

THE NARRATIVE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK AND BROWN FIRST-GENERATION
FRATERNITY MEN IN HISTORICALLY WHITE FRATERNITIES

by

MARLON LADELL GIBSON

(Under the Direction of Diane L. Cooper)

ABSTRACT

Part of the higher education structure is the co-curricular experience, which is a way for students to develop a sense of belonging on campus, which leads to positive outcomes, such as self-actualization and persistence. This study has helped us to better understand the lived experiences through narrative inquiry of fraternity men's sense of belonging and why they persist through graduation. However, as my study progressed, I had only men of color volunteer as participants. This offered a different lens and different lived experiences of members of Alpha Tau Omega and Delta Sigma Phi. A student's academic experience, however, is only a piece of the overall college student experience. Since the founding of America's oldest colleges, students have engaged in co-curricular activities that provided them the opportunity to interact with one another away from the classrooms and outside the view of faculty members. Student interaction, both in and out of class with their peers, faculty members, and administrators, is essential to developing a sense of belonging on campus. Because sense of belonging leads to student success, an institution's ability to assist students with developing a sense of belonging directly relates to successful persistence and graduation.

INDEX WORDS: first-generation, fraternity, financial aid, male, men of color, race, persistence, retention, sense of belonging

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B.A., University of Toledo, 2001

M.A., University of Toledo, 2007

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

August 2021

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August 2021

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all first-generation students and survivors of your educational journeys. Thank you for trusting me with your narratives about your lived experiences as first-generation fraternity men in 2020. I see you, hear you, and appreciate you for all you have and will continue to do as trailblazers within our respective families.

This study is also dedicated to the two queens in my life. First, Betty Louise Gibson, my paternal grandmother, who raised me to the man that I am today. I love you, Sweetie! And, of course, Dr. Sheree Latoi Williams Gibson, I could not have ever dreamed or imagined having a better life partner. I love you, Sugar Bae! Thanks for ALWAYS believing in me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I think about acknowledgments, I immediately think about my God. I would not be who or where or I am today without the grace, forgiveness, and unwavering love of GOD. I played gospel music every time I sat down to write a paper, do a homework assignment, and think through and work on an ANOVA or regression problem. Next, I would not have even started this doctoral journey if it was not for my bride, life partner, confidant, and mother of our son, Adam Patrick Gibson; she will always be the original Dr. Gibson in our family. Dr. Sheree Latoi Williams Gibson epitomizes strength, wisdom, compassion, wicked intelligence, ethical character, and most importantly, unwavering love and support to me every second of the day. Sheree is the person who would say, “Go ahead and study with Meg,” “Go work on your ANOVA and regression,” “Go work on that assignment for Dr. Hall.” I will never be able to repay her for the time I have spent away from home writing, reading, and working on this doctoral degree. In addition, Sheree has been the primary caregiver for Adam Patrick during this journey, Adam turned 2 at the start of my journey, and he is now 6 years old. Sheree has been my support in changing jobs to pursue my passion for serving as a consultant and speaker. Sheree has also supported our family in moving to our new home during an international pandemic. Sheree remains my ride-or-die life partner, and for her, I am forever grateful. Next, I cannot forget about my baby boy, Adam Patrick Gibson. During the nights and weekends when I wanted to give up and stop this journey, I would look at you and think about the perseverance, determination, and grit you have exhibited in your young life as our son. I said, “I have to remain a shining example for our son.” Sweetie, Betty Louise Gibson, my grandmother of 94 years

young, you remain my first hero, my first shining example of hard work and never giving up. Sweetie has also taught me the meaning of treating people with respect, love, and perseverance. Sweetie is a survivor of breast cancer since 1992, a triple bypass heart surgery survivor, and a survivor of losing my grandfather after being married to him for 62 years. Sweetie continues to be the matriarch and family support; I cannot imagine my life without her. Sweetie has kept me focused on this degree, asking, “How is your book report coming along?” It is because of Sweetie that I have kept working on my “book report” until it is truly finished.

My mom, Climmye Tean Elam Gibson: I miss you dearly, Mom, and I wish your earthly presence was here for the completion of this doctoral journey. I know that you have been with me every step of the way. I could hear your voice infused with humor as I would think about taking a break, “Marlon, don’t stop now. You know you have always wanted to be called Dr. Gibson.” I reference you and your wisdom all the time, Mom. I know I would have called you many days going and coming from Athens during this degree because I had many days where I would look for your phone number to give you a call. I often reflect on some of your final words. During your last stay at the Toledo Hospital, you looked at Sheree and said, “Marlon never gave me any trouble. He was truly a great kid.” I have always strived to make you proud, Mom, and I hope you know that I kept going for this degree every time I would think about the sacrifices that you made for my Catholic school education. I love you, Mom!

My dad, Michael LaDell Gibson, has truly supported me throughout this journey. Dad has talked to me many nights, driving from Athens to home. My dad also has a story as a survivor and remaining clean for over 5 years now. My dad has always been very caring and compassionate, and I am so thankful for his unwavering love to me and my family. My loving and caring in-laws, I have loved each of you since the day we first met. Mom Williams, I am so

thankful for your passion, grit, and determination in raising two amazing, beautiful, and brilliant women by yourself as a single mother. Grandpa Eddie, you are and will remain my buddy! I am so thankful for the knowledge you share with us whenever we are in your presence. And who could ever forget your ability to make every food sing and talk? Thank you for loving me as your grandson. Danielle, the little sister. I always wanted, I love you and your sense of humor. What can I say? We are one and the same. I cannot thank you enough for your unwavering support and affirmation during this doctoral journey. I appreciate you more than you will ever know, just for listening to me and affirming for me that this, too, shall pass, and you will be thankful on the other side. Uncle Jeff, you are a shining example of Black excellence. I have admired you as a leader, leading scholar, and an example that hard work and determination truly result in the ability to live your dream. Aunt Michelle, Haleigh, and Jeffrey, thank you for supporting me during this journey by always checking in on me. I also am very thankful for the ability to connect with each of you during our visits to Cincinnati or your visits to Atlanta. Aunt Cynthia, thank you for always being one of my biggest supporters. You have been calling me Dr. Gibson for years, and I appreciate you speaking it into existence even before I could picture it myself. Thank you for always believing in me. Cousin Angela Rose—Wow, what can I say? I am so thankful for you moving to Atlanta and truly being an awesome cousin who always has my back. I love that you would meet me at 5:00 a.m. so that we could work out together, when I would talk about my homework and you would talk about your homework. You completed your educational journey, which laid the foundation for me to follow in your footsteps and keep going. I am so thankful that you live here, and we can always count on you.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my family members, Issa and Heather, who are also in the Atlanta area. I love you, cousins! I am also thankful for my Brooks, Colbert, Gibson,

Sweet, and Utle family members. Each of you has played a role in my educational journey from Toledo, Ohio, to Athens, Georgia. I appreciate each of you checking in on me and thinking about me as I continued along this journey.

To my CSAA-11 family, I remain thankful for your unwavering love and support throughout my doctoral journey. I loved having class with such brilliant and talented scholars who opened my eyes to thinking about theories, policies, and practices in ways I had never thought about as a scholar-practitioner. My CSAA-11 family, I know that we will remain connected for years to come. Dr. Roshaunda L. Breeden, thank you, thank you, and thanks again. I cannot thank you enough for believing in me and meeting with me every Sunday and writing with me virtually. Dr. Breeden, thank you for holding up the banner of success for me during times I did not want to hold it up for myself. Dr. Meg E. Evans, thank you for coming to my house and getting me out to study for prelims, to work on assignments, and for sending me a card that said, "Keep going!" Dr. Jason K. Wallace, wow, thank you for ALWAYS answering my calls, texts, questions, willingness to meet at The University of Georgia Gwinnett campus as I was preparing for my publishable defense. Dr. Gloria Laureano, you are truly my Auntie, and I am so thankful for you always being there for me and supporting me at every corner of my doctoral journey. I love you, Auntie Gloria! Dr. Gwen Terwilliger, you are truly one of the kindest, dedicated professors I have ever had during my career. Dr. T. was my undergraduate statistics professor at UT, and then she picked back up and tutored me through ANOVA and regression. I am forever indebted to you, and I am looking forward to seeing you in the audience in December. Dr. Kim Bullington, you have been my editing friend since SACSA. I cannot thank you enough for the time, energy, patience, advice, and wisdom you have offered to me over the years. Dr. Diane L. Cooper, this journey would not have even happened if I would not have run

into you at NASPA in Indianapolis, where you encouraged me to reach out to you and to really think about this doctoral journey at UGA. I said I would only come to UGA if you would be my advisor, and look at us now. Who would have ever thought other than you that this day would come? As I always say, you are my white Aunt that has never been afraid to tell me just like it is. Thank you, Dr. Cooper, for always believing in me. Dr. Sheneka Williams, thank you for agreeing to serve on my committee. I knew from our initial meeting in Decatur Square that you would be a great supporter during my doctoral journey. I will always remember the support you showed to me during my time of stress when I did not pass my comprehensive exams. You supported me and gave me the strength, courage, and motivation to keep going. Thank you, Dr. Williams; I will always be appreciative of you! Dr. Georgianna Martin (G\$): I have known you since our time in Bowling Green, Ohio. I remember when you were interviewing at UGA, and Sheree and I were both so excited about the possibility of you being closer to us. I was even more excited to have you in class, as you were living your dream as a professor in a premier College Student Affairs Administration Program. I also remember when I asked if you would be willing to serve on my committee, and you immediately agreed. Thanks, Dr. Martin, for always being one of my most loyal supporters. Dr. Merrily Dunn, you have always been the kindest, most caring professor I have had within our department. I remember how excited and thankful I was when you agreed to serve on my committee. I have always appreciated your ability to show up as your authentic self, an ally for minoritized populations. Thanks, Dr. Dunn! Dr. D.L. Stewart, you have been my scholarly mentor since I met you at Bowling Green State University. I cannot thank you enough for believing in me when I surely did not believe in myself. I want to also thank you for giving me truthful and honest feedback. Your feedback and your words of wisdom are more meaningful than you will ever know. My Kappa Alpha Order family, thank

you, thank you, and thank you. I have felt like a member of the KA family since my first visit to Lexington. Of course, none of that would have been possible without Larry and Dawn believing in me and believing in my abilities to serve as a leader within KA.

