now leading. So, it was kind of a three-phase process. And not only that, like I said, one of my line brothers actually became SGA vice-president. We were

heavily involved in the Black Greek Council, we called it back then. And we

were also involved in the Panhellenic Council.

Here, James (Omega, ODU) explained that he had a responsibility to give back to other

African-American men by way of Achievement Week on his campus. His experience is

particularly illuminating since the activities of his chapter benefitted the outside

community by giving out scholarships to local high school students (non-members) and

by the service events and academic events which took place on campus (members).

Paying it forward to other students. Another common theme emerging from

the coding of the data was how the participants viewed their responsibility and desire to

pay it forward once they became members of their respective BGLOs. Essentially, they

felt a responsibility to inspire other African-American males, both members and non-

members as part of their duties of membership. Some of these feelings of responsibility

emerged due to fraternal programming and others were more localized or individualized.

For example, James (Omega, ODU) touched on the feeling of the need to inspire others,

"you have to continue to build a legacy and you have to be able to teach people to carry

on." Part of his feeling about the need to contribute to the success of others resulted in

teaching other students how to succeed. James (Omega, ODU) mentioned that he and his

fraternity brothers felt that, "We need to, not only identify perspective members and

teach them as much about the fraternity as possible and then also prepare them [to join

the fraternity and succeed]." Providing an example to other students provided those that

followed them with additional support.

Dillinger (Alpha, VCU) encapsulated the notion of service to others: "And then

we had to pay it forward by helping those behind us. A lot [of] us, when we got to a

118

certain point, we wanted to make sure we helped the younger ones". Helping to support

future leaders was the goal and part of the responsibility as fraternity members.

Fraternity brothers did this for others in their fraternity, in their friend groups, and even in

other fraternities.

Paying it forward to the community. Part of many of the participant's

experience also involved helping out the community. The fraternities engaged in

providing community service to those around them as a means of paying it forward.

Several participants discussed in detail, the ways in which they served others. Dillinger

(Alpha, VCU) advised:

> Back in those days when I pledged, it was in the middle of the crack epidemic, so
>
> they [my fraternity's national goals] wanted us to do something dealing with
>
> addiction and things of that nature. So, I remember we went to a detention
>
> facility and did a program…that had young men and women that had been
>
> convicted or…had possession or drug issues or things of that nature. But we
>
> made sure that year that one of our community service events was catered to the
>
> drug epidemic.

Similarly, Michael (Alpha, VCU) offered a specific example of the way in which he and

his fraternity brothers acted out providing support to the community. He recalled,

> The Go To College program that Alpha Phi Alpha had at that time. And how we
>
> reached out to young African-American men…. how at the time, the organization
>
> reached out to young African-American men and encouraged them to continue
>
> their education and go to college. I thought that…that was very appealing to me
>
> because that was something that I felt would have been helpful to me growing up.

Here, Michael addressed how he felt a responsibility to help others because he was aware of the programming goal of his fraternity and because he saw the value in it. All of the men who participated in the study identified a culture in which they joined their respective fraternities that contained elements of service to others. They also knew that membership did not mean that they could rest on their laurels. They acted upon the idea that they were given a lot by members who entered the fraternity before them and now they must give the same to other members and members of their community. It was a culture and an unspoken expectation that was exemplified by older brothers. As Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) summed up,

> individuals who were members of Alpha Phi Alpha…were doing impressive
> things. They were in positions of leadership. They were extremely service and
> community service oriented. And in fact, some of the men who I found out later
> were Alpha men were doing things in the way of service and leadership even
> before I knew they were Alphas.

The recompense for their membership was the community service that they engaged in both on campus and in their communities. Quite remarkably, the expectation of service or paying it forward also served to strengthen their own social engagement as an African-American male student attending a PWI. Their service served as a very real means of social engagement. Jimmy (Omega, VCU) summarized this feeling of social engagement via community service to others when he said:

> To be honest…I guess it encouraged me socially… [to be] active on campus and
> in the community. You know, we did a lot of service projects, scholarship funds
> and stuff like that. So, you know…it kind of stimulates your sense of

120

involvement and causes in the community. That's just a part of what you signed

up for.

Memories of BGLO Membership

Participants reflected on the role their membership in a BGLO meant to them over

time. This emergent theme is more reflective and cumulative than the others. Given the

25 years that has elapsed since they were undergraduate students and joined their

respective BGLO, the participants had time to reflect on their experience to understand

better how their membership supported them during their college years. A question

posed to the group queried if they would make a different choice, and/or whether they

would make any changes looking back. Jimmy (Omega, VCU) summed up the sentiment

of participants quite succinctly, "I wouldn't do anything differently. Go to class more,

you know." More insight is offered by Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) as to his experience with

Alpha Phi Alpha and his overall college experience. He stated that,

And so, college life is really about finding out not only your individual identity

but your various different social, group and cultural identities. Either finding

them or extending them or redefining them. So, my fraternity experience was

very instrumental in all of those developmental experiences as an undergraduate.

Jimmy (Omega, VCU) remembers that he had a positive experience overall and has some

reservations about the manner in which African-American males enter the organization

today. He offered,

Yeah, I wouldn't rewrite it…wouldn't rewrite a page of it. I wouldn't do

anything differently. I think now, as far as the process and how it has developed

over the years, I think, I don't know. I think that it almost makes the

fraternity…you know, some people make the fraternity and other people, the

fraternity makes them.

Jimmy valued his experience as he pledged Omega Psi Phi.   He values the identity he

formed for himself within the confines of the organization. Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) also

values the identity he has found within his organization and at the same time, he also

offered a critique. Jimmy (Omega, VCU) stated,

> All the good that I know these organizations have done particularly for Black
>
> students helping them finish their degrees, giving them leadership experience,
>
> socializing them and giving them a safe space and a safe haven at their PWIs, the
>
> only way that they will continue to have a positive impact is if we do all we can
>
> and make that the focus.

Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) goes to say, "until we make sure in every possible way that

members of our organization strive to uphold the ideals, you know, we're going to have

challenges. And that's true of any institution that has high ideals." In his quote, Lorenzo

addressed the role of the high ideals of his fraternity like education, brotherhood,

community service and giving to others. Since these ideals are very similar to the

emergent themes of this study, it is no surprise that the memories of the participants

focused on the commonalities in their college experiences.

As members of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and Omega Psi Phi fraternity, these

study participants fondly remember their times as members of their fraternal community

and the larger community of African-American students at a PWI. Membership in a

BGLO at a PWI provided the participants a connection with their community's culture

and a place of safe harbor and acceptance while at college. This sentiment is echoed by

Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) as he reflected,

> the notion of community and the concept of communalism, which is strong
>
> throughout the African-American and African history. It's probably at least a
>
> partial explanation for how people of like backgrounds and experiences
>
> particularly in predominantly White settings tend to find themselves and build
>
> culture together.

The larger concept of microcosmic community appears to be exactly what all of the study

participants experienced as undergraduate students. Their communities expanded when

they joined their respective BGLOs and those networks were maintained in the 25 years

since they joined. Dillinger (Alpha, VCU) gives an idea of the lasting nature of his

fraternal relationships,

> Those friendships last a lifetime. It's funny. You say that you just spoke to [a
>
> fraternity brother]. We were just at 2 or 3 birthday parties in the last couple of
>
> months, 30 years later. I'm the godfather of his daughters, both of whom went to
>
> VCU.

George (Omega, VCU) spoke about being both a recipient of these lasting fraternity

bonds as well as being a benefactor. He stated:

> I had talked to some people and there was a brother…I talked to him and he said,
>
> "Hey I can get you the interview, however, understand that it's up to you to sell
>
> yourself during the interview. But I can get you the interview." Lo and behold, I
>
> got that job. The job after that, was also a brother involved. So, when you talk
>
> about networking, yes, I still utilize that now. I mean, I have helped others to get

jobs. Even when I see…I'm in a position now that I can hire people and I have hired some brothers in the past

Another important part of the study that should be mentioned is the recurrent idea of social capital. One researcher discussed the idea and importance of social capital. Harper (2010) reasoned that researchers should focus on those African-American male collegians who have earned good grades, avoided trouble, assumed leadership positions on their campuses, and amassed social capital that they previously lacked in order to determine what factors contributed to their success. Social capital is the idea that certain individuals are privileged because of their membership in a social network (Gasman & Palmer, 2008). Bourdieu (1986) theorized that the amount of social capital individuals possesses hinges on the size of their network as well as their economic and cultural standing. Bourdieu viewed social capital as a mechanism of control that the ruling class used to maintain their dominant position over the general population. The theory works in favor of African-American males at PWIs in that it operates to get these young men to the place in which they should be. In essence, African-American males, a historically underrepresented gender and racial group in regard to student persistence, found a way to increase the odds of their ability to graduate. Their membership in their respective BGLOs allows them to capitalize on an underutilized way to feel connected to college campuses that often are alien to them. These groups provide social capital, not in the traditional or historical context, but in such a way as to benefit these young men as they persist towards graduation. Their BGLO membership is indeed a network and that network is not a manner in which to control the general population or exercise

124

dominance, it is used a positive affinity group for these young as exemplified by the memories of the participants.

Chapter Summary

The emergent themes from this study capture the voice of the African-American males' BGLO experiences as students at ODU and VCU. Prior to college, prior to joining a BGLO, and as BGLO fraternity members, these participants engaged in various manners of social engagement with their brothers. This engagement provided both social and academic integration for them. Their social engagement, especially the social engagement experienced as they prepared to join an actual pledge process served as a foundation of support that contributed to their persistence. The element of BGLOs as a positive influence on student persistence decisions of African-American males is one that has very rarely been researched and for which there is precious little data.

The themes of 1) pre-college connections the African-American male students had prior to their matriculation at their PWI, 2) brotherhood, 3) membership in a BGLO as a means of support in their persistence to graduation, 4) a pay it forward element of their experience, and 5) memories or reflections as each participant gave an account of their college experiences. Many times, the participants mentioned how they did not remember a specific experience until prompted by one of the interview questions. From their detailed memories, which prompted the emergence of precise experiences from the past and times of laughter throughout all of their interviews, it appears that each participant relished the ability to walk down memory lane. Not only did the study benefit from their recollections of their experience, they too received a benefit from being able to

recount all of the ways in which their membership in their respective BGLOs on their respective campuses helped them decide to persist to graduation.

The participants also expressed the same joy when remembering their fraternal connections in the decades since they joined. Their resolution to make it to graduation was strengthened as they identified other successful African-American males who had already blazed a trail for them. Their goals to get their degrees were supported by their undergraduate and graduate fraternity members. Their membership, in essence, became a critical point of connection to others in an environment that was completely foreign when they arrived as incoming freshman. Such a strong element of student persistence deserves a serious examination and serves as the basis for this qualitative study.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This hermeneutic phenomenology investigated how membership in a BGLO influenced African-American males' decision to persist at a PWI during the 1990s. Specifically, this study included the experiences of eight participants and queried what, if any, role their fraternity experiences played in their decisions to persist until their graduation. The memories of the participants were captured via one-on-one interviews. During their one-one-one interviews, the participants revealed the variables and forces that influenced their desires to become connected to their respective college campuses and persist towards degree attainment. Chapter 1 introduced the growing issue of low student persistence for African-American males in higher education, using specific statistics that highlighted that African-American males have the highest attrition rates of any gender and racial group. The study's conceptual framework derived from the literature provided an extensive overview of historic research on African American college persistence and the history of BGLOs. The use of a phenomenological approach for a methodology helped to surface emergent themes and patterns across the participant experiences that highlighted how pre-college connections, the role of the brotherhood within their BGLO, and a desire to pay it forward were the essence of the phenomenon under study.