My mentor and friend, Dr. F. Stuart Gulley, I will always remember our first meeting and me truly being in awe with amazement at your class, poise, and ability to relate to people from all walks of life. Every time we would meet, I would always take mental notes and write them down as soon as I would return to my car. Every step of the doctoral journey, I was worried and concerned you would pray for me. Each meeting I had while working on a college campus, I would ask for your prayers, and each of those meetings would go smoother than I could have ever imagined. During the pandemic, you have remained calm, peaceful, and at ease, and I, too, have taken a page out of your book and reminded myself to also be at peace. Uncle Stuart, you are truly amazing, and I am a better human for the opportunity and privilege of being able to call you my friend and mentor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is one of the critical factors in providing individuals with the opportunity for social mobility, economic progress, financial stability, and success (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). However, the pathway to higher education is not always equal and equitable for all students (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). The college transition process for every student who enrolls in a higher education institution is unique and different. For first-generation college students (FGCS), the transition of going to college is far more convoluted than those students whose immediate family members had some college experience. FGCS undergo immense transformations as they look for ways to navigate the difficult terrain from high school to college and the adaptation into the culture of academia as well as the social life (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). Often, FGCS experience numerous challenges in the midst of their transition into college, and these challenges can lead to poor academic and social experiences as well as a lack of belonging on campus. Eventually, these challenges can lead to their ultimate withdrawal from the institution (Ishitani, 2006). Some of these challenges are financial, academic, familial, and lack of integration into the cultural and social aspects of the university environment (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008).

My initial study was created with support from two historically White fraternities, Alpha Tau Omega and Delta Sigma Phi. Each organization connected me with first-generation students identifying as students with minoritized identities. All participants identified as Mexican American or African American. As I was putting together my prospectus, I anticipated having all

White male student participants; however, the data were very rich, with my six students holding minoritized identities. More than any other psychologist, Carol Gilligan helped us to hear girls' voices just when they seem to be blurring and fading or becoming disruptive during the passage to womanhood (McLean-Taylor & Gilligan, 1997). I am thankful I could give voice to a population I did not intend on learning and growing from; however, I will continue to champion these and other minoritized voices of FGCS.

Researchers have found that students who establish connections to their institution through involvement and engagement are more likely to persist and graduate (Braxton et al., 2013; Strayhorn, 2012). Central to student involvement is the sense of belonging, or “social support, a feeling of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to a group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). Astin (1993) further explained the relationship between students and peers, concluding, “The student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years” (p. 398). Through peer interaction and engagement, sororities and fraternities can enhance students’ sense of community and learning (Long, 2012; Walker et al., 2015).

First-Generation College Students

Scholars have discussed FGCS from multiple perspectives. Several scholars refer to FGCS as students whose parents have attended some college but never completed their degree; as a result, they do not have postsecondary education or training (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Hsiao, 1992; Mitchell, 1997). Others have described FGCS as students who come from a family in which neither parent nor guardian has attained a college degree (Schwartz et al., 2018). Despite the variations in defining FGCS, the most widely accepted definition of FGCS used by

scholars is an individual whose parents have not obtained a 4-year college degree (Chaney et al., 1998; Hicks, 2003; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). For this study, FGCS were defined as students whose parents or guardians have never attended a 2-year or a 4-year institution.

FGCS comprised 22% of the total college student population from 1993-2000 (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). At the same time, 43% of FGCS left college without completing their degree in the United States between 1992 and 2000 (Chen, 2005; Petty, 2014). Over the past decade, higher education institutions have seen an increase of 4.5 million FGCS enrolling in college programs in the United States (Petty, 2014). These statistics alone suggest the need to focus on FGCS as more are enrolling in colleges and universities, and a large percentage of that population are not completing their degree programs. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education reported that nearly 32% of college students at 4-year institutions come to college from families where neither parent has completed a postsecondary education (Schwartz et al., 2018).

The aforementioned data indicated that more FGCS are enrolling in colleges and universities without knowledge of the higher education system and not knowing how to navigate the college environment. The lack of familiarity with navigating the college environment has presented several obstacles for FGCS and their family members. As Collier and Morgan (2008) indicated, FGCS are less likely to graduate college compared to those students who have at least one parent with a postsecondary education degree. Additionally, FGCS tend to take on more remedial courses due to the lack of rigor in their high school curriculum (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Furthermore, FGCS enroll in college part-time, earn lower grades, feel less prepared for college, and are less likely to discuss any feelings of stress compared to their peers, which leads to students experiencing higher stress levels (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). Other challenges facing FGCS include but are not limited to their high school to college transition, relationships,

work, finances, decision-making responsibilities (Gist-Mackey et al., 2018), the desire to live close to home, and having the presence of their family members in their daily activities (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Moreover, FGCS typically come from low-socioeconomic families, differ in race, ethnicity, age, and gender, and may not have a great deal of time to delegate to their academics due to work commitments and aiding their family with finances (Williams & Ferrari, 2015). These factors have led FGCS to have lower academic achievement and a lack of sense of belonging in the campus environment. In other words, due to the lack of social and cultural capital, coupled with their commitment to their familial and financial responsibilities, FGCS are forced to live off campus, work multiple jobs, and devote less time to their academic responsibilities and social interests.

There is a variety of terminology used to describe student integration or fit at institutions of higher education. For example, one study may describe something as *fit*, another as *sense of belonging*, and still another may seem to measure integration and involvement, and all may call them *belonging* (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). FGCS, or students whose parents never attended a 2-year or a 4-year institution, comprise at least half of students currently in college in the U.S. (NCES, 2017). In an NCES study of 2002 high school sophomores who subsequently enrolled in higher education, 58% were FGCS using the above definition (NCES, 2017). Over the past few decades, access to higher education has improved for first-generation students (Cataldi et al., 2018; Chen & Carroll, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998), as evidenced by the number of these students enrolling in higher education. Though first-generation students are attending college at higher rates (with FGCS defined as those with parents who never attended a 2-year or 4-year institution), they are not graduating or persisting as often as students who have parents who have completed a college

degree (Cataldi et al., 2018; Chen & Carroll, 2005; DeAngelo & Franke, 2016; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004; Riehl, 1994; Soria, 2015).

Fraternity Life

With over 60 years of serving the fraternal movement as fraternity/sorority members, chapter advisors, fraternity/sorority life advisors, and international fraternal leaders, I approached writing about the experiences of college students who participate in fraternities and sororities from an affirming and positive perspective. I believe these distinctive and intergenerational organizations can provide a forum for college students to create meaningful, well-rounded, and learning-oriented experiences. Deep and longstanding challenges continue to exist, but the juxtaposition of the best and worst actions of today's college students makes fraternities and sororities among the most complex organizations on college campuses. In addition, there is a high level of interaction between and among students, the campus community, administrators, faculty, alumni, and external stakeholders such as parents and (inter)national fraternity/sorority headquarters. Such dynamic experiences can create shared and distinctive realities for students integral to student development (Barber et al., 2015).

The majority of studies conducted regarding the common behaviors of college students advance the dominant discourse that fraternity/sorority affiliation contributes negatively to student development through behaviors such as alcohol abuse (Eberhart et al., 2003; Park et al., 2009; Wechsler et al., 1996), academic dishonesty (Eberhart et al., 2003; McCabe & Bowers, 1996), stereotyping (Schwartz, 1987), sexual promiscuity (Eberhart et al., 2003), hazing (Drout & Corsoro, 2003), and gender-norming (Arthur, 1998; Robinson et al., 2004).

In the past 10 years, fraternities and sororities have been called to task for nationally publicized incidents of cultural insensitivity. For example, at multiple institutions, North

American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) fraternities have been put on probation, suspended, and fined for sponsoring racially themed parties where members have dressed in offensive attire (Bartlett, 2001). However, supporters of these organizations tout the positive impact of fraternities/sororities on volunteerism, civic responsibility, involvement in other student organizations, a willingness to donate to charitable causes, engagement in educationally effective practices, such as student–faculty interaction, collaborative learning (Hayek et al., 2002), and student retention (Nelson et al., 2006).