This chapter is organized in three sections for the sake of clarity and synthesis. The first section provides a discussion of the findings of the study. These findings are then tied to the study's conceptual framework and theory. The second section presents

analysis for the implications of the study and offers strategies that can possibly improve the persistence of current African-American male students by examining the success of African-American male students. These strategies may be successfully adopted by colleges and universities to aid them in the elimination of possible barriers to persistence and to improve the probability of their African-American male collegians becoming African-American male graduates. The final section of Chapter 5 offers formal recommendations to higher education faculty members and administrators to help support better African American men attending PWIs. These recommendations are formulated from the key factors and variables identified by the study's participants as influential and supportive for African-American males as they attend PWIs.

The value of this study is that it offers the precise memories of African-American males who have attained the educational goal of graduation. Their voices present the essence of the phenomenon under study, which could help to shape policy and programming at a range of colleges and universities. The methods during data collection allowed the participants an opportunity to depict their perspectives and experiences of being an African-American man attending a PWI, and to understand the influence of membership in a BGLO on their persistence.

Analysis of the participant interviews involved an initial reading of the volume of memories to get a feeling for the types of things being said about the phenomenon being studied. Then I began a deeper analysis of the data offered in order to organize the information, gain a deeper understanding of the data and to focus on emerging themes. This coding of the interviews provided the foundation for the emerging findings and a means to use direct quotes to bring the voices of the participants into the study. The rich,

thick descriptions provided by the participants allowed for the capture of the meanings in the data. The five themes which emerged from the data are pre-college exposure to BGLOs, brotherhood, fraternal ties, pay it forward phenomenon, and memories. The findings from the study provide a good backdrop to help improve the campus experiences and social engagement of African-American males, and thereby help to encourage them to persist at higher rates.

Summary of Findings

This section outlines the research question and aligns it with the findings from the study. Each of the areas includes a discussion of how the findings relate to the existing literature base, how the work extends what is known, and how the data highlight counter narratives to the literature base.

Guiding research question. Recall, the main research question for this study was*: How do African-American men now view their experiences as a member of a BGLO at a PWI 25 years later?

    a. How do the fraternity members perceive the influence of their BGLO membership on their persistence?

    b. What memories of their BGLO membership are most salient?

In response to the low persistence rates of African-American male students, this study examined the ways in which membership in a BGLO influenced persistence decisions among African-American male students attending PWIs. This qualitative study researched and analyzed any potential connections between fraternity membership in a BGLO and persistence towards graduation. As well, the study sought to understand what memories of their college years were still important some 25 years after graduation.

The findings revealed the important role that BGLO membership held for the study participants and how this membership permeated their decisions to remain connected to their respective campuses. In my own experience as an African-American male student attending a PWI and as a member of a BGLO, I found there to be an emphasis on achievement. This included, but was not limited to, good grades, leadership positions on campus in other organizations, creating inroads to professional opportunities and influencing the other African-American students in positive ways. My own experiences help me to understand the voices of the participants because I was familiar with many elements of the pledge process such as being assigned a number while on line, working together with my line brothers on specific projects and governing myself in accordance with fraternity principles along with having the expectation for my line brothers and other members of my fraternity. All of this enabled me to relate to study participants in a unique way. Also, my membership in a BGLO gave me a certain measure of authenticity with participants. Given my own positionality, the participants felt a kinship with me as the researcher and established a high level of trust as they provided me with very candid responses.

The participants spoke about being exposed to fraternities even before arriving as first year students via family members, peers and university community engagement. These pre-college connections offered the African-American male participants a glimpse of what college could mean for them. Once on campus and committed to pledging, the participants relied heavily on their brothers for support, and this support and engagement helped their persistence.

The participants concluded that their membership in a BGLOs fueled their decisions to persist. In fact, their BGLO membership was directly influential in their decisions to persist because it connected them to their respective campuses in such a way that membership in other organizations did not. It gave them a substitute family and a space where they could be inspired and provide inspiration simultaneously. Their membership allowed them to have access to generations of Black men who had successfully traversed the academic rigors they sought to overcome. They were immediately embraced by chapter members, graduate members, graduate advisors, faculty members and staff and members of the community who were essentially there to cheer them on towards the ultimate goal of graduation.

Tinto's (1993) Theory of Departure opines that if a student has a weak or negligible connection between his desire to remain (persist) and a lack of commitment to do so, there is a stronger probability of attrition. The practical meaning here is that when an African-American male student does not link their desire to persist with a personal commitment to do so, the drop out odds increase. Factors which can influence this persistence decision are social engagement (Kuh, 2008). Strong levels of social engagement acts as a barrier to graduation. For the participants, their level of social engagement appeared to be the anchor that they needed in order to thrive academically. As Dillinger noted in his interview, "especially being at a PWI, you know, it's good to see people who have been where you are and now, they have graduated. Because, I mean, navigating VCU could a challenge sometimes." The takeaway here is that Dillinger's experience as a student at VCU could have been drastically different if he had not elected to engage in a BGLO and been provided examples of other African-American

college students at VCU who had been successful in their academic careers and now had obtained their college degree. When students reach high levels of self-actualization, an internal commitment to persist emerges regardless of race or gender (Melendez, 2015). This sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012b) goes a long way to overriding decisions to quit. For the participants in this study, pointedly, the literature highlights how social integration is key in student decisions about persistence (Gonyea, 2006).

Discussion of Themes

This section reviews each of the themes from this study through the theoretical frameworks. Discussion involves the role of structure, motivations, and student agency to highlight how the participants navigated their time at a PWI using the social capital they gained via their BGLO membership.

Pre-college connections. Engagement is the strongest in instances in which this social integration has roots in a student's pre-college experience. As noted in the findings, nearly all of the participants had some pre-college exposure to BGLOs from family members, peers, friends of other people and/or the community engagement of local colleges or local graduate chapters. Many of them cited specific examples of the ways in which they discovered the benefits of BGLO membership. For example, one study participant, Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) talked about an upperclassman at ODU who was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha and who inspired him early on, "I had interaction with at least three or four guys beyond John Hastings…These guys were great ambassadors for the university. And they…extended outreach not just to me…they were really involved that way."

Much of the current research consistently shows that many students and their parents lack accurate or complete knowledge or information about college costs and financial aid (Perna, 2004). The benefit of BGLO members coming back to their community and connecting with high schoolers that may have looked up to them or family members getting ready to go to college is that they tend to share important information about getting to college. They share things like how to best use Title IV funding, what professors are the most student friendly, courses to take and other college success mechanisms.

Brotherhood. Brotherhood emerged as another theme in the interviews and the participants recounted the bonds of brotherhood that they felt as African-American students at a PWI and then they remembered how those bonds of brotherhood expounded exponentially once they joined their respective BGLOs. The theme of brotherhood was distinguished from ordinary friendships because the commonality of the pledge experience amongst the young men bonded them in a way that ordinary friendships did not. Many of the participants talked about how they would go to the edge of the world for their fraternity brothers and don't make mention of the same level of responsiveness when it comes to the friends that they made in college. Those non-fraternal friendships are important certainly and they were discussed by the participants as they talk about roommates, dorm mates and suitemates that they met and with whom they became friends. However, when talking about their fraternity brothers, that level of friendship was deepened in a significant way. In my own experience, while joining my fraternity, being made to eat together, to sleep together, to work on projects together and to face

adversity together bonded my line brothers and me together for life. To this day, we often sit around and fondly reminisce about those times.

All of the data collected was ripe with examples of BGLO brotherhood bonds. These BGLO brotherhood bonds stemmed from their relationships with their chapter brothers, alumni brothers, graduate members and current college students who were members of other fraternities. Despite the way in which they started, an overwhelming number of them all cited how these bonds have lasted in the years since college. James (Omega, ODU) gives a glimpse, as he said,

> So, we all pretty much functioned as an extension of one another. Some of those guys…one of them is my kid's godfather. We've all been at each other's weddings. And we continue to support each other in every way possible.

These bonds of brotherhood have been more than just a means of social engagement for these former collegians while they matriculated towards their degree, they were the sort of relationships that bound these men together over 25 years later.

As mentioned above, there were moments were study participants spoke about their non-fraternity friendships as well. These non-fraternal friendship bonds were important as well since not every African-American male on their respective campuses joined a BGLO. Since the overall goal is to aid and assist this particular racial and gender group with their goals towards persistence, discussion about other methods of social engagement is just as important for their persistence decisions. Although all of the study participants were members of a BGLO, a few of them discussed the connectedness and support they received from other African-American students. They talked about the ways in which the African-American students on their campus would connect and

support one another. For example, TDR 88 (Alpha, VCU) said that he met quite a few

new friends in the exceptional student program at VCU. It was a pre-college summer

program offered to students to allow them to pass both of the offered courses and gain

full acceptance to the university; "so I already had a strong bond with that person and

then that entire group [of exceptional student program], we stayed connected throughout

the years, throughout my entire college experience." Here, TDR 88 (Alpha, VCU)

gained friendships from the summer entry program at VCU prior to the beginning of his

first year. Interestingly, those friendships continued to grow despite joining different

BGLOs.

> **BGLO inspiration and support.** Membership in a BGLO meant that each of the

members were expected to thrive academically. This expectation served as an inspiration

to the members and was not without support by the other members. One of the

participants talked about his ability to make a decision about getting to graduation.

Michael (Alpha, VCU) talked about social integration and student persistence in his

interview;

> "[we were] just trying to graduate on time. So, they encouraged me in that
>
> way…or we encouraged each other by making sure that we were able to get our
>
> work done. You know, if you needed help with something…I know as an Alpha,
>
> we were good with that. If we didn't understand something, we could find
>
> somebody who did understand it.

Brothers were there to inspire, uplift and provide concrete ways in which their fraternity

brothers could not persist towards graduation, but excel academically while doing so.

Paying it forward. Many of the participants remembered their experiences as collegians where once they joined their respective BGLOs, they felt the responsibility of acting as mentors for other college students, younger fraternity brothers or even area high school students. TDR 88 (Alpha, VCU) talked about the idea of paying it forward as a graduate member for local undergraduate members,

> It's a mentorship program where you can help the undergraduate brothers [of Alpha Phi Alpha] and provide the events and historical knowledge of where the chapter was and to help to continue the future of the chapter by distinguishing this relationship with a brother who's been in the organization say…20 years ago, 30 years ago, 40 years ago with someone who just crossed in 2016, 2017 or 2018 and help them get through some of the bumps in the road that they can't see yet.

George (Omega, VCU) spoke about his experience where he was the recipient of a member of the organization who elected to show him the ropes before he was even a member of the fraternity:

> But when I got to VCU, there was a brother that actually approached me. And he didn't approach me from a fraternity perspective, he just approached me as, "Hey, how's it going?" I didn't even know that he was in a frat at the time. He had on no paraphernalia, none whatsoever and he just walked up to me and started talking…I couldn't believe it.

These are just two examples of students who received the benefits of membership from their fraternities and then effortlessly benefitted others without an expectation of

recompense. The idea of pay it forward was evidenced by their in-depth social engagement.

Memories. None of the African-American males who participated in the study were reticent about providing details about their college experience. They seemed to enjoy remembering all of the ways in which their college years were enriched due to social engagement and successfully obtaining their degrees. James (Omega, ODU) remembered some of his responsibilities while on line,

There were marching lines, so once I got accepted…we kind of bonded over Spring Break a little bit. We started hanging out together a little bit more and tried to prepare ourselves. [We] dressed alike, we went everywhere we could on campus together, we marched according to height, in sequence, everywhere we went. We did everything in sequence or as a unit. We kind of functioned as a unit. We each were an extension of the next person.

As he remembered the experience of being on line, he provided enough vivid details to give this researcher a rich account of how he joined his fraternity. His memory is a prime example all of the participants provided their memories with total transparency.

Table 6 provides a synthesis of the participants' responses to prompts included in the interview protocol. This type of summary helps more fully see the phenomenon in question.

Table 6

Protocol Question and Answer Summary

Question	Summary of Responses
Once attending college, what attracted you to your respective BGLO?	The participants responded that what attracted them to their respective BGLOs was most often their exposure to members. They talked about how open and engaging the members were. Many times, members also impressed these former collegians because they were leaders on campus and academically accomplished. At times these members were family members, peers, upperclassmen, members of the community or prominent figures in Black History or American history who were quite accomplished.
What steps did you take in order to prepare yourself for the application to your fraternity, and later the pledging process?	The participants sought out other members on their respective campuses by engaging them individually, going to fraternity parties and showing up for fraternity community service projects. They were able to establish a friendship with them most often. A few said that members sometimes sought them out as well. They all studied historical information about their BGLO and took note of their community service.
What experiences before pledging caused you to feel more connected to campus life? During? After?	All of the participants mentioned their network of friends and acquaintances that they developed on campus prior to the pledge process. Many of them were actively involved in student groups such as ROTC after starting college. During the pledge process, they felt even more connected because of the pledge process itself. They gained line brothers and other members as brothers, which served to expand their connectedness. Finally, after the pledge process, the participants mentioned the bonds of brotherhood that made them feel connected to the campus. They were connected to other older brothers in their undergraduate chapter, alumni brothers and members of the graduate chapters. They also mentioned how being fraternity members made them student role models and people wanted to be around them.
Did becoming a member of a BGLO induce you to join other organizations?	Some of the participants talked about how their fraternal membership encouraged them to become members of other organizations or hold other positions of service. However, some mentioned that they were so busy due to the community service obligations brought on by their membership, jobs and school work that they did not have time to join any other organizations.
How instrumental was the local graduate chapter in the process by which you became a member of your BGLO? And, how did their guidance and advice influence you?	Local graduate members were involved with undergraduate brothers as they ensured that the undergraduate chapters adhered to the rules of the fraternity and stayed "on track." Many graduate chapters had a specific undergraduate advisor assigned to the chapter which was an elected position in each of the fraternities. The graduate members took an active role in making their younger brothers made decisions that enabled them to persist towards graduation as they checked on their class attendance, class schedules and how they were balancing their academics with all other responsibilities.
How did the resultant peer groupings that developed during the pledge process influence your decision to persist?	Many of the participants talked about how the older brothers would offer help if they saw one of their brothers struggling academically or shirking their community service responsibilities. This type of help could come in the form of helping them get to class, giving them textbooks or connecting them with faculty who could also assist them.
How has your views concerning the rigors of gaining membership into your fraternity changed over the years?	None of the participants would change anything about their BGLO involvement. They highlighted their pledge process and talked about how entering the fraternity opened up a new world to them. With regard to the current membership intake process, many of the participants expressed small ways in which they would change the current process.
Is there anything that you would like to add?	A few of the participants said that despite whatever small challenges that BGLOs deal with, the good that they do for their campus community and

larger communities outweighs any problems by far.

Note. BGLO = Black Greek letter organization.

In sum, this study confirmed that social engagement is a motivator for African-American male students' persistence, and social engagement in the form of BGLO membership offered a level of connectivity that was enhanced due to the pre-exposure the participants had to BGLOs and what it means to be a fraternity brother. One of the memories that TDR 88 (Alpha, VCU) provided about his college days was how he felt as a student on campus,

> The college experience was great. The campus life…the cohesion strengthened [me] even more because being a part of an organization just sparks you to be involved…to be active and when people saw that, it drew people to you and to your organization. So, it was an even stronger bond [between us as students].

Another example of the themes of pay it forward and memories are mixed together in George's (Omega, VCU) undergraduate experience. He said, "I remember as an undergrad…we used to wash cars. We used to have car washes. We used to have dances, things to do to get money and would be happy if we made $500 on a dance." As young African-American college students attending PWIs, these young men had a heart for doing good for their fraternity brothers, friends, and communities. They were gracious enough to share their memories as part of this study.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides an appropriate lens for analysis in this study. CRT grew out of the legal field as theorists there began to examine why the Civil Rights movement stalled out and why race was rarely examined as a legal form of oppression. In the 1990s, researchers such as Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate

139

examined CRT as it applied to the field of education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Their work focused heavily on the social disparities between dominant and oppressed

racial/social groups.

The five key doctrines of CRT include: 1) the notion that racism is ordinary and is

not aberrational, 2) the idea of an interest convergence, 3) the social construction of race,

4) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling, and 5) the notion that Whites have

actually been the recipients of Civil Rights legislation (Delgado, 1995). Critical race

theorists propose that racism is a fundamental, endemic, and normalized part of the

organization of society. CRT theorists believe that this type of racism began with the

taking of land from indigenous people through slavery. The idea here is that the

dominant White race created racism for their own benefit and its creation of it is

normative (Yosso, 2006).

CRT and educational research have historically intersected as a means by which

to provide 1) criticisms of policies and procedures and 2) documentation of strategies that

navigate and provide resistance to racism. Here it was important to develop new methods

to aid and assist undergraduate Black male students with their persistence decisions. The

development of these new methods meant that this researcher used CRT to provide a lens

for others to understand the issues faced by African-American males as they understood

it.

On a larger scale, CRT plays an important role in higher education when

institutions of higher learning seek to become more diverse and inclusive. For example, a

PWI that only seeks to increase its number of students of color that it enrolls is

insufficient where substantial institutional change is a priority for that institution.

Examining the campus climate and efforts to have a culturally competent and diverse

faculty, staff and administration is a more effective way to become more diverse and

thereby effective (Hiraldo, 2010). The current study used storytelling by the study

participants to provide a glimpse into the campus climates as they remembered it. Their

memories provided insight into the obstacles they overcame as they were determined to

persist. They candidly provided their memories and their memories served as a modern-

day criticism of a current lack of attention to the successful measures they were able to

utilize in order to get towards graduation. This study emphasized the voices of African

American men's experiences on a PWI campus. The men spoke of the solidarity they

experienced with their BGLO brothers, and other African American men on campus.

Because this study did not focus on racism, the findings did not specifically link to race

per se. Yet, the participants commented on several occasions about the PWI context of

their college years. Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) talked about his experience at ODU on this

topic when he remembered,

> So, once I got there, the other thing that helped me out a lot and get really
>
> connected to the campus world was the Black students in my dorm. A lot of us
>
> bonded together. We used to take up three tables in the dorm cafeteria at dinner
>
> time and at breakfast. We used to call ourselves the family.

TDR 88 (Alpha, VCU) echoed a similar comment at his experience as an African-

American male at a PWI, "It was a sense of community. Campus life itself

was…together and we felt like we were at home. So, we felt like we were at home…you

didn't feel like a stranger at all." These men found a way to find a way to socially engage

with other African-American students in order to become comfortable at their respective

PWIs. They engaged by finding other students, alumni, faculty, and graduate chapter members who look like them, had similar experiences and who had already achieved what they desired to achieve. They created their own inroads in order to persist.

The aim of this study was to understand the remembered experiences of the participants, and these memories existed in a context in which race was prominent due to the PWI enrollments. By default, the African-American men in this study felt a foreign in a PWI campus. As each of the participants remembered their experiences, they often replaced the anxiety of being a new student on a PWI campus in which the majority of students, faculty and administrators did not look like them with feelings of connections with other African-American students, Black graduates, and community members. TDR 88 (Alpha, VCU) said:

> So, during pledging as a Sphinxman, we were above ground on campus. We went
>
> to our classes. The campus accepted our organization so…I felt connected
>
> because we weren't shunned or we weren't looked at with an evil eye of sorts.

The participants spoke about feeling able to see other African-American students who had already successfully traversed college life as upper classmen or alumni. For many of them as undergraduates, seeing is believing and like James (Omega, ODU) remembered, "Even when we were pledging, we would go out to their [alumni brothers] houses and stuff to meet them and to participate in activities with them as well." CRT and the participant's explanations of racial dynamics act as the backdrop as they discussed increased levels of support and connections.

CRT is vital since the theory shifts the research lens away from a deficit view and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and

contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged. CRT works to acknowledge that African-American males bring cultural capital with them from their homes and communities into the classroom. This CRT approach to higher education involves a commitment to develop colleges and universities that acknowledge the multiple strengths of African-American male students as well as those of other racial and gender groups in order to serve a larger purpose of struggle toward social and racial justice (Yosso, 2006).

 With a new approach that involves CRT principles of social justice, colleges and universities will create environments that grow and prosper students who want to socially engage and more importantly, persist. Ultimately, CRT centers its research, pedagogy, and policy lens on African-Americans and calls into question White middle-class sensibilities and standards as the standard by which all others are judged. This shifting of the research lens allows critical race scholars to see multiple forms of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006). Restructuring of the ways in which PWIs offer support to African-American males is strengthened by CRT.

 The analysis of the data from this study provides information regarding strategies that could be adopted by colleges and universities as a means to eliminate barriers to persistence for African-American men, which may improve the probability of African-American male collegians becoming African-American male graduates. The implications derived from the data highlight that BGLOs provide a key form of social and educational engagement for members and as such, fraternity membership heavily influenced the participants' persistence towards graduation. There are those researchers who believe that affiliation with a fraternity or sorority can in fact lower students' grades, particularly

around the time recruits are being inducted into a Greek chapter (Bauer-Wolf, 2019). It has been noted that most often the drop-in grades occur around the time that the member joins their respective Greek organizations. However, this information must be examined in context. They cited other research that showed retention is improved by involvement in Greek organizations. Further research shows the stress of first-year students stems from loneliness, and sororities and fraternities provide connection, friendship, and a strong support system for these collegians (Bauer-Wolf, 2019). This most recent article echoes the importance of social engagement as a means by which students persist towards graduation and the reasons why. Connection, friendship, and a strong support system act as a network for students and encourage them to feel connected to their respective campuses.