Student affairs practitioners are responsible for addressing the needs of students with multiple contexts. Fraternal organizations aid in two important higher education areas: student development and student engagement. Student engagement finds its roots in involvement theory (Astin, 1984). Fraternal organizations help two important areas in higher education: student development and student engagement. Fraternities and sororities provide opportunities for students to learn, make meaning of knowledge, and share values within a socially constructed context. Students within fraternities and sororities actively construct knowledge rather than passively receive it from the environment. Their learning and development are a social, collaborative activity.

Cobb (1996) examined whether the *mind* is located in the head or in social action and argued that coupling these perspectives is valuable. Fraternity and sorority membership can provide a positive, life-changing experience that is paramount to the success of many college students and alumni, those from all manner of backgrounds and aspirations. While there is literature that contends the fraternal experience is fraught with detrimental situations and contributes negatively to student development (Maisel, 1990; Wechsler et al., 1996), significant

developmental potential and meaning-making experiences exist within fraternal organizations for college students.

Problem Statement

A considerable body of research indicates that students whose parents have not attended college often face significant challenges in accessing postsecondary education, succeeding academically once they enroll, and completing a degree (e.g., Choy, 2001; Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004; Stephens et al., 2012; Woosley & Shepler, 2011). When they do enroll, FGCS cannot benefit from their parents' college-going experience—a valuable source of cultural capital that helps students navigate college (e.g., understanding the significance of the syllabus, what office hours means, or how to cite sources in written assignments; Collier & Morgan, 2008). This lack of cultural capital negatively even affects first-generation students who are academically well prepared for college.

FGCS frequently struggle academically, participate in fewer extracurricular activities, receive lower grades, and work more hours to finance their education than their non-first-generation peers (Stephens et al., 2012). In addition to academic challenges, many first-generation students experience social, cultural, and emotional marginalization on campus. Institutions have much work ahead in helping FGCS access higher education to complete their studies successfully. However, more colleges and universities now recognize that increasing diversity through student enrollment will benefit their institution (Garrison & Gardner, 2012).

Sororities and fraternities also provide the structure for developing and strengthening personal and shared values (Shutts & Shelley, 2014; Tull & Cavins-Tull, 2018). Tull and Shaw (2017) conducted a study on common fraternity values of 76 organizations. These included scholarship, service, responsibility, excellence, leadership, and brotherhood (Tull & Shaw,

2017). In a similar review of the 26 organizations in the National Panhellenic Conference, service, friendship, scholarship, loyalty (to school and sorority), sisterhood, philanthropy, and leadership emerged as common themes (Tull et al., 2018). Research on NPHC (National Panhellenic Council) organizations revealed six common values for the men's groups: brotherhood, leadership, service, scholarship, manhood, and citizenship (Tull et al., 2018). In the same study, Tull et al. (2018) found that the majority of NPHC sororities shared charity, friendship, honesty, integrity, respect, service, sisterhood, unity, and womanhood as common values.

The connection between sorority and fraternity membership and student success has been the subject of debate among researchers and the public (Bowman & Holmes, 2017). While Routon and Walker (2014) noted the negative outcomes of sorority and fraternity affiliation, others (DeBard & Sacks, 2010; Walker et al., 2015) found evidence of the positive influence these social organizations can play in the lives of students. In evaluating sorority/fraternity outcomes, it is important to recognize that exclusionary membership is often limited to individuals holding some form of privilege (Garcia & Shirley, 2019; Ray, 2013; Syrett, 2009). Therefore, these individuals may already be more inclined to excel in traditional academic success measures. For many college students, fraternity or sorority membership provides such meaningful involvement.

Researchers have found that students who establish connections to their institution through involvement and engagement are more likely to persist and graduate (Braxton et al., 2013; Strayhorn, 2012). Central to student involvement is the sense of belonging or "social support, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to a group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). Astin (1993) further explained

the relationship between students and their peers, concluding, “The student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years” (p. 398). Through peer interaction and engagement, sororities and fraternities can enhance students’ sense of community and learning (Long, 2012; Walker et al., 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The intersecting literature of FGCS and members of fraternal letter organizations is sparse, but also is quantitative in design and focused on outcomes of membership, not FGCS as members. Bureau et al.’s (2011) study on first-generation fraternity and sorority students sparked my interest in this topic. If FGCS are less likely to be engaged, then connecting them to experiences that support their success is critical (Lundberg et al., 2007; Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; Somers et al., 2004). Specific activities have been linked to high levels of student engagement and, ultimately, student success. One such activity is fraternity/sorority membership (Bureau et al., 2011; Hayek et al., 2002; Pike, 2003). Therefore, this study centered on the lived experiences of first-generation fraternity men in NIC chapters, using sense of belonging as a conceptual lens. Data collection entailed by interviewing upper-class fraternity men who are FGCS.

The purpose of this study was to elucidate the experiences of FGCS within the NIC. First-generation students are devoted to improving the lives of their families and communities by creating a legacy of college completion, serving as role models for future generations of potential college students, and realizing a “personal and collective dream of achieving a college education” (Benmayor, 2002, p. 116). This study examined the various forms of institutional support or self-generated support that FGCS use to succeed on campus.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this narrative inquiry study:

- How do first-generation male college students describe their experiences in fraternities?
- How does fraternity membership influence first-generation male college students' sense of belonging on campus?
- How does fraternity membership influence the retention of first-generation male college students?

Methodological Approach

Qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world, representing true occurrences through personal interactions with those who live them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In other words, qualitative research studies a phenomenon in its natural setting, followed by an in-depth interpretation of events based on the meanings developed from them. Creswell (2007) provided a more exhaustive description of qualitative research by stating, “Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a world view, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). Qualitative research also recognizes the self-reflective nature of research and emphasizes the role of the researcher as an interpreter of the data and an individual who represents information. Additionally, a qualitative approach acknowledges the importance of language and discourse and issues of power, authority, and domination that exist within research (Clarke, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Within the field of education, “Qualitative researchers continue to ask questions of people they are learning from to discover

what they are experiencing, how they interpret their experiences and how they themselves structure the social world in which they live” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 8).

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework/Conceptual Orientation

First-person accounts of experience constitute the narrative text of this research approach. Whether the account is in the form of autobiography, life history, interview, journal, letters, or other collected materials, the text undergoes analysis for the meaning it has for its author (Merriam, 2016). I used Tinto’s (1993) theory of persistence and Strayhorn’s (2018) sense of belonging as the conceptual frameworks for data collection and analysis.

In his interactionist model of student departure, Tinto (1993) also supported the critical role of student involvement in positive educational outcomes for college students. Moreover, he emphasized the need to better understand the relationship between student involvement in learning and the impact that involvement has on student persistence. According to Tinto,

There appears to be an important link between learning and persistence that arises from the interplay of involvement and the quality of student effort. Involvement with one’s peers and with the faculty, both inside and outside the classroom, is itself positively related to the quality of student effort and in turn to both learning and persistence. (p. 71)

Tinto argued that learning is linked to persistence, given that “the more students learn, the more likely are they to persist” (p. 131).

For years, scholars have argued that what happens in college matters most. If that is true, it follows that student involvement in college also matters (Astin, 1984). An impressive body of research supported this assertion for college students of all races and sexes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). For instance, college student involvement is associated with a set of prevailing learning outcomes in higher education including, but not limited to artistic interests;

civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998), clarified values (Strayhorn, 2008b), critical thinking (Flowers, 2004), enhanced self-esteem or self-concept (Berger & Milem, 2002), leadership skills (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998), multicultural competence (Einfield & Collins, 2008), and even racial identity affirmation and expression (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995)

There are other benefits of students' involvement in college. Here, I argue that college student involvement is related to sense of belonging. Specifically, students who are more involved in college life also tend to feel a stronger connection with others on campus than those who are involved less or not at all. Astin (1999) noted that student involvement in college could result in a "greater sense of attachment to the college" (p. 523). So, what is the relationship between involvement and engagement? Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) noted, "These terms are in many ways distinct" (p. 411), while others use them interchangeably. Activities such as "working on campus, living on campus, engaging with peers, being a member of clubs, and socializing with faculty members are the types of involvement typically measured under this theory" (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 411). Many researchers have found that high levels of student engagement in a wide range of educationally purposeful activities (e.g., faculty-student collaborations, service-learning, study abroad) are positively associated with student learning and development across a variety of domains, including appreciation of diversity, critical thinking, social responsibility, and character development (Bridges et al, 2008; Kuh, 1993; Kuh et al., 2005; Strayhorn, 2008b).

As colleges aim to ensure students grow academically and personally, institutions also seek to prepare students for citizenship and social responsibility (Chickering, 2010). Sororities and fraternities encourage student development through accountability, civic engagement, and

values attainment (Tull et al., 2018). Membership outcomes in fraternities and sororities also link with individuals' sense of self, collaboration, and personal responsibility (Hevel et al., 2018). When studying the developmental experiences of students in fraternities and sororities, the environmental context (Barber et al., 2015) and a student's "feeling...of connectedness" (Strayhorn, 2018, p. 3) merit consideration as factors that influence a student's success.

Operational Definitions

The following operational definitions helped guide this study and provide a sense of clarity and consistency in terms.

- First-generation college students (i.e., students whose parents never attended college) graduate at lower rates than students who represent the second, third, or fourth generation in their families to attend college (Bui, 2002).
- Fraternity: A group of people associated or formally organized for a common purpose, interest, or pleasure, such as a men's student organization formed chiefly for social purposes, having secret rites and a name consisting of Greek letters (Merriam-Webster, 2020).
- Gender: A socially constructed psychological and social characteristic and traits typically associated with biological sex. Gender identity is how an individual identifies with a gender, and gender expression refers to how an individual outwardly appears in relation to gender identity. In society, gender is typically described in the binary of men and women, as in this study. However, the concept of androgyny is gaining more ground in research (Coon, 2006).
- Involvement: Being engaged in student clubs and organizations is associated with academic achievement and persistence (Guiffrida, 2004). Astin's (1984) theory of

student development indicated that when students are involved in the life of the university through participating in student organizations, they are more likely to learn, more satisfied with their overall college experiences, and eventually reach graduation. Astin defined involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to academic experience” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 34). In other words, Astin believed that students who engage in various aspects of college life tend to have a higher college success rate than students who do not participate in any clubs or organizations (Fischer, 2007).

- North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC): The NIC is a trade association representing 57 inter/national men’s fraternities. NIC member organizations also represent a diverse range of fraternity men and interfraternal interests, including fraternities founded for leadership and business interests as well as faith-based, multicultural, historically Black, and new or emerging fraternities (NIC, 2021).
- Sense of belonging: Echoing Baumeister and Leary (1995), sense of belonging characterizes an individual’s need for frequent and consistent interactions with others to feel a part of something greater than themselves. Sense of belonging is motivation sufficient to drive human behavior.

Delimitations of the Study

There are several delimitations to this research study. As noted by Creswell (2007), it is important for the researcher to outline in detail the protocol used to select the data sources, which appear in Chapter 3. I remained mindful that not every participant would have the same positive undergraduate experience as myself. I approached each interview from a place of understanding. I always listened intently to every conversation that occurred within my presence. I made notes

of my emotions, feelings, and thoughts during this process, which helped me remember different participants' experiences. Like seasoned qualitative researchers, I constantly tried to understand the people I observed from the participants' or "natives" or "actors" viewpoints; this is the concept of "empathetic understanding" (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 36). My research informed higher education professionals as they implement policies and procedures for FGCS who are members of fraternal letter organizations.

Significance of the Study

FGCS often face obstacles that continuing-generation students do not when applying to, getting into, and persisting through college. These obstacles can include a lack of parental college experience, lower socioeconomic statuses, and lower academic preparedness than continuing-generation students (Cataldi et al., 2018). My interest in this study was rooted in specific observations from my professional career. First, findings from my publishable paper led me to more questions than answers about the experiences of first-generation fraternity men on our campuses. Second, my role as an administrator has always had responsibility or indirect oversight of fraternities and sororities on campus. This study allowed me to elucidate the stories of first-generation fraternity men and how they remain resilient and successful despite all of the adversity they faced while trying to complete their degrees.

Organization of the Study

This research study is in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, research questions, and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature, which will discuss the history of FGCS, how first-generation fraternity men can navigate a campus and a new community of leaders, ways in which first-generation fraternity men show up

as leaders on campus, the resiliency of FGCS, and the support received from the NIC along with each of the two-fraternity headquarters for Alpha Tau Omega and Delta Sigma Phi. Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the study, which includes a review of the study, findings, research design, research questions, interview questions, data sources, participant selection, role of the researcher, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 includes the findings of the study, which include the voices of each participant, an introduction to participants, and emerging themes. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings, discussion of the emergent themes, implications for theory and practice, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review that follows is an introduction of the characteristics of a first-generation student and how the definition has evolved over many years. The section also describes the culture of a world at home and a world on campus. Furthermore, the chapter presents a discussion of the success and opportunities for growth for first-generation fraternity men on today's college campus. Therefore, the data tells a story about a group of men striving to be successful in obtaining an undergraduate degree.

It is rewarding, challenging, and sometimes lonely—all at once—being the first person in a family to achieve something for the first time. FGCS are trailblazers who must navigate several barriers in their process of achieving higher education. These obstacles include a lack of social and cultural capital as well as financial strain (Housel & Harvey, 2009; Owens et al., 2010). Compared to students with college-educated parents, FGCS report receiving less assistance in preparing for postsecondary environments and lacking a sense of belonging to the institutions they attend (Choy, 2001). The experiences of FGCS who occupy spaces at the intersections of race, class, sexual orientation, and spirituality receive seldom mention (Mitchell & Means, 2014; Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010). The goal of this study was to show how FGCS with intersecting identities as fraternity men can matriculate through graduation.

Since their early days, fraternities and sororities had official, formal exclusionary policies barring people of color (and, in numerous cases, non-Christians) from membership. There were real “discriminatory clauses against Negroes and Orientals” in place, and the political and

historical dynamics behind them are fascinating. In the mid-20th century, the official policies shifted, and by 1955, only one NPC sorority had an official ban on students of color (Lee, 1995). This is worth noting since the two historically white fraternities used in my study were represented by men of color. All six of my participants are men of color representing historically white fraternities. Among students of color who join Greek life, a good percentage participate in historically and predominately White groups, counter the misperception that Greek Life remains White because students of color only join groups specifically catering to students of color. The historically White Groups remain mostly White because not many students of color join Greek life (Park, 2013).

While Hurtado et al.'s framework is generally applied to universities as a whole, it also serves to understand climate issues in subsections of the university, such as historically White Greek life (HWGL). Arguably, the four dimensions applied to HWGL tend to reinforce organizational culture and climate that is largely inhospitable to many students of color, although some choose to participate. The campus racial climate framework speaks to the significance of historical legacies of exclusion, the decades and decades of explicit bans on students of color in HWGL (Hurtado, 1998).

The realities of being a first-generation student and from a lower socioeconomic family can preclude some students from enrolling in college, joining a fraternity, and persisting to graduation. The issue is further complicated when correlated with parental educational achievement. Of the low number of SES students enrolled in college between 1992 and 2000, those who had a parent or parents who completed college graduated at a rate of 68%; that number dropped to 43% for first-generation students (Chen, 2005). This trend is still present, with 42% of continuing generation college students graduating and only 20% of FGCS

graduating (Redford et al., 2017). The aforementioned data confirm the disadvantage faced by FGCS without having a parent who graduated from college.

Scholars have defined FGCS differently (Ward et al., 2012). Ward et al. (2012) pointed to the inconsistencies between definitions and the resulting implications for the field of higher education, noting that the lack of a single definition of first-generation college student creates difficulty in understanding the positions of researchers on the topic. Therefore, what becomes increasingly challenging is generalizing and comparing information about this group. Because research can inform the development of programs intended to serve FGCS, Ghazzawi and Jagannathan (2011) found that how studies operationalize concepts of this group is a critical step in considering their application. Research shows that interventions with FGCS can close the gap between their performance and that of their continuing-generation classmates (Harackiewicz et al., 2014; Stephens et al., 2012; Walton & Cohen, 2011). First-generation students are resilient and eager to experience new educational environments despite adversities they may have previously experienced. First-generation students “bring vitality and new ideas to the college environment” (Davis, 2010, p. 127).

Research suggests the fraternity and sorority experience provides members with developmental opportunities, promotes persistence, encourages interaction with peers, and is associated with higher levels of alumni involvement and giving (Astin, 1993; National Panhellenic Conference, 2001). Even today, fraught with the complex issues of college fraternal organization culture, fraternities and sororities offer relationship-building opportunities that contribute to leadership development (Kelly, 2008). First-generation students are resilient and eager to experience new educational environments; despite adversities they may have previously

experienced. First-generation students “really do bring vitality and new ideas to the college environment” (Davis, 2010, pp. 54–55).

Angeles (2018) found that only 27.4% of first-generation students who begin college graduate within 4 years, and only 50% will graduate in 6 years. These numbers are even lower for students born into the lowest socioeconomic quartile. While these numbers demonstrate that the coupling of first-generation and low-income students is insufficient, many campuses still host programs that combine these populations.

The Historical Context of Fraternities

The development of fraternity/sorority life in the United States mirrors the history of higher education in the country in various ways. The faculty movement from instructors to researchers provided opportunities for students to form social groups and literary societies. The development of student affairs as a profession created partnerships between the university and Greek organizations and opportunities for student support. Like their host institutions, fraternities were impacted by national events and policies, particularly around the expansion of chapters and membership.

Harvard was the first institution of higher education in the United States (Rudolph, 1962; Thelin, 2017). Early colleges were small and private. Many included only one staff member, who served as faculty and morality guide. This combination of responsibilities fell in line, as most institutions were religiously affiliated at the time (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). Many parents expected this combination of education and behavior observation, also known as *in loco parentis* (Rudolph, 1962; Westmeyer, 1997). Parental involvement has shifted, as parents no longer expect the institution to act as parents for students. Rather, families expect greater involvement in their student’s educational experience (Cullaty, 2011).