Each of the eight participants talked about how they experienced a culture of success once they entered the fraternity. The participants noted how their fraternity's culture created overt and covert expectations for members, which built on the principles of leadership, service to the community, and excellence in education. Pointedly, an expectation was graduation for members. And, not only were the members expected to graduate, they were expected to succeed in life, and to reach out to others in their communities and help them succeed as well.

Another important point that emerged was how their fraternal membership created a network of brotherhood that extended well past their college years. During the college years, fraternity brothers were responsible for assisting one another through mentorship and making themselves available to assist other members with academics in any way possible. The connections and bonds of brotherhood fostered connectedness to their

"new home" at a PWI, and as such made it easier for them to address typical barriers to

persistence. Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) remembered the assistance that he got from a

graduate member of Alpha Phi Alpha as he asked about his academic progress,

> I will never forget [him saying to me] "Lorenzo you decided to get in the
>
> game." And I knew exactly what he meant. He meant that that I was
>
> taking my scholarships, my academics as seriously as I was taking any
>
> other part of my college experience.

The participants reviewed the efficacy of their BGLO membership and noted that nearly

all of their fraternity brothers graduated, with most graduating with a four to six-year

period. The participants reflected on the expectation of their fraternity brothers to

become leaders on campus, within the BGLO, on campus, and in the community. For

example, Lorenzo (Alpha, ODU) talked about his fraternity and leadership on his

campus,

> Individuals who were members of Alpha Phi Alpha who were doing impressive
>
> things. They were in positions of leadership. They were extremely service and
>
> community service oriented. And in fact, some of the men who I found out later
>
> were Alpha men were doing things in the way of service and leadership even
>
> before I knew they were Alphas.

This expectation created an incentive to do well academically and inspire others to do the

same.

Implications from this study include the influence of fraternity membership on

persistence, the need for members to understand the ongoing expectations of role

modeling for others, and the way college administrators and faculty members can support

the values, goals, and mission of BGLO given the outcome of supporting African American male persistence to graduation. One study recently found its sample of respondents, the proportion of African- American Greek-letter members who graduate from college is roughly 90% (Severtis & Christie-Mizell, 2007). Another comparative study offered that Black and White Greeks at a PWI, Black Greeks were found to be more grade-motivated than their White counterparts and study more hours per week. There were no significant differences in extracurricular involvement. The authors concluded that "Black Greeks are likely to be the superior students academically" (Branch, 1997). As the participants noted, their BGLO membership encouraged them to realize their educational goals and provided corrective support if they ever got off track. Once these men joined their respective fraternities, their membership served as a source of emotional, social, and educational support for the remainder of their college careers. The experiences of the study participants support the perceptions of the participants and their memories of their BGLO membership. Work to increase the African-American male BGLO alumni base could further bolster the persistence of current collegians. Next, this study offers suggestions for formal policy and practice recommendations for faculty members and administrators. Finally, the next section reviews suggestions for further research.

Policy/Practice and Future Research Recommendations

This study outlines what African-American male students in BGLO found as potential factors of influence in supporting their persistence in the world of higher education. These experiences serve as implications and recommendations for the field. Institutions of higher education should re-examine their practice and policies related to

graduation strategies and student support. Data analysis points to distinctive policy recommendations to better support African-American male undergraduates. The recommendations section serves as a preliminary framework for future research on African-American males as they attend PWIs.

Policy/practice recommendation #1. PWI leaders should assume a more active role in exposing incoming students to BGLO on campus. Orientation programming and the resources to support it will expose more African-American men to these organization and, given the positive influence membership held for the participants in this study, membership could provide support to persist for this new generation of college men. It is true that the organizations themselves engage in recruitment activities; such as back-to-school parties, step shows, and public service events, but endorsements from the university and collaborations with the office of Greek life or student activities could further highlight the organizations to incoming students. The findings of this study support the idea that participant involvement in Greek life engendered an early desire to imitate the successful behaviors of other African-American males who were already members of BGLO. These behaviors included a culture of excellence marked by academic achievement and degree attainment. The sense of brotherhood also worked to establish a connectedness to their respective campuses.

College and university administrators would do well to not only expose their entering students to BGLOs, but to providing support to campus chapters to emphasize the positive outcomes for members. It is vital that institutions not only give voice to their desire to support student persistence regardless of race or gender, and also to signal support for marginalized groups that suffer from high rates of attrition. Consistent

exposure and administrative support of BGLOs may result in persistence to graduation for incoming African-American men.

Policy/practice recommendation #2. Leaders at PWIs should likewise strive to establish and maintain relationships with BGLO alumni. As noted in the findings, the notion of pay-it-forward was prominent for the study participants. The PWI graduates thought it was important to mentor the next generation. Determining ways to formalize these mentorship efforts would be useful.

As they became more successful, these study participants understood that they had a responsibility for reaching out to younger fraternity brothers, underclassmen, and local high school students to guide them through the college going process. The participants held the underlying concept that to whom much is given, much is required. Finally, the memories of their experiences collectively serve as a valuable resource as they capture the voices of African-American male college students who have been hidden in historical literature. Essentially, the data collected helps inform how BGLOs influenced African-American men on a PWI campus.

A recognition of the role that colleges and universities hold in engaging the alumni members of BGLOs is critical, as these alumni can act as mentors for current African-American male students. To date, institutions of higher learning have largely ignored the rich potential database of alumni who are able to enrich the lives of current students by providing them with the benefit of their experiences. This vast potential network of Black men is unique in that they have already managed to accomplish obtaining a degree, a goal to which current African-American male students aspire. The alumni of BGLOs can provide mentorship, networking skills, and academic assistance to

current students. Alumni involvement can help stave the high number of African-American men who decide not to continue in college and attain a degree.

Policy/practice recommendation #3. Also, universities and national chapter leaders should develop programs through which BGLOs are able to improve their practices. Nearly all of the BGLOs are more than 100 years old and steeped in traditions that may be outdated. Programming to aid in the re-examination of the image of BGLO and their appeal to students is needed. BGLOs and the social engagement, leadership and academic excellence benefits it offers must appeal to the profile of today's students. This type of evaluation of practices is important to retain the historic role BGLOs have had in African-American students' persistence decisions. Not only did these organizations play a pivotal part in their degree attainment, but they historically engendered a culture of excellence that their members inspired to achieve. BGLOs have encouraged their alumni members to continue this culture of degree attainment and success by serving as mentors for newer members. Summarily, BGLOs would be well served to purposely understand better the needs of current collegians in order to attract them as members and to remain relevant.

Policy/practice recommendation #4. Lastly, the NPHC should take a more active role in the promotion of joining BGLOs as a persistence tool. The NPHC endeavors to address concerns that are common amongst all nine of the BGLOs. This can be accomplished with forums, seminars, conventions, and even social events. Following the acknowledgement that the attempts to try to standardize the pledge process between the years of 1985 and 1990 was a failed experiment, each BGLO tried to minimize risk and liability on its own. It would seem to be more useful and instructive

149

for this collective to serve as makeshift think tank to resolve the issue of improving recruitment efforts.

When I was a graduate student at VCU, an undergraduate member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority and I realized that while the White Greek Letter Organizations (WGLO) had the Inter-Fraternal Council (IFC) to serve as an umbrella organization that could assist with membership drives and other worthwhile activities, the BGLOs had no such organization. So, in February of 1997 my peer and I wrote to the graduate chapter of the organization to charter the NPHC at VCU. The purpose of this was to establish a similar umbrella organization to the IFC that could access student activity funds for BGLOs. In this way, each BGLO on campus could have the much-needed financial backing that it needed to expand recruitment efforts among other things. It was my personal experience that, even though a chapter of the NPHC was established at VCU and its establishment was a vital programming tool, there was little or no focus on student persistence. Thus, student success and academic programming could be emphasized as national initiatives.

Research recommendation #1. Additional research is necessary to understand African-American male student persistence. There are a number of recent studies (Harper, 2015) which have provided data on the threat of confirming stereotypes and the ways in which confirming stereotypes undermine academic performance and persistence for Blacks and other minoritized students at PWIs. Their findings show that these undergraduate men were frequently confronted with stereotypes but succeeded in resisting them through their campus leadership roles, their engagement in student organizations, and their use of a three-step strategic redirection process. Communication and confrontation skills acquired through out-of-class engagement enabled participants to

effectively resist the harmful threat of racial stereotypes encountered in classrooms (Harper, 2015). This research study touches on the fact that African-American students who attend a PWI perform better academically and make positive decisions to persist until graduation when they are able to engage in student organizations. Harper (2015) identifies the issue of persistence and provides a general solution with the engagement panacea. This study takes the research several steps further by specifically identifying a BGLO as a student organization that has historically provided undergraduates with a network of fraternity brothers who are leaders, excellent students and community service oriented. Another study noted the need for successful Black male initiatives. Wood (2011) specifically identified a BGLO as a student organization that has historically provided undergraduates with a network of fraternity brothers who are leaders, excellent students and community service oriented. Wood (2011) noted in his study that a college and its personnel, culture, policies and procedures, and programs have a critical role in student success. Specifically, the faculty interactions with black males can affect their achievement.

Many external barriers can be overcome by institutional environments that are affirming (Wood, 2011). Additional research is necessary to inform faculty, administrators, and other educators about the challenges faced by African-American male students and to highlight additional strategies to eliminate those challenges. Essentially, more research is needed to inform the development of new policies to support this racial and gender group, as well as the entire campus community.

These explorations should include determining whether African-American males are more or less likely to persist if they belong to other affinity groups. Affinity groups

can be centered around any subject of common interest. There should also be additional research to examine whether the same tendency to persist exists in the smaller Black male fraternities. There are questions such as if this enhanced level of student engagement exists for African-American males who join WGLOs. Does it exist for African-American males who join Greek organizations that identify as other than Black in ethnicity? There are questions involving whether the same phenomenon exists at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Finally, future research should also include whether there is a halo effect present, whereby African-Americans who simply express interest in joining a BGLO are more likely to persist because of the desire to emulate members of BGLOs.

Although this qualitative study is rich with data provided by its participants, there is an overall lack of information which deals with the retention of African-American male college students at four-year PWIs. Precious few studies examine the reasons for low rates of student persistence among African-American males (Bush & Bush, 2010; Cuyjet, 1997, 2006; Harper, 2006a; Strayhorn, 2012b). According to National Center for Education Statistics (2012) data, African-American men are the lowest of any racial and gender student population in higher education. According to Cuyjet (2006), African-American men most often cite the lack of a warm, nurturing, and supportive campus environment as a reason for not attending or persisting in college. Since the late 1990s, student success researchers have considered the experiences and outcomes of African-American males who have been historically underrepresented and underserved in institutions of higher learning (Bush & Bush, 2010; Cuyjet, 1997, 2006: Harper, 2006a; Strayhorn, 2012b). A finding which is consistently reported across these studies is that

African American rank at or near the bottom on most indicators of student success, including enrollment, persistence, achievement, engagement, and attainment. More recently, Harper (2006a) noted that in 2002, Black men represented 4.3% of all students enrolled in postsecondary education—the same as they did in 1976. What has not been studied at length, is the positive effect of BGLO membership as a means of social engagement and an effective tool to aid in African-American male's persistence decisions. A deeper exploration is needed of Black male student persistence issues.

Despite a historic focus on and ongoing attention to student persistence, barriers remain for certain populations of college students, particularly African-American men who have the poorest persistence rates. Colleges and universities must not only give voice to policies, procedures, and programming that support persistence towards graduation but must enact them, fund them, and monitor their success. The best way to solve an issue to make sure there is a clear understanding of the issue itself.

Research recommendation #2. More research is needed to examine other racial/gender groups that have very low student persistence rates. Attention should be given to how the pricing of particular colleges and universities marginalizes access for particular students. Implicit bias of faculty and staff members regarding the lack of ability to succeed and complete degree requirements by certain groups of students based on race and gender creates stereotype threat (Steele, 1997). Stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) stems from a growing body of studies which undercut conventional assumptions that genetics or cultural differences lead some students—such as African Americans or girls—to do poorly on standardized academic tests and other academic performances. Instead, it has become clear that negative stereotypes raise inhibiting doubts and high-

pressure anxieties in a test-taker's mind, resulting in the phenomenon of "stereotype threat" (American Psychological Association, 2006).

Finally, researchers should examine whether introductory courses dissuade student's efforts towards persistence by viewing their responsibility to "weed out" students during their first year. Factors which act as barriers towards student persistence, especially for underrepresented groups, must be identified and counteracted. In order to do that, more research is needed in order for these groups to succeed. The research that is needed must expound upon former studies which talk about issues but stop short of providing actual solutions. Researchers like Harper (2012) identify racial bias, institutional efforts to overcome it and the role that race plays in higher education. Much discourse is given to the identification of racial barriers to persistence, classification of these issues and even prospecting of the state of higher education should current problems remain. What is not often resultant from previous studies are practical solutions to aiding African-American males persist. As mentioned earlier this study, the best way to find a solution to any problem is to examine the methods of those who have already overcome it—that is, African-American male alumni from the selected PWIs.

Conclusion

This study found that the African-American men who participated in this study acknowledged and credited their BGLO membership with their persistence and success at a PWI in the 1990s. It can be argued that students who have high GPAs and the wherewithal to produce letters of recommendation and who are resourceful enough to come up with costly initiation fees are more likely to graduate anyway. Those students could be seen as resourceful enough to overcome obstacles and matriculate successfully

154

despite the odds. The rigors associated with making line such as completing a lengthy application, securing funding, earning the GPA, and convincing several members in good standing to provide an individual with letters of recommendation could frustrate their intention to join a BGLO, but the benefit is apparent.

To be certain, low persistence rates among African-American males is problematic universally, not just at PWIs. However, there are specific challenges that are peculiar to African-American males attending them. Social isolation, microaggressions, a fractured sense of belonging, even open hostility may cause students to drop out. These challenges must be addressed in order to enable the university to continue to access Title IV funds, but also to produce more diverse and better educated citizenry throughout the country. Joining a BGLO is one way to increase an African-American male's chances of remaining in school.

As noted, the five emergent themes included pre-college exposure to BGLOs, brotherhood, fraternity ties, pay it forward phenomenon, and memories. This research found that the strengths of brotherhood helped these young men succeed at college despite the odds against them. The many memories the participants shared highlighted the importance of pre-college relationships on ultimate college success. These early relationships helped bridge the gap between high school and community to the college campus more easily. Knowing someone on campus and having an ally, helped to connect the participants to their colleges. Ultimately, the participants gained a sense of brotherhood through their interactions with roommates, fellow pledges, and other fraternity members. The strength of these fraternal ties extended beyond the college years and remain strong even today. When African-American collegians obtain

155

successful outcomes, such as graduating from college and launching into successful careers, they feel a sense of obligation to pay it forward to future generations. Long held, positive memories from their college experiences continued to bolster the agency of the African-American alumni included in this study. Supporting a cycle of success such as that experienced by the participants is important to maintain. Too much is at stake to do any less.

There are some takeaways that can be derived by the participants responses. All of which are indicative of the positive influence of these two groups on the African-American student's decision to persist.

1. Being a member of a fraternity can serve as an early warning system to alert peers to when a student has already joined the group but may be struggling academically.

2. Being part of fraternity means having a built-in tutoring, mentoring, and support; academic and otherwise.

3. Being part of a fraternity provides a safe space to freely express an individual's thoughts and ideas.

4. Being part of a fraternity means that the brotherhood that members feel is a makeshift familial bond that can encourage them to succeed.

5. The pre-college connection that is common among the participants was a vehicle through the pump was primed. The college goers had a better idea of what to expect, and were privy to success tips that enabled them to excel.

APPENDIX A

Solicitation Email

Hello,

I was given your name by _____. I am conducting a study of African-American male college students, who attended a PWI and who joined a BGLO as an undergraduate student between the years of 1985 and 1990. The two universities that I have selected for the study are ODU and VCU. If you satisfy the above-mentioned parameters, I wanted to see if you would be willing to participate in the study. Your participation would be completely voluntary and all answers that you provide will be completely anonymous. If you are you willing to participate, you may contact me at the information listed above.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Charles Smith, a doctoral candidate from the College of William & Mary, department of Education Policy, Planning and Leadership. I hope to learn how participation in a historically Black Greek Letter Organization (BGLO) has had an impact on your persistence in college and your perception of college life at your undergraduate university. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your membership in a BGLO and because of your ability to obtain your college degree as an African-American male at a PWI. If you decide to participate, I will contact you directly by email for our interview session. The interviews will take place via telephone. The interviews will be audiotaped. Prior to the interview session, I will distribute consent forms and the interview protocol which includes the questions I will address in the interview. Duration of interviews will be 30-60 minutes. If you are willing to respond to follow up questions, these brief interviews will occur within one week of the consent form being received – either face-to-face or via phone. All interviews will take place in _____ of 2018. Data will be collected through the personal interview methods. Minimal risk will result from sharing your personal experiences as a member of a BGLO.

Confidentiality will be focused upon throughout the research. After I collect the interview data via audio recording, I will personally transcribe and code the interviews and then develop an identity key that links your identity with a unique code number. For your security, code keys, audio tapes and transcriptions will be stored separately. After

the research study is completed, the code key and audio tapes will be destroyed and I and my assistant will be the only person to have access to the audio interview files. I will store audiotapes, coded transcripts, signed consent forms and written interviews at my home in a secure location where I and my assistant will be the only individuals that have access to the data.

The benefits of participating in the study are many. You will be able to share your personal experiences of being a student at your undergraduate university. Your experiences will directly impact how services and support are delivered to African-American, male college students. Moreover, the data you provide will influence how curriculum and how many colleges and universities address key issues of persistence and success of all student populations, especially African American males. Finally, your participation will influence others to participate and share their personal lived experiences as members of a BGLO as a means of social engagement.

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship as an alumnus of your undergraduate university. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at (804) 536.6996, crssmith238@gmail.com. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the above email address and/or phone number.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your

consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you will receive a

copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims.

Signature _____

Print Name _____

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions for study participants

1. Once attending college, what attracted you to your respective BGLO?

2. What steps did you take in order to prepare yourself for the application to your fraternity, and later the pledging process?

3. What experiences before pledging caused you to feel more connected to campus life? During? After?

4. Did becoming a member of a BGLO induce you to join other organizations?

    a. What other organizations did you join?
    b. What type of experiences did you have in those organizations?

5. How instrumental was the local graduate Chapter in the process by which you becoming a member of a BGLO, how did their advice and guidance influence you?

6. How did the resultant peer groupings that developed during the pledge process influence your decision to persist?

    a. Tell me about an experience that highlights this?
    b. Who was involved—frat brothers? Others?

7. How has your views concerning the rigors of gaining membership into your fraternity changed over the years?
    a. Have you remained active in your fraternity chapter post-graduation?
    b. Who do you stay in contact with from your college days?

8. Are there any other experiences that you would like to share about experiences that helped you in your college persistence?

APPENDIX D

Table 6

JMU Graduation Rates for Bachelor's Degree-seeking Cohort, by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Cohort Years 1987-1991

Year	Grand Total	Men	Women	White Total	White Men	White Women	Black Total	Black Men	Black Women
1991	2256	985	1271	2045	908	1137	144	52	92
1989	2045	791	1254	1842	727	1115	152	47	105
1987	1932	820	1112	1810	783	1027	98	30	68

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. JMU = James Madison University

Hispanic Total	Hispanic Men	Hispanic Women	Asian/ Pacific Islander Total	Asian/ Pacific Islander Men	Asian/ Pacific Islander Women	Native American Total	Native American Men	Native American Women
28	13	15	30	8	22	5	1	4
15	4	11	28	9	19	4	2	2
10	3	7	9	4	5	2	0	0

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. JMU = James Madison University

Race/Ethnicity Unknown Total	Race/Eth Unknown Men	Race/Ethnicity Unknown Women	Nonresident Alien Total	Nonresident Alien Men	Nonresident Alien Women
0	0	0	4	3	1
0	0	0	4	2	2
0	0	0	3	0	3

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. JMU = James Madison University

Table 7

Virginia Tech University Graduation Rates for Bachelor's Degree-seeking Cohort, by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Cohort Years 1987-1991

Year	Grand Total	Men	Women	White Total	White Men	White Women	Black Total	Black Men	Black Women
1991	3781	2137	1644	3403	1913	1490	104	45	59
1989	3670	2107	1563	3356	1921	1435	82	45	37
1987	3581	2045	1536	3303	1876	1427	109	63	46

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. VA Tech = Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Hispanic Total	Hispanic Men	Hispanic Women	Asian/ Pacific Islander Total	Asian/ Pacific Islander Men	Asian/ Pacific Islander Women	Native American Total	Native American Men	Native American Women
44	21	23	180	115	65	1	1	0
27	21	6	163	91	72	4	3	1
22	11	11	110	64	46	3	3	0

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. VA Tech = Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Race/Ethnicity Unknown Total	Race/Eth Unknown Men	Race/Ethnicity Unknown Women	Nonresident Alien Total	Nonresident Alien Men	Nonresident Alien Women
0	0	0	49	42	7
0	0	0	38	26	12
0	0	0	34	28	6

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. VA Tech = Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Table 8

GMU Graduation Rates for Bachelor's Degree-seeking Cohort, by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Cohort Years 1987-1991

Year	Grand Total	Men	Women	White Total	White Men	White Women	Black Total	Black Men	Black Women
1991	2455	978	1477	2006	798	1208	83	28	55
1989	2376	984	1392	1949	801	1148	70	27	43
1987	1835	768	1067	1611	673	938	48	21	27

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. GMU = George Mason University

Hispanic Total	Hispanic Men	Hispanic Women	Asian/ Pacific Islander Total	Asian/ Pacific Islander Men	Asian/ Pacific Islander Women	Native American Total	Native American Men	Native American Women
78	35	43	197	73	124	8	4	4
79	26	53	186	107	97	11	5	6
45	17	28	123	56	67	8	1	7

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. GMU = George Mason University

Race/Ethnicity Unknown Total	Race/Eth Unknown Men	Race/Ethnicity Unknown Women	Nonresident Alien Total	Nonresident Alien Men	Nonresident Alien Women
			83	40	43
			81	46	35
			0	0	0

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. GMU = George Mason University

Table 9

VCU Graduation Rates for Bachelor's Degree-seeking Cohort, by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Cohort Years 1987-1991

Year	Grand Total	Men	Women	White Total	White Men	White Women	Black Total	Black Men	Black Women
1991	2274	781	1493	1934	680	1254	227	55	172
1989	2003	716	1287	1660	616	1044	247	63	184
1987	703	1223	841	1595	594	1001	247	71	176

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. VCU = Virginia Commonwealth University.