The single staff member maintained a strong sense of authority, unchecked and unquestioned, over the students. Perhaps the student population at the time was the reason for this respect for authority. College was a means to create an ideal citizen in the country, within a sense of entitlement for the wealthy (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Thelin, 2017). As enrollment grew at early institutions, so did the need for expanded staff. More faculty were needed for additional courses. However, the faculty maintained responsibility for student behavior, as well. This expansion led to a larger population of faculty guiding the educational and personal experiences of students (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Rudolph, 1962; Westmeyer, 1997), but a shift in authority was coming.

Three key moments in history created a shift from faculty authority to student authority. First, part-time instructors were needed as enrollment continued to increase at colleges. Institutions no longer had the funds to continue hiring full-time faculty. Perhaps this issue is related to the newness of the college idea. The first adjuncts hired, originally known as teaching aides, were subject to mistreatment by faculty and students, with some seriously injured or even killed. The failure of the teaching aide movement necessitated adding courses to faculty members' already taxing loads (Rudolph, 1962). The competition for resources created the need for an institutional leader, leading to the first college presidents. Although presidents were initially members of the college affiliation, institutions eventually shifted away from this notion, preferring leaders who represented general interests as a means to attract more students (Morgan, 1933). College presidents led from a business mind, concern for the bottom line, and desire to please the board of trustees, reducing faculty authority.

The limited resources and increased competition for students gradually pushed institutions away from religious affiliation and more toward recruiting a more general population

(Handlin & Handlin, 1974). New populations created additional curricular needs and a more specialized faculty. Despite these improvements, higher education continued to struggle for resources, leading to the rise in faculty research. Faculty research resulted in additional funds and increased institutional prestige. Although fraternities and sororities as a student movement conducting research energized faculty, it reduced their contact with the student population (Rudolph, 1962; Westmeyer, 1997).

The reduced contact led to a decreased value for instruction, which created a student movement for activities. The initial groups on college campuses were literary societies (Baird, 1912). These groups, while providing socialization, were focused on educational pursuits and debate, often challenging the curriculum. These groups were accepted by institutions due to their connection with academics, a belief they would not sustain, or a combination of the two (Rudolph, 1962). Historians have suggested faculty members may have contributed to the rise in these organizations. Some faculty members could have seen the creation of these student groups as examples of student activism and sought to support the groups (Altbach, 1989; Kezar, 2010). However, the rise of student groups was less related to protest and more toward boredom with the college experience.

Secret societies were a precursor to Greek life. The first society founded was at the College of William and Mary around 1776 (Baird, 1912). Membership was highly selective, and the groups met in secret locations. These groups were focused on literature and with support from faculty members. About these societies, Baird (1912) stated, "Their exercises consisted of debates, the reading and discussion of papers on literary subjects, and the like. They were encouraged by the faculties, the students joined them as a matter of course and their work was mainly educational" (p. 5). Colleges typically had a minimum of two societies that engaged in

educational debate regularly. These societies led to the formation of fraternities, beginning with Kappa Alpha Society in 1827. This became further exemplified with the Black Greek-letter organizations, which, through social activism, worked to improve the quality of life for African Americans (Harris & Mitchell, 2008). Because the first eight Black Greek-letter organizations “had been born during the turbulent turn of the century...not too far past the midcentury point, the need to organize fraternally arose again” (Harris & Mitchell, 2008) The founding of the Iota Phi Theta Fraternity during the civil rights movement was a sign that members were committed to social change.

The Start of Fraternities

American college fraternities are unique among the educational systems of the world. Although similar groups exist in Germany, Italy, and England, their existence is founded on the perpetuation of specific socioeconomic cohorts of students (Bailey, 1949). The emphasis of such European fraternal organizations identified with elitist fervor, as the groups have highly selective membership intake practices (Anson & Marchesani, 1991). American college fraternities focus on egalitarianism and the social development of their members. Although European schools have clubs and societies, no other arrangements are readily comparable to the American fraternity system (Anson & Marchesani, 1991).

The genesis of American college fraternities was forged from the desire of the general student body (Bailey, 1949). The evolution of the men’s collegiate social fraternity began as a social outlet as part of the extra curriculum. During the 19th century, many colleges had forbidden the existence of fraternities. Prior to 1880 and in a few cases afterward, the fraternities evaded antifraternity rules and operated chapters sub rosa. Although many institutions of higher education have chosen to eliminate fraternities and sororities or question their relevance, Greek

organizations have had a significant historical impact on the early development of the American system of higher education (Anson & Marchesani, 1991).

The educational curriculum during the 18th and 19th centuries was rigid, structured, and dogmatic (Horowitz, 1987). Recitation of text and oral examination of the classics was commonplace. This system of drill and instruction was believed to be foundational in the preparation of gentlemen scholars and clergymen who predominantly dominated the student demographic. Due to the high levels of academic rigor and restrictiveness of the collegiate environment at the time, students craved an extra curriculum; they yearned for outside social activity to complement their academic pursuits (Caple, 1998). Thus, students founded early and loosely affiliated groups that met privately in dorm rooms and debated the day's topics (Bailey, 1949). Students sought to create organizations of like-minded individuals, particularly in matters of common interest, such as for the discussion of banned texts. These few clubs were primarily formed as literary and debate societies, and they offered the only outside-the-classroom experience to which students had access (Horowitz, 1987). These clubs began to flourish at this time (Bailey, 1949). With the influence of the classicist curriculum, many students sought inspiration from Greek texts that they had read and debated. These societies became the first early college fraternities as they adopted Greek letters and ideals that symbolized specific academic and intellectual ideals. The early fraternities were a way to fill a need in students' lives by facilitating friendships, recreation, and an outlet for free expression when the college environment provided none (Caple, 1998).

The first true modern conception of a Greek-letter society grew out of an antecedent organization known as the Flat Hat Club, which had existed at the College of William and Mary since about 1750 (Bailey, 1949). The Flat Hat Club was a group of men devoted to the printing

and distribution of an underground literary newspaper called *The Flat Hat*. Early writings of *The Flat Hat* were satirical compositions on student culture and essays concerning various literary opinions and expressions (Horowitz, 1987).

Five students founded Phi Beta Kappa at the College of William and Mary in the Apollo Room of the Raleigh Tavern on the night of December 5, 1776 (Bailey, 1949). The Greek-letter society and its founders soon determined to extend its values to other institutions and, within 11 years, had established chapters at Yale, Harvard, and Dartmouth. This growth was, however, short-lived. Due to military conscription actions during the Revolutionary War, the parent or alpha chapter of Phi Beta Kappa became dormant in 1781. The fraternity did not expand for many years.

In 1831, influenced by a nationwide faculty agitation against secret societies, the Harvard chapter voluntarily disclosed its secrets (Horowitz, 1987). Thereafter, the entire organization became an honorary society in which membership was conferred solely for distinguished scholarship (Bailey, 1949). Its Greek-letter designation of phi, beta, and kappa stood for “love of learning is the guide of life” (Anson & Marchesani, 1991) Following this policy change, Phi Beta Kappa emphasized the honorary nature of its membership and no longer considered itself in competition with social fraternities (Bailey, 1949).

Phi Beta Kappa today is more widely distributed on college campuses across the United States than any other Greek-letter society and remains purely honorary in character (Anson & Marchesani, 1991). Yet this fraternity of 1776–1831 was the progenitor of a whole class of college fraternities, and its numerous descendants bear all of its essential features (Horowitz, 1987). The Phi Beta Kappa of the late-18th century had all the earmarks of present-day social fraternities: the charm and mystique of the secrecy, an esoteric ritual, oath of fidelity, a grip, a

motto, a badge for external display, high ideals of morality, as well as ideals of high scholastic achievement and fellowship (Horowitz, 1987). As the first Greek-letter society, Phi Beta Kappa provided the foundation for today's proliferation of the college fraternity (Bailey, 1949). This was true for women's fraternities, as well (Caple, 1998). As young women were gradually admitted to colleges across the United States after the Civil War ended, women craved the same type of outside-the-classroom fraternal experience that men created through Greek-lettered organizations (Caple, 1998). Thus, female students established their own fraternities solely to advance women forward within higher education institutions.

As fraternities and sororities formed, campus housing during the early era of campus life left a growing number of students living in boarding houses rather than in dormitories because of a shortage of on-campus housing. By the middle of the 19th century, a change occurred on the American campus that caused fraternities to acquire a secondary characteristic: the fraternity house (Dartmouth College, 1936). More students had greater personal wealth than in earlier periods and could afford to board in fraternity houses. The earliest example of a fraternity house was at the University of Michigan, where Chi Psi built a 20-by-14-foot log cabin in 1846. Although not used for living, it was the site of meetings where its members spent a considerable amount of their outside time. This building marked the first instance of the fraternity as a social living group and the end of the fraternity as a social outlet (Bailey, 1949).