Hispanic Total	Hispanic Men	Hispanic Women	Asian/ Pacific Islander Total	Asian/ Pacific Islander Men	Asian/ Pacific Islander Women	Native American Total	Native American Men	Native American Women
16	5	11	77	33	44	8	3	5
25	14	11	54	14	40	5	3	2
21	12	9	49	18	31	3	2	1

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. VCU = Virginia Commonwealth University.

Race/Ethnicity Unknown Total	Race/Eth Unknown Men	Race/Ethnicity Unknown Women	Nonresident Alien Total	Nonresident Alien Men	Nonresident Alien Women
0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	12	6	6
0	0	0	11	6	16

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. VCU = Virginia Commonwealth University.

Table 10

ODU Graduation Rates for Bachelor's Degree-seeking Cohort, by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Cohort Years 1987-1991

Year	Grand Total	Men	Women	White Total	White Men	White Women	Black Total	Black Men	Black Women
1991	1819	834	935	1560	712	848	140	52	88
1989	2082	1042	1040	1816	917	899	148	55	93
1987	1774	933	841	1545	817	728	112	40	72

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. ODU = Old Dominion University.

Hispanic Total	Hispanic Men	Hispanic Women	Asian/ Pacific Islander Total	Asian/ Pacific Islander Men	Asian/ Pacific Islander Women	Native American Total	Native American Men	Native American Women
16	8	8	59	26	33	5	3	2
19	8	11	57	31	26	5	3	2
19	16	3	43	25	18	8	4	4

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. ODU = Old Dominion University.

Race/Ethnicity Unknown Total	Race/Eth Unknown Men	Race/Ethnicity Unknown Women	Nonresident Alien Total	Nonresident Alien Men	Nonresident Alien Women
0	0	0	31	24	7
0	0	0	38	33	5
0	0	0	47	31	16

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2014)

Note: This table includes Data represents a compilation from the National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* (2018) Fall 1987 to Spring 1991, Graduation Rates component. Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J. & Mann, F. Students who identified in a category not listed were not included in the statistical data. ODU = Old Dominion University.

REFERENCES

20 United States Code §1070 et. seq.

34 Code of Federal Regulations §668 et. seq.

Alpha Phi Alpha. (2018). *Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity - Membership.* Retrieved from

    http://www.apa1906.net/

Alvesson, M., & Skoldberg, K. (2018). *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative*

    research 3ʳᵈ ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

American Psychological Association. (2006, July 15). *Stereotype threat widens*

    achievement gap. Retrieved from https://www.apa.org/research/action/stereotype

Armstrong, P. (2005). Phenomenology. In M. Groden, M. Kreiswirth, & I. Szeman,

    Johns Hopkins guide for literary theory and criticism (2nd ed., pp. 117-128).

    Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Asel, A., Seifert, T., & Pascarella, E. (2009). The effects of fraternity/sorority

    membership on college experiences and outcomes: A portrait of complexity.

    Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors,

    4(2), 4-54.

Assmann, J. (1995). Collective memory and cultural identity. *New German Critique*, 65,

    125-133.

Astin, A. (1984). Student involvement; A development theory for higher education.

    Journal of College Student Personnel, 25(4), 297-308.

Astin, A. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited.* San Francisco,

    CA: Jossey-Bass.

Avery, J. (2014). *Examining the persistence of students in academic and leadership*

    development programs. New Orleans, LA: Louisiana State University.

Baker, C., & Robnett, B. (2012). Race, social support and college student retention: A

case study. *Journal of College Student Development*, 53(2), 325-335.

Bauer-Wolf, J. (2019, January 7). Go Greek and see grades drop? Retrieved from

https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/01/07/study-grades-greek-affiliated-

students-suffer-after-joining-fraternity-sorority

Baum, S., Ma, J., & Kurose, C. (2013, October). *How college shapes lives:*

Understanding the issues. Washington, DC: George Washington University.

Bentley-Edwards, K., & Chapman-Hilliard, C. (2015). Doing race in different places:

Black racial cohesion on Black and White college campuses. *Journal of Diversity*

in Higher Education, 8(1), 43-60.

Black, R., & Bimper Jr., A. (2017). Successful undergraduate African-American men's

navigation and negotiation of academic and social counter-spaces as adaption to

racism at historically White institutions. *Journal of College Student Retention:*

Research, Theory & Practice. Retrieved from

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1521025117747209

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to*

theory and methods (5th ed.)*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Booker, K., & Breward, J. E. (2017, January 18). *Why mentoring matters: African-*

American students and the transition to college. Retrieved from

https://dus.psu.edu/mentor/2017/01/why-mentoring-matters-african-american-

students-and-the-transition-to-college/

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York, NY: Greenwood Press.

Branch, K. (1997). *The African American experience: Notes on Black identity development, membership in a historically Black fraternity or sorority and involvement.* Ames, IA: Iowa State University.

Britt, B. (2014). African American male inclusion, involvement, perception and achievement at predominantly White institutions. *McNair Research Scholars Journal*, 7(1), 19-35.

Bush, E., & Bush, L. (2010). Calling out the elephant: An examination of African American male achievement in community colleges. *Journal of African American Males in Education*, 1(1), 40-62.

Cassell, C., & Symon, G. (2004). *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Castillo-Monyoya, M. (2016). Preparing for interview research: The interview protocol refinement framework. *Qualitative Report*, 21(5), 811-830.

Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Kline, P., Saez, E., & Turner, N. (2014). *Is the United States still a land of opportunity? Recent trends in intergenerational mobility.* Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Chickering, A. (2018). *Education and identity* (2nd ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Cole, N. (2018, July 23). *The definition of Whiteness.* Retrieved from https://www.thoughtco.com/ /whiteness-definition-3026743

Creswell, J. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (1st ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crossman, A. (2019, January 14). *An overview of qualitative research methods.* Retrieved from https://www.thoughtco.com/qualitative-research-methods-3026555

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* London, UK: Sage.

Cuyjet, M. (1997). African American men on college campuses: Their needs and their perceptions. *New Directions for Student Services*, 1997(80), 5-16.

Cuyjet, M. (2006). Helping African American men matriculate: Ideas and suggestions. In M. J. Cuyjet (Ed.), *African American men in college* (pp. 237-250). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Dahlberg, H., Dahlberg, K., & Nystrom, M. (2008). *Reflective lifeworld research.* Los Angeles, CA: Professional Publishing House.

Dancy, T., & Brown, M. (2008). Unintended consequences: African-American male educational attainment and collegiate perceptions after Brown v. Board of Education. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51(7), 984-1003.

Daniels, S. (2011). *The academic effects of Black fraternal membership.* Whitewater, WI: University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

Davidson, C., & Wilson, K. (2013). Reassessing Tinto's concepts of social and academic integration in student retention. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, 15(3), 329-346.

Davis, J. W., & Bauman, K. (2011, June). *School enrollment in the United States: 2008.* Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p20-564.pdf

Davis, R., & Palmer, R. (2010). The role of postsecondary remediation for African American students: A review of research. *Journal of Negro Education*, 79(4), 503-520.

Delgado, R. (1995). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction.* New York, NY: New York University Press.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: New York University Press.

DeSousa, D., & Kuh, J. (1996). Does institutional racial composition make a difference in what Black students gain from college? *Journal of College Student Development*, 37(3), 257-267.

Dictionary.com, (n.d.). *Definition of Alumni.* Retrieved from https://www.dictionary.com/browse/alumni

Dilshad, R., & Latif, M. (2013). Focus group interview as a tool for qualitative research: An analysis. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 33(1), 191-198.

Eakins, A., & Eakins, Sr., S. (2017). African-American students at predominantly White institutions: A collaborative style cohort recruitment and retention model. *Journal of Learning in Higher Education*, 13(2), 51-57.

Elkins, S., Braxton, J., & James, G. (2000). Tinto's separation stage and its influence on first-semester college student persistence. *Research in Higher Education*, 41(2), 251-268.

Endo, J., & Harpel, R. (1981). The effect of student-faculty interactions on students' educational outcomes. *Research in Higher Education*, 16(2), 115-138.

Evans, N., Forney, D., Guido, F., Patton, L., & Renn, K. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research and practice.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Feagin, J., Vera, H., & Imani, N. (1996). *The agony of education: Black students at White colleges and universities.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Fleming, J. (1984). *Blacks in college: A comparative study of students' success in Black and in White institutions.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Flowers, L. (2006). Effects of attending a two-year institution on African American males academic and social integration in the first year of college. *Teachers College Record*, 108(2), 267-286.

Fischer, M. (2007). Settling into campus life: Differences by race/ethnicity in college involvement and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 78(2), 125-161.

Fisher, R. (2015). *Black male student success in U.S. higher education: Lessons from the institute for responsible citizenship.* Chattanooga, TN: University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Forbes. (n.d.). America's best employers for diversity: Old Dominion University. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/colleges/old-dominion-university/

Gasman, M., & Palmer, R. (2008). "It takes a village to raise a child": The role of social capital in promoting academic success for African American men at a Black college. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49(1), 52-70.

Gerdes, H., & Mallinckrodt, B. (1994). Emotional, social and academic adjustment of college students: A longitudinal study of retention. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 72(3), 117-118.

Gibbs, J. (1988). *Young, Black and male in America.* New York, NY: Auburn House.

Gibson, Y. (2014). The impact of mentoring programs for African American male community college students. *Journal of Mason Graduate Research*, 1(2), 70-82.

Giorgi, A. (2009). *The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology.* Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Goble, E. (2011). Facing the ugly face. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 5(2), 6-19.

Gonyea, R. (2006). *The relationship between student engagement and selected desirable outcomes in the first year of college.* Chicago: IL: University Center for Postsecondary Research.

Green, A. (2014). *Experiences of African-American college graduates.* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Lincoln.

Greene, S., Walden-Cole, S., & Cromwell, R. (2017, March 15). *After Burning Sands,
   can we actually talk about hazing, or nah?* Ebony.com. Retrieved from
   https://www.ebony.com/entertainment/culture/burning-sands-hazing

Guiffrida, D. (2003). African American student organizations as agents of social
   integration. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(3), 304-319.

Guiffrida, D., & Douthit, K. (2010). The Black student experience at predominantly
   White colleges: Implications for school and college counselors. *Journal of
   Counseling and Development*, 88(3), 311-318.