Even though students could now better afford housing, due to economic factors and the rapid growth of attendees, many colleges were financially ill-equipped to maintain housing for their students (Dartmouth College, 1936). Consequently, campuses sat amid private boarding houses where students secured their own lodging and meals. For fraternities and sororities, owning and maintaining property required the cooperation of the alumni, many of whom in the

past had simply graduated and disappeared (Hering, 1931). Eventually, alumni became involved with chapter management because undergraduates could not maintain their living spaces properly. This action indirectly benefited the colleges by keeping alumni interested and engaged in the affairs of their alma mater. Likewise, chapter ownership of these houses relieved many colleges and universities of the financial burden of building dormitories. For the college or university, fraternities had the practical benefit of housing people when an expanding college or university could not cope, and many institutions at the time relied on fraternities this way (Hering, 1931).

This willingness on the part of sororities and fraternities to assume responsibility because fraternities and sororities began as a student resistance to the power structure in higher education and existed in a cloak of secrecy, it is not surprising that early on, the academy began to problematize fraternities and later sororities. Scheurich (1997) discussed the construction and recognition of a problematic group occurring within what he called a “grid of social regularities” (p. 98). Importantly, Scheurich described this grid as “both epistemological and ontological; it constitutes both who the problem group is and how the group is seen or known as a problem” (p. 107). The problematization of fraternities and sororities has continued in the academy into the present era.

Second, student affairs practitioners are responsible for addressing the needs of students within multiple contexts. Fraternal organizations aid in two essential areas in higher education: student development and student engagement. Student engagement finds its roots in involvement theory (Astin, 1984). This theory suggests students who put energy into an activity are likely to receive a benefit equal to the energy expended, provided the event includes a challenge. Research has indicated fraternities can provide such challenges to students, impacting their

personal development (DeBard et al., 2006; Pike, 2003; Routon & Walker, 2016; Wilder et al., 1989). Students, regardless of background and identity, will respond to an administration that guides them in these experiences (Pace, 1990). Graduate students who understand the impact of fraternity/sorority life activities on the student population are better equipped to harness the positive value of such activities.

Finally, students must graduate with an understanding of inclusion. Fraternities and sororities can connect students to one another. Although research has not linked membership to cultural understanding (Martin et al., 2015; Routon & Walker, 2016) and many organizations are formed based on racial, ethnic, or religious lines, there is no reason to discount the ability of these groups to connect across divides. Greek organizations have become more open overall and could bridge the gap between majority and minority populations. The marginalization of students of color continues on college campuses. Fraternity/sorority life could be a solution to this discord among students.

The development of Greek life in the United States has close ties to the history of higher education in the country. The shift in power from faculty to students created an opening to organize fraternal groups. These groups fought through many challenges to grow and expand their reach. The creation of the NIC provided links between fraternities into shared purpose. Although the group did not exude any control over individual chapters, its existence increased accountability and aided in policy development.

Federal policies provided improved access for marginalized populations. New fraternal organizations supported the discussion of social issues and inclusion. NPHC's formation created avenues for these groups to exercise a collective voice. These organizations also provided connections for students, which increased student retention.

These groups continue their active connection to social issues today, both on campus and nationwide.

A stereotype of IFC fraternities and NPC sororities is that they are synonymous with alcohol consumption and hazing incidents on college campuses (Nuwer, 1990, 1999). Although research suggested a connection between these student issues and fraternities, it is vital to consider other historical factors. Alcohol use and abuse have been a part of higher education since its inception. Many factors contribute to use, such as year in school, residence, and organizational membership. Hazing predates the formation of fraternities, and evidence suggests it began with faculty members (Nuwer, 1990, 1999; Sweet, 1999). In addition, hazing practices may be learned behaviors as opposed to chapter mandates (Sweet, 1999). Thus, staff must intervene and guide student development away from such practices. Although we cannot ignore the links between these issues and Greek life, we must also be mindful of other impacting factors.

Sasso (2019) argued that we, as a field, have discussed student engagement and legal implications connected to fraternities. These issues are vital for administrators as they consider student expectations, federal mandates, and increased competition. Fraternities provide an engagement experience not only to members but the community as a whole. These organizations can connect diverse student groups, assuming they have appropriate leadership and direction. The key legal implication regarding campus fraternities is liability. Both private and public institutions can avoid litigation by acting on known information to prevent dangerous incidents. Colleges may also cite legal precedence once charges are filed. We cannot ignore the historical links between Greek life and higher education in the United States. We must continue to examine how the past, present, and future of higher education will impact fraternities on campus and vice

versa. How can we support each other's mission? We must find common ground, as elimination of Greek life is not a feasible option. Removal of chapters or fraternity life entirely could have a detrimental impact on the U.S. college system (Sasso, 2019).

First-Generation College Students

Over the past 80 years, the United States has witnessed a significant increase in college enrollment and completion (Horowitz, 2018). The percentage of students obtaining a higher education degree increased from 7.7% to 31.7% between 1950 and 2010 (Horowitz, 2018). Higher education is one of many paths that lead individuals to greater social mobility, economic growth, a sense of achievement, employment opportunities, and working in higher status jobs (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Kyllonen, 2012). According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017a), the employment rate in the United States is projected to increase by 11.5 million by 2026. Additionally, 54% of created jobs will require postsecondary education, and only 3.9% will require a high school diploma by 2024 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). A higher education degree is of great value to all students, helping to provide them with economic gains, higher earnings, and greater career opportunities (Ishitani, 2006).

There are great benefits associated with obtaining a postsecondary education such as having a better life and a sense of accomplishment, higher income, job security and stability, and higher levels of psychological well-being and happiness. However, certain populations are less likely to attend and graduate from a higher education institution, making it difficult for them to reap those benefits (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Horowitz, 2018; Ishitani, 2006; Tate et al., 2015).

Background and Characteristics

FGCS are a growing population in the United States, and they are emerging as one of the most important student populations in all colleges and universities (Castelló et al., 2018). There are many different variations of the definition of FGCS. Some researchers describe this population as students with parents who never attended a university at all, while others define FGCS as those with parents with “some” college experience but never graduated (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Davis, 2010; Ishitani, 2006). Although there are similarities between the definitions, this research study used the definition of FGCS as students whose parents or guardians did not attend a 2-year or a 4-year institution. The characteristics of FGCS greatly differ from continuing-generation college students, which contributes to FGCS experiencing higher dropout rates than their counterparts.

FGCS generally come from low-income families and are disproportionately overrepresented in the most disadvantaged groups related to enrolling and participating in higher education (Castelló et al., 2018; Coffman, 2011; Engle, 2007). Demographically, FGCS are more likely to be older, Black or Hispanic, have dependent children, attend 2-year or for-profit institutions, work full-time and have a part-time college enrollment status, register for remedial courses, and withdraw and/or repeat classes (Chen, 2016; Chen & Carroll, 2005; Engle, 2007; Furquim et al., 2017). Research further denoted that FGCS are less likely to take college standardized tests (ACT and SAT), and those who do tend to score the lowest among their peers (Inkelas et al., 2007). Additionally, FGCS attend college to honor their family or pursue future financial aspirations. However, they feel less academically prepared, earn lower grades, are less involved in college activities, have lower educational aspiration, and perform poorly in the math and sciences compared to continuing-generation college students (Bui, 2002; Gibbons &

Woodside, 2014; Horn & Nuñez, 2000; Petty, 2014; Próspero & Vohran-Gupta, 2007; Reid & Moore, 2008).

Challenges of First-Generation College Students

Due to the hidden status of FGCS, they may not be recognized or acknowledged among other groups, with their social, cultural, and academic needs often overlooked (Kish, 2003). When FGCS arrive at college, they are naïve about the campus culture and the role of their family in their lives; as such, they experience mixed feelings of hope, confidence, self-doubt, and motivation (Kish, 2003). These feelings and expectations force FGCS to live in two different worlds: the world of higher education and commitment to their family's sociocultural backgrounds (Petty, 2014).

Griffiths (2017) reported, "Across the country, many first-generation college students drop out of college. Yet, these students especially need to finish their schooling because college degrees may represent their only chance to break generational poverty cycles" (p. 2). Therefore, first-generation students must have academic and personal support within the college experience because it may not be present in other areas of their lives due to their family's limited knowledge about college (Davis, 2010; Ishitani, 2006; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

FGCS have limited access to information about higher education and the expectations of the institutions (Hirudayaraj, 2011). Institutions of higher education have provided college students with ample sources of information for an easier transition to college. For continuing-generation college students, these sources of information could come from their parents, siblings, or friends because of their previous access to higher education or personal and academic experiences (Schwartz et al., 2018). As a result, students arrive at college with a stronger sense of social capital. Social capital is the information, support, and resources accessible to people

through networking and connections. Social capital is important, especially for any marginalized student population, because it provides support and assistance in any social environment (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Knowledge of Postsecondary Education

When considering the differences between FGCS and continuing-generation college students, distinct disadvantages between the two student populations are evident. These disadvantages occur before enrolling in college, during college, and after graduation (Gofen, 2009). Disadvantages before enrollment include lack of knowledge on postsecondary education such as the application process for admission, financial aid systems, lack of finances, academic readiness, moral support from family members, low educational expectations and plans, as well as minimal academic preparation in high school (Gofen, 2009). During and after the collegiate experiences of FGCS, these disadvantages show in their high attrition rate before completing their degrees and continue through early career outcomes (Gofen, 2009; Warburton et al., 2001).

Research conducted the past 2 decades showed that FGCS face a unique set of challenges to their college success compared to their continuing or non-FGCS' peers (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Davis, 2010; Engle, 2007; Engle et al., 2006; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Padgett et al., 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004; NASPA, 2018; Ward et al., 2012). This is a disparity widely recognized and accepted throughout the literature. FGCS commonly enter the institution with less knowledge of college-related activities and expectations and have less social and familial support relative to students whose parents have college degrees (Davis, 2010; Engle, 2007; Martin, 2015; Moschetti, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tym et al., 2004). As a result, researchers must explore how student social support networks develop to ensure student success during difficult transitions.

Because FGCS are the first in their family to attend college, they lack familiarity with the college admission process, the campus culture and climate, and what it means to be a college student (Davis, 2010; Inkelas et al., 2007). This population is also new to the language, insider knowledge, institutional practices, and resources available to students (Davis, 2010). Individuals who assume they are familiar with FGCS believe that they can aid those students by simply getting them a campus tour, bringing them to various offices where they can pay their bills, sign up for housing, and register for classes. However, becoming familiar with the college culture, creating a sense of fit, and navigating the bureaucratic organization of the higher education system is more complex, and it is a challenge that FGCS experience to a greater degree than continuing-generation college students (Davis, 2010; Ishitani, 2006; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

FGCS have limited access to information about higher education and institutions' expectations (Hirudayaraj, 2011). Institutions of higher education have provided college students with ample sources of information for an easier transition to college. For continuing-generation college students, these sources of information could come from parents, siblings, or friends because of their previous access to higher education or personal and academic experiences (Schwartz et al., 2018). As a result, when they arrive at college, they have a stronger sense of social capital.

Social capital comprises the information, support, and resources accessible to people through networking and connections. Social capital is essential, especially for any marginalized student population, because it provides support and assistance in any social environment (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). In contrast, when FGCS come to college, they have experienced isolation, limited themselves to just one or two sources of information, and greatly lacked social capital (Davis, 2010). Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen (2012) and Sanchez et al. (2011) contended

that while transitioning to college, students' accessibility to their social capital shrinks and their strong connection to their previous community begins to weaken, especially for first-generation and low-income students. As such, students must find a way to maintain their relationships from their past communities while building new and meaningful relationships and connections when they enroll in college. Another barrier that has impacted FGCS's persistence in college is family involvement.

Family Involvement

Autonomy and family involvement are a significant part of the first generation's lived experience. During the adolescent years, children desire more autonomy and independence and guidance and direction from their family members to make decisions about their academics and learning (Wang & Nuru 2017). According to the Harvard Family Research Project (2007), adolescence is a phase where young adults establish their identities, practice autonomous self-expressions, and partake in complex experiences to develop their competence and self-esteem. As children pass through adolescence, family members begin to have conversations about academic expectations for their children. Parents also seek to create opportunities for their children to take responsibility for their academic work and create a meaningful plan for their future (Rosenberg & Lopez, 2010; Wang & Nuru, 2017).

The level of family engagement during adolescence can produce positive academic outcomes, such as growth in college enrollment rate (Rosenberg et al., 2010), decrease in attrition rate (Englund et al., 2008), and academic achievement (Epstein, 2008). Other researchers have noted that when parents of students engage with their children's education process, they have higher levels of student achievement, attendance, behavior, educational expectations, and educational planning (Ferguson et al., 2008). Despite the positive connection

between family engagement and students' academic achievement, this experience is convoluted for FGCS and their family members.

FGCS's family members lack familiarity with the higher education system, having not graduated from college. As a result, they are likely unable to advise students regarding navigating the college process and adopting strategies to succeed academically (Wang & Nuru, 2017). Additionally, FGCS have strong ties to their family responsibilities (McKay & Estrella, 2008). As such, because FGCS identify as low-income students, they spend more time attending to their familial obligations and working multiple jobs to help with finances (Williams & Ferrari, 2015). These obligations force FGCS to spend less time on campus, impacting their sense of belonging and academic and social integration (McKay & Estrella, 2008; Petty, 2014; Williams & Ferrari, 2015). There are other instances where families of FGCS have played a positive role in students' educational attainment.

While the parents of FGCS do not possess a college degree, they sometimes encourage their students to achieve both family and educational goals. Wang (2014) and Stephens, Fryberg, et al. (2015) defined encouragement as parents reminding FGCS about the importance of staying true to their roots. This involves making family a priority, relying on family as a strong support system, leading by example by modeling a true definition of college success for younger siblings and community members, and avoiding family achievement guilt. Family achievement guilt is a new concept that assesses specific feelings of guilt about a person's academic achievement compared to their family members' success (Covarrubias et al., 2015).

Family achievement guilt has made students feel uneasy about having access to more educational opportunities and college success than their family members; therefore, they have had to reduce their academic success with their family members (Covarrubias et al., 2015). As

difficult as it is for FGCS to avoid family achievement guilt, they tend to experience it more as they surpass their parents' educational achievement. FGCS who exercise interdependence are more engaged with their families, living closer to them while involving them in their daily activities (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Wang & Nuru, 2017). Accordingly, FGCS feel guiltier for pursuing their academic aspirations as they transition from high school to college.

Family involvement also could serve as an important influence on FGCS's success (Azmitia et al., 2013; Palbusa & Gauvain, 2017). FGCS have had a sense of obligation to stay connected to family and receive encouragement and emotional support (Azmitia et al., 2013). Additionally, having face-to-face interactions and support from family members have been documented as instrumental to FGCS' academic outcome (Dennis et al., 2005). The result of a study that was done by Cornelius-White et al. (2004) suggested that when FGCS' family were engaged with the college-going process and students' college transition, students experienced a high level of academic achievement. Including parents in the educational process improved students' educational aspirations and reduced the adverse effects of culture shock (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). A lack of familiarity with the culture of higher education and its institutions has made it difficult for FGCS's family to provide their students with much help, forcing students to navigate college life entirely on their own (Davis, 2010). Although family involvement is critical in the experiences of FGCS, academic preparation is also one of the significant factors of their college experiences.

Academic Preparedness

Comparisons of the academic preparedness of FGCS with continuing generation college students have shown FGCS less academically prepared than their counterparts (Chen, 2005; D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Engle et al., 2006; Pratt et al., 2017). Generally, FGCS GPAs are lower

than continuing-generation college students (Lee et al., 2004), disparities advancing through the rigorous academic courses (Atherton, 2014; Choy, 2001; Cushman, 2007) and standardized test scores (Atherton, 2014; Choy, 2001). Researchers have further associated FGCS's lack of access to social capital, lower high school engagement, and lower socioeconomic status to low academic performance, forcing FGCS to take more remedial courses (Chen, 2005; Coffman, 2011; Martin et al., 2014). Engle and Tinto (2008) stated that 62% of FGCS take variations of remedial courses before they register for their major curriculum courses. Pascarella et al. (2004) denoted that having a strong sense of social capital fosters relationships among individuals, facilitating transactions and transmitting different resources. Social capital permits FGCS to connect with various faculty members, professional staff, and peers while having access to resources that would guide them toward retention at a higher level (Pascarella et al., 2004). Establishing a relationship with faculty and professional staff members has created an opportunity for students to feel more comfortable attending office hours, seeking academic assistance, and finding ways to enhance their academic skills to enroll in more rigorous academic courses (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Participating in rigorous academic courses has contributed to students' academic success (Choy, 2001; Coffman, 2011; Warburton et al., 2001). Reid (2007) conducted a qualitative study on academic preparation for postsecondary education. The participants reported that they failed at developing effective study skills strategies in high school that would have helped them in college. Additionally, advanced math courses in high school have enhanced the college enrollment chances of FGCS and narrowed their college attendance gap (Engle, 2007). Nevertheless, more often, FGCS have taken fewer advanced-level math and science courses, impacting their level of academic preparedness before enrolling in college (DeFreitas & Rinn,

2013). Because FGCS are members of lower-socioeconomic classes, they work more hours than continuing-generation college students (Chen, 2005; Ishitani, 2006; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). As a result, they are less focused on their academics and are more dedicated to home and community obligations. Attending to their family's needs and performing well academically made it difficult for FGCS to navigate two worlds.

Hsiao (1992) indicated that FGCS live in two worlds: college and family responsibilities. Too often, FGCS have a difficult time managing both worlds. Although attending college could be seen as a rite of passage, it has created a significant separation from FGCS's past community, which is their home. Parents, siblings, or friends who have not attended college could serve as a distraction for FGCS. Additionally, too often, family members and friends encourage students not to attend college, which forces them to reject their family or home community culture to achieve their nonfamilial academic aspirations (Gofen, 2009; Inman & Mayes, 1999). As FGCS begin to acculturate themselves in college through their professional attire, taste in music,] academic responsibilities, and expanded vocabulary, they feel anxious and uncomfortable leaving the culture in which they grew up (Hsiao, 1992). This forces FGCS to negotiate the competing pressures of staying committed to family values and fulfilling their parents' wishes by achieving academic excellence and graduating college while pursuing their education without their family's support (Hsiao, 1992; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016).