Habley, W., Bloom, J., & Robbins, S. (2012). *Increasing persistence: Research-based
   strategies for college student success.* San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Hagedorn, L., Maxwell, W., & Hampton, P. (2001). Correlates of retention for African-
   American males in community colleges. *Journal of College Student Retention:
   Research, Theory & Practice*, 3(3), 243-263.

Halai, A. (2006, November). *Ethics in qualitative research: Issues and challenges*
   (EdQual Working Paper No. 4). Retrieved from
   https://www.edqual.org/publications/workingpaper/edqualwp4.pdf/at_download/f
   ile.pdf

Hall, R. (2017). Factors contributing to the persistence of African American and Hispanic
   undergraduate males enrolled at a regional predominantly White institution.
   Administrative Issues Journal, 7(1), 50-65.

Harper, S. (2005). Leading the way: Inside the experience of high-achieving African
   American male students. *About Campus*, 10(1), 8-15.

Harper, S. (2006a). *Black male students at public universities in the U.S.: Status, trends and implications for policy and practices.* Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

Harper, S. (2006b). Peer support for African American male college achievement: Beyond internalized racism and the burden of "acting White". *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 14(3), 337-358.

Harper, S. (2007). The effects of sorority and fraternity membership on class participation and African American student engagement in predominantly White classroom environments. *The College Student Affairs Journal*, 27(1), 94-115.

Harper, S. (2008). Realizing the intended outcomes of Brown: High-achieving African American male undergraduates and social capital. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51(7), 1030-1053.

Harper, S. (2009). Institutional seriousness concerning Black male student engagement: Necessary conditions and collaborative partnerships. In S. Harper, & S. Quay (Eds.), *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations* (pp. 137-156). New York, NY: Routledge.

Harper, S. (2010). In his name: Rigor and relevance in research on African American males in education. *Journal of African American Males*, 1(1), 1-6.

Harper, S. (2012). Race without racism: How higher education researchers minimize racist institutional norms. *The Review of Higher Education*, 36(1), 9-29.

Harper, S. (2015). Black male college achievers and resistant responses to racist stereotypes at predominantly White colleges and universities. *Harvard Educational Review*, *85*(4), 646-674.

Harper, S., & Harris, III, F. (2006). The role of Black fraternities in the African American male undergraduate experience. In M. J. Cuyjet (Ed.), *African American Men in College* (pp. 128-153). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Harper, S., & Kuykendall, J. (2012, March). Institutional efforts to improve Black male student achievement: A standards-based approach. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 44*(2), 23-29. Retrieved from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00091383.2012.655234

Harper, S., & Quaye, S. (2009). *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations.* London, UK: Routledge.

Harper, S., & Quay, S. (2015). *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations* (2nd ed.)*.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Harper, S., Byars, L., & Jelke, T. (2005). How membership affects college adjustment and African American undergraduate student outcomes. In T. Brown, G. Parks, & C. Phillips (Eds.), *African American fraternities and sororities: The legacy and the vision* (pp. 393-416). Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.

Harper, S., Patton, L., & Wooden, O. (2009). Access and equality for African American students in higher education: A critical race historical analysis of policy efforts. *Journal of Higher Education*, 80(4), 389-414.

Hayworth, K. (2014). *Black male graduates' reflections on their college experiences at a private faith-based, predominantly White institution of higher education.* Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University.

Henry, G. (2012). *The African American male student experience in Black Greek letter organizations at selected predominantly White institutions.* Washington, DC: George Washington University.

Hillman, N., Hicklan Fryar, A., & Crespin-Trujillo, V. (2017). Evaluating the impact of performance funding in Ohio and Tennessee. *American Educational Research Journal*, 35(1), 144-170.

Hiraldo, P. (2010). The role of critical race theory in higher education. *The Vermont Connection*, 31(7), 53-59.

Huber, L. (2008). Building critical race methodologies in educational research: A research note on critical race testimonio. *FIU Law Review*, 4(1), 159-173.

Hudley, C., Moscetti, R., Gonzalez, A., Su-Je, C., Barry, L., & Kelly, M. (2009). College freshmen's perceptions of their high school experiences. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 20(3), 438-471.

Huelsman, M. (2015). *The debt divide: The racial and class bias behind the "new normal" of student borrowing.* New York, NY: Demos.

Hurtado, S. (1992). The campus racial climate: Contexts of conflict. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 63(5), 539-569.

Husserl, E. (1970). *The crisis of the European sciences and transcendental phenomenology.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Irby, K. (2012). *Reclaiming our voice: Strengths first-generation African-American males use to succeed in college.* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

James, J. (2016). Introduction to the special edition: Pedagogies that work for students of African descent. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 9(8), 3-8.

Jaschik, S. (2013, November 11). *To be a Black man at UCLA* [Inside Higher Ed]. Retrieved from http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/11/11/students-video-leads-discussion-race-ucla

Jensen, U. (2011). *Factors influencing student retention in higher education. Summary of influential factors in degree attainment and persistence for career or further education for at-risk/high educational need students.* Honolulu, HI: Pacific Policy Research Center.

Johnson, J., & McGowan, B. (2017). Untold Stories: The gendered experiences of high achieving African American male alumni of historically Black colleges and universities. *Journal of African American Males*, 8(1), 23-44.

Johnson, R. (2013). Black and male on campus: An autoethnographic account. *Journal of African-American Males in Education*, 4(2), 25-45.

Kappa Alpha Psi. (n. d.). *Kappa Alpha Psi - History.* Retrieved from http://kappaweb.dev.onpressidium.com/a-brief-history/

Kapsidelis, K. (2016, January 9). Graduation rates for Black men lag at VCU. *Richmond Times Dispatch.* Retrieved from http://www.richmond.com/news/graduation-rates-Black-men-lag

Kelchen, R. (2018, February 13). *Examining long-term student loan debt by race and ethnicity* [Robert Kelchen]. Retrieved from

https://robertkelchen.com/2018/02/13/examining-long-term-student-loan-default-rates-by-race-and-ethnicity/

Kimbrough, W., & Hutcheson, P. (1998). The impact of membership in Black Greek letter organizations on Black students' involvement in collegiate activities and their development of leadership skills. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 67(2), 96-105.

Kuh, G. (2008). *High impact educational practices: What are they, who has access to them and why they matter?* [National Survey of Student Engagement] Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Kuh, G., Bridges, B., Hayek, J., Kinzie, J., & Buckley, J. (2006). *What matters to student success: A review of the literature* [Commissioned Report for the National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success: Spearheading a Dialog on Student Success]. Bloomington, IN: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative.

Kuk, L., & Manning, J. (2010). Student organizations and institutional diversity efforts: A typology. *College Student Journal*, 44(2), 354-361.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47-68.

Laverty, S. (2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison of historical and methodological considerations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 28(1), 21-35.

Lewis-Beck, M., Bryman, A., & Liao, T. (2004). *The SAGE encyclopedia of social science research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412950589.n931

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Maina, F., Burrell, M., & Hampton, B. (2011). *Coping strategies for students of color in a predominantly White college: Voices from the alumni.* Oswego, NY: State University of New York.

Mallinckrodt, B., & Sedlacek, W. (1987). Student retention and the use of campus facilities by race. *NASPA Journal*, 24(3), 28-32.

Marriott, M. (1990, October 3). Education; Black fraternities and sororities end a tradition. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/03/us/education-black-fraternities-and-sororities-end-a-tradition.html

Maryland K-16 Leadership Council, Task Force on the Education of Maryland's African American Males. (2006). *Report of the Task Force on the Education of Maryland's African American Males.* Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED496696.pdf

Mauer, M. (1999). *The crisis of the young African American male and the criminal justice system.* Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

McClung, J. (1988). *A Study to identify factors that contribute to Black student withdrawal at Clemson University.* Clemson, SC: Clemson University.

McCorkle, C. (2012). *First-generation, African American students' experiences of persisting at a predominantly White liberal arts college.* Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University.

McDonald, N. (2011). *African-American college students at predominantly White and historically Black colleges and universities.* Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University.

Melendez, M. (2015). Adjustment to college in an urban commuter setting: The Impact of gender, race/ethnicity and athletic participation. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, theory and practice*, 18(1), 31-48.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A Guide to design and implementation.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam-Webster. (2018, May 12). *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Retrieved from Merriam-Webster: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary

Milem, J., & Berger, J. (1997). *A modified model of college student persistence: Exploring the relationship between Astin's theory of involvement and Tinto's theory of student of involvement.* Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Miller, B. (2017, October 16). *New federal data shows student loan crisis for African American borrowers* [Center for American Progress]. Retrieved from https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-postsecondary/news/2017/10/16/440711/new-federal-data-show-student-loan-crisis-african-american-borrowers/

Murguia, E., Padilla, R., & Pavel, M. (1991). Ethnicity and the concept of social integration in Tinto's model of institutional departure. *Journal of College Student Development*, 32(5), 433-439.

Nagasawa, R., & Wong, P. (1999). A Theory of minority students' survival in college. *Sociological Inquiry*, 69(1), 76-90.

Naidoo, S., Pillay, J., & Conley, L. (2018). The management and governance of racial integration in public secondary schools in Guateng. *Koers Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 83(1), 1-13.

Nangendo, F., Sebbudde, S., & Nalwadde, R. (2006). Coping by normalization: Implications for HIV and AIDS prevention in young people from the Rakai District, Uganda. In A. Partet (Ed.), *Re-Thinking research and intervention approaches that aim at preventing HIV infection among the youth* (pp. 62-87). Nairobi, Africa: Regal Press.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2011). *Digest of education statistics.* Washington, DC: Dillow, S. & Snyder, T.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). *Higher education: Gaps in access and persistence study.* Washington DC: Ross, T., Kena, G., Rathburn, A., KewalRamini, A., Zhang, J., Kristapovich, P., & Manning, E.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2014). *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.* Washington, DC: Ginder, S., Kelly-Reid, J., & Mann, F.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). *College enrollment rates.* Retrieved from http://www.nces.ed.gov

National Panhellenic Council. (n. d.). *NPHC - Our History*. Retrieved from http://www.nphchq.org/quantum/our-history

National Student Clearinghouse. (2014). *Snapshot report: Persistence-retention.*

    Retrieved from http://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-

    content/uploads/SnapshotReport14-PersistenceRetention.pdf

National Survey of Student Engagement. (2005). *Exploring different dimensions of*

    student engagement: 2005 annual survey results. Bloomington, IN: Indiana

    University Center for Postsecondary Research.

National Survey of Student Engagement. (2015). *High impact practices.* Bloomington,

    IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.

Nettles, S. (1991). Community involvement and disadvantaged students: A review.

    Review of Educational Research, 61(3), 379-406.

Nichols, A., & Evans-Bell, D. (2017). *A look at Black student success: Identifying top-*

    and-bottom-performing institutions. Washington, DC: The Education Trust.

North American Interfraternity Conference. (n. d.). *About Interfraternity Council*.

    Retrieved from https://nicfraternity.org/about-interfraternity-council-ifc/Nutt, C.

    (2003, February). Student retention and persistence. *Academic Advising Today*,

    26(1). Retrieved from https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-

    Advising-Today/View-Articles/Student-Retention-and-Persistence.aspx

Old Dominion University. (2010, August 9). *ODU among schools with higher than*

    average graduation rates for African-American students, study shows [ODU].

    Retrieved from https://www.odu.edu/news/news-

    archive/2010/08/ODUAmongS_23506#.XMYP3KZ7lbg

Omega Psi Phi. (n.d.). *Omega Psi Phi Fraternity History.* Retrieved from

    https://web.archive.org/web/20110903040706/http://www.omegapsiphi2011.com/

    history

O'Shaughnessy, L. (2013, June 28). *Third of student loan borrowers never earned a*

    degree. Retrieved from https://www.cbsnews.com/news/third-of-student-loan-

    borrowers-never-earned-degree/

Owens, D., Lacey, K., Rawls, G., & Holbert-Quince, J. (2010). First generation African-

    American male college students. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 58(4), 290-

    298.

Oxford Dictionary. (n.d.). *Definition of Caucasian.* Retrieved from

    https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/caucasian

Padilla, V., Trevino, J., Gonzalez, K., & Trevino, J. (1997). Developing local models of

    minority student success in college. *Journal of College Student Development*

    38(2), 125-135.

Palmer, R., Moore, J., Davis, R., & Hilton, A. (2010). A Nation at risk: Increasing

    college participation and persistence among African American males to stimulate

    U.S. global competitiveness. *Journal of African American Males in Education*,

    1(2), 105-124.

Palmer, R., & Young, E. (2009). Determined to succeed: Salient factors that foster

    academic success for academically unprepared Black males at a Black college.

    Journal of College Student Retention, 10(4), 465-482.

Pascarella, E., & Terenzini, P. (2005). *How college affects students* (2nd ed)*.* San

    Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, L. (2010). *Culture centers in higher education: Perspectives on identity, theory and practice.* Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Patton, L., Flowers, L., & Bridges, B. (2011). Effects of Greek affiliation on African American students' engagement: Differences by college racial composition. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 29(2), 113-123.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.)*.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. (2002). Designing qualitative studies. In M. Patton (Ed.), *Qualitative research and evaluation methods 3rd ed.* (pp. 230-247). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. (2010). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Perna, L. (2004). Studying college access and choice: A proposed conceptual model. In *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research Vol. XXI* (pp. 99-157). Los Angeles, CA: California State University.

Perna, L. (2006). *A framework for reducing the college success gap and promoting success for all.* Philadelphia, PA: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative.

Phi Beta Sigma. (n. d.). *Phi Beta Sigma - Membership.* Retrieved from http://phibetasigma1914.org/

Pike, G. (2000). The Influence of fraternity and sorority membership on student's college. *Research in Higher Education*, 41(1), 117-139.

Pike, G. (2003). Membership in a fraternity or sorority, student engagement and educational outcomes at AAU public research universities. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(3), 369-382.

Reason, R. (2009). An examination of persistence research through the lens of a

    comprehensive conceptual framework. *Journal of College Student Development*,

    50(6), 659-682.

Redden, E. (2009, July 7). *Reaching Black men.* Retrieved from

    https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/07/07/academic-revolution

Riley, N. (2017, November 29). *The real meaning behind high loan default rates among*

    Black students -- another kind of college mismatch. The LA Times. Retrieved from

    http://www.latimes.com

Robertson, R., & Mason, D. (2008). What works? A qualitative examination of factors

    related to the academic success of African-American males at a predominantly

    White college in the South. *Challenge: A Journal of Research on African-*

    American Men, 14(2), 67-89.

Robinson, E. (2014, February 25). *African-American males in higher education*

    [Cambridge Post]. Retrieved from

    https://www.cambridgecollege.edu/news/african-american-males-higher-

    education

Ross, A., Powell, A., & Henriksen, R. (2016). Self-identity: A key to Black student

    success. *VISTAS Online*, 64, 1-10.

Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Thousand Oaks, CA:

    Sage.

Saunders, N. (2017a, May 18). *ODU named a top 15 university in the nation for African-*

    American student success [ODU]. Retrieved from

    https://www.odu.edu/news/2017/5/african_american_suc#.XMYQF6Z7lbg

Saunders, N. (2017b, August 24). *ODU Named Most Affordable Higher Education*

    Institution in Virginia [ODU]. Retrieved from http://www.odu.edu/about

Schiel, W. (n.d.). *Medical Definition of African American.*   Retrieved from

    https://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=38705

Scholarship.com. (2016). *Old Dominion University.* Retrieved from

    http;//www.scholarship.com

Schuh, J., Triponey, V., Heim, L., & Nishimura, K. (1992). Student involvement in

    historically Black Greek letter organizations. *NASPA Journal*, 29(4), 274-282.

Severtis, R., & Christie-Mizell, C. (2007). Greek-Letter membership and college

    graduation: Does race matter? *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 34(3),

    95-118.

Simmons, L. (2013). Factors of persistence for African American men in a student

    support organization. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 82(1), 62-74.

Smith, S., & Moore, M. (2002). Expectations of campus racial climate and social

    adjustment among African American college students. *African American*

    Education, 2, 93-118.

Snider, S. (2014, October 14). *What to know if your college loses federal funding. U.S.*

    News & World Report. Retrieved from http://www.usnews.com

State University. (2012, April). *College student retention - defining student retention, a*

    profile of successful institutions and students, theories of student departure.

    Retrieved from Southeastern Oklahoma State University website:

http://www.se.edu/dept/native-american-center/files/2012/04/College-Student-Retention-Defining-Student-Retention-A-Profile-of-Successful-Institutions.pdf

Steele, C. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52(6), 613-629.

Steffen, E. (2016). Ethical considerations in qualitative research. In E. Lyons, & A. Coyle (Eds.), *Analyzing qualitative data in psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 31-44). London, England: Sage.

Stoops, N. (2004). *Educational attainment in the United States: 2003.* Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Stratford, M. (2015, September 23). *A tougher test for colleges.* Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/09/23/new-college-scorecard-repayment-data-fuels-debate-over-accountability-higher-ed

Strayhorn, T. (2008). The role of supportive relationships in facilitating African American males success in college. *Journal of Student Research and Practice*, 45(1), 26-48.

Strayhorn, T. (2012a). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Strayhorn, T. (2012b). Satisfaction and retention among African American men at two-year colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 36(5), 358-375.

Stuckey, H. (2015). The second step in data analysis: Coding qualitative research data. *Methodological Issues in Social Health and Diabetes Research*, 3(1), 7-10.

Sutton, E., & Kimbrough, W. (2001). Trends in Black student involvement. *NASPA*, 39(1), 30-40.

Taylor, C., & Howard-Hamilton, M. (1995). Student involvement and racial identity attitudes among African American males. *Journal of College Student Development*, 36(4), 330-336.

The Free Dictionary, (n.d.). *Definition of Black American.* Retrieved from https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Black+American

Thomas, E. (February 2010). *Why minority students don't graduate from college.* Newsweek. Retrieved from https://www.newsweek.com

Thomas, J., Wolters, C., Horn, C., & Kennedy, H. (2014). Examining relevant influences on the persistence of African American college students and a diverse urban university. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, 15(4), 551-573.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropouts from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition research* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.

Tinto, V. (1998). Colleges as communities: Taking research on student persistence seriously. *Review of Higher Education*, 21(2), 167-177.

Tinto, V. (2016, September 26). *From retention to persistence.* Retrieved from

      https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/09/26/how-improve-student-

      persistence-and-completion-essay

Tinto, V. (2017). Reflections on student persistence. *Student Success*, 8(2), 1-8.

Tinto, V., & Pusser, B. (2006). *Moving from theory to action: Building a model of*

      institutional action for student success

[National Postsecondary Education Cooperative]. Washington, DC: National

      Postsecondary Education Cooperative.

U. S. Department of Education. (2015, July 27). *Fact Sheet: Focusing higher education*

      on student success. Retrieved from https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-

      sheet-focusing-higher-education-student-success?mod=article_inline

U. S. Department of Education. (2017, January 27). *College affordability and*

      completion: Ensuring a pathway to opportunity. Retrieved from

      https://www.ed.gov/college

U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid. (2017, September 27). *Official*

      cohort default rates for schools. Retrieved from

      https://www2.ed.gov/offices/OSFAP/defaultmanagement/index.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2010). *Higher education act of 1965.* Retrieved from

      https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/leg/hea08/index.html

University of British Columbia. (2017, June 5). *Creating and managing an academic*

      profile. Retrieved from https://guides.library.ubc.ca/academic_profile

Vagle, M. (2009). Validity as intended: 'bursting forth toward' bridling in phenomenological research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(5), 585-605.

Vagle, M. (2018). *Crafting phenomenological research.* New York, NY: Taylor and Francis.

Van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Virginia Commonwealth University. (n. d.-a). *About VCU and VCU Health.* Retrieved from http://www.news.vcu.edu

Virginia Commonwealth University. (n. d. -b). *Facts and rankings.* Retrieved from http/www.vcu.edu

Vocabulary.com. (n. d.). *Definition of collegian.* Retrieved from https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/collegian

Wallenstein, P. (2011, April 7). *Desegregation in higher education in Virginia*. Retrieved from https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Desegregation_in_Higher_Education

Watkins, D., Green, L., Goodson, P., Guidry, J., & Stanley, C. (2007). Using focus groups to explore stressful life events of Black college men. *Journal of College Students and Development*, 48(1), 105-118.

Weathers, J., Mitchell Jr., D., & Jones, M. (2013). *A 20-year history of Black Greek letter organization research and scholarship.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University.

Whitt, E. (1996). Some propositions worth debating. *About Campus*, 1(4), 31-32.

Wood, J. (2011, August 5). Developing successful Black male initiatives. *Community College Times.* Retrieved from

http://www.ccdaily.com/Pages/Opinions/Developing-successful-black-male-

programs-and-initiatives.aspx

Woodson, C. (1990). *The miseducation of the negro.* Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Yosso, T. (2006). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of

community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity & Education*, 8(1), 69-91.

VITA

Charles R. Smith, Jr.

EDUCATION

Doctor of Education (Ed. D., May 2019) student in Education Policy, Planning and Leadership at the College of William & Mary. Dissertation title: "Examining persistence: The influence of joining Black Greek Letter Organizations on African-American male students attending predominantly White Institutions."

Master of Arts (May 2009) in Education. Strayer University, Glen Allen, Virginia

Master of Arts (May 2000) in History, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia

Bachelor of Arts (May 1993) in Administration of Justice, Virginia Commonwealth University. Richmond, Virginia.

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Researcher, Doctoral Dissertation for Charles R. Smith, Jr. Department of Education (Dr. Pamela Eddy) College of William & Mary.

Researcher, Qualitative Project for Dr. N. Haskins, Department of Education (Dr. Natoya Haskins) College of William & Mary

ACADEMIC AWARDS

Strayer University Academic Excellence Award   2010

Virginia Commonwealth University – Distinguished Service Award – Office of Minority Student Affairs

Co-Founder NPHC – Virginia Commonwealth University chapter

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. – member

Virginia Commonwealth University Executive Search Committee for Director of Minority Student Affairs