To move away from the culture of home to the culture of college, FGCS face many challenges; as a result of it, when they arrive at college, they experience a major "culture shock" (Gofen, 2009; Hsiao, 1992). In a study on the impact of family involvement on pursuing a higher education degree, Collins (2010) found that some of the FGCS spoke of familial support, others mentioned familial pressure, and a few discussed their family's absence in the pursuit of higher

education. In addition to family pressures, when FGCS enroll in college, they are under a great deal of educational pressure, making navigating both worlds very difficult. Kish (2003) further insisted that when FGCS enroll in college, they experience a lack of institutional support and do not feel welcomed. FGCS experience a dichotomy where they do not want to disconnect from their community at home even if the opportunity presents itself; additionally, they do not feel accepted at their institutions due to prejudice, stereotypes, and marginalization.

FGCS seek to gain power, comfort, hope, and a better life through higher education. Education becomes a means to an end: the end of their family's financial struggles (Kish, 2003). Although research suggested that a higher education degree helps with career advancement, higher-paying jobs, living an easier life, and having healthy mental stability, for FGCS, it creates a personal separation from family. Amid a college transition, FGCS have to decide whether to stop working, which could impact their financial commitment to their families. FGCS become different people, finding a balance between accepting their educational transition while maintaining connections and sustaining relationships with their past communities. Thus, FGCS must mask their transition by pretending to be happy and comfortable in a place where they do not feel welcomed. FGCS's commitment to meeting their family needs negatively affects their academic preparedness and campus involvement once they arrive at college.

Sense of Belonging

Belief in the ability to successfully complete a particular course of action does not guarantee persistence (Tinto, 2017b). It is necessary to include the individual in the community of faculty, staff, and other students who value the students' participation, making them feel that they matter and belong to a community (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Kuh et al., 2005; Strayhorn, 2008a). When students feel valued and appreciated, they experience a sense of commitment,

bringing together the individual and the community members amid adversities (Tinto, 2017a, 2017b). Therefore, engagement in the campus community is essential to FGCS persistence, as students equate engagement with sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 2017a).

Students' sense of belonging derives from the broader campus climate and their ongoing daily campus interactions with students, faculty, staff, and administrators (Hurtado & Punjuan 2005; Tinto, 2017b). A sense of belonging or lack thereof is a critical factor in student withdrawal from their institution (O'Keeffe, 2013). Sense of belonging comes when students share common interests with their peers in the same discipline, sociocultural background, or broader institutional climate (Tinto, 2017b). However, when students lack a sense of belonging, their motivation to persist declines, leading them to withdraw from their institution. Students of color endure great strains that can interfere with their college transition and integration as well as establishing a sense of belonging (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007).

Higher education institutions have established a positive sense of belonging for students through different methods. The makeup of faculty, staff, and administration represents the diverse student population, which has helped students to feel connected to the campus climate and classroom environment (Tinto, 2017a). Additionally, institutions have promoted a sense of belonging through different activities around students' academic and social needs. For instance, in the academic milieu, a sense of belonging can be accomplished through cohort programs, learning communities within residence halls, and diverse and effective pedagogical practices. On the other hand, under the social realm, institutions have provided opportunities to engage with diverse social groups and organizations, permitting students to discover their small subcommunities within a larger community. These subcommunities have mandated students' collective learning, creating a sense of belonging.

Strayhorn's Model of College Students' Sense of Belonging

Having a sense of belonging among students on a college campus is one of the key components of the college experience (Strayhorn, 2012). Not only can sense of belonging impact the academic achievement of students, but it can also assist with students' retention and graduation rates. According to Strayhorn (2012), sense of belonging refers to a "student's perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to a group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)" (p. 3). Strayhorn used Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which described belongingness as a basic human motivation; as a result, people have a desire to discover their need to belong. Maslow also indicated that once individuals meet their physiological and safety needs, the need to belong emerges.

Other definitions of belonging are important to highlight. Erickson (1987) defined belonging as the basis of formal and informal organizations where people participate in activities to belong to a group. Yuval-Davis (2006) defined belonging through three levels: (a) social positions, identification processes, emotional bonds, and ethical and political values; (b) belonging to policies and ways in which they integrate into various plans and projects of people who live in a society; and (c) belonging in political, cultural, social, and religious projects. Bagnall (2009) defined belonging as a form of social organization and association with the various communities that people experience. Osterman (2000) introduced belonging as having members feeling they matter to another member or a group as a whole while having a shared faith between members to be committed to one another.

For this research, I used Strayhorn's (2012) definition of belonging, which is "a basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior" (p. 3). Specific to college, sense of

belonging focuses on students' social support on campus, having a sense of connectedness, feeling valued and cared about, acceptance, respect, and feeling important to a campus community or others on campus. Sense of belonging has served as a pathway to academic achievement, retention, and persistence to degree attainment (Strayhorn, 2008a). Additionally, when students are socially and academically engaged, they tend to have a stronger sense of belonging on campus (Strayhorn, 2012). When students engage with others, they have more frequent interaction, foster meaningful relationships, and develop friendships; as a result, they feel more supported and experience a positive college experience.

These factors have contributed to students' commitment to their achievement, connections, and, ultimately, retention. Strayhorn (2012) stated that the failure to secure a sense of belonging led to a lack of interest or engagement in everyday life activities. Students have various needs; if unmet, their motivation diminishes, their developmental skills suffer, their academic performance decreases, and they cannot sustain high academic engagement and commitment to their environment. Male students who do not conform to prescribed standards of masculinity can be subject to ridicule or isolation from peers, both male and female (Strayhorn et al., 2015). For a male student who may not naturally conform to these standards, college can be a challenging time.

Membership and Sense of Belonging

Fraternity men and sorority women conceptualize belonging as part of the experience of brotherhood (McCreary & Shutts, 2015) and sisterhood (Cohen et al., 2017), respectively. The feeling of belonging associated with membership, however, is not limited to the chapter experience. One study found that joining a fraternity or sorority chapter assisted with connection to the campus Greek-letter organization community and the institution as a whole (Matthews et

al., 2009). Further, the relationships can be qualitatively different from other peer relationships college students develop. In the literature on college students' sense of belonging, scholars have paid specific attention to belonging for minoritized students who join Greek-letter organizations. For example, joining a fraternity or sorority has led to an increased sense of belonging for Latinx students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007); however, these studies do not indicate whether the fraternities or sororities were Latinx-interest organizations. Accordingly, other researchers have found that Latinx students who join Latinx-interest fraternities and sororities yielded some of the benefits of belonging, such as a smooth transition to college and identity development (Guardia & Evans, 2008; Orta et al., 2019). Similarly, other researchers have connected belonging and membership in an identity-based Greek-letter organization for Asian American students (Chen, 2009; Tran & Chang, 2013), Black men (Strayhorn, 2012), deaf women (Stapleton & Nicolazzo, 2019), gay men (Yeung, 2009), and racially minoritized students in general (Johnson & Larabee, 2003).

Achieving belonging, however, is not equal for all members. In general, belonging can vary between individuals (McCreary & Shutts, 2015; Shutts et al., 2017). Specifically, chapter officers report a statistically greater sense of belonging than general members (Long & Snowden, 2011). This finding could be related to the time spent with the organizations due to their positions; however, too much involvement can actually reduce belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). In terms of social identities, straight men in fraternities have reported higher levels of belonging than their gay or bisexual brothers (Long, 2010).

That expectation could have a negative effect on belonging due to inhibited personal acceptance (Vaccaro & Newman, 2017). Socioeconomically, students who cannot pay the extra costs associated with membership may feel a reduced sense of belonging if that inability inhibits

them from having the same experience as their chapter brothers and sisters (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; McClure & Ryder, 2018). Members' sense of belonging within the Greek-letter organization community may also be affected by historically White chapter members' racial biases toward culturally based chapter members and structural inequities between the two groups (Garcia, 2019; Ray, 2013). Further, struggling chapters that lack the members, social connections, and resources to be one of the top chapters on campus may feel out of place within the community (DeSantis, 2007).

Fraternity membership and sense of belonging became the pinnacle of each participant within my study as they talked about their lived experience as men of color as they contribute to their own sense of belonging to their own fraternity experience. Drawing on Mills' (2007) conceptualization of racial ignorance, Cabrera and Corces-Zimmerman (2017) highlighted the discursive strategies White college men used to avoid or ignore conversations on race and Whiteness, insulated from meaningful racial dissonance with limited opportunity for critical reflection about their White racial selves. Cabrera (2014b) documented how White college men rationalize racial joking in all White environments as nonracist. In doing so, these men situated themselves as victims of reverse racism and political correctness. These findings echoed what Picca and Feagin (2007) described as backstage racism, or how White Americans exhibit a level of comfort in expressing overtly racist views in all White spaces.

A consistent thread throughout Cabrera's (2014a, 2014b) work is how White men minimize the role of racism in the lives of people of color while also making claims of reverse racism against Whites. Such findings are unsurprising, given contemporary racial discourses defined by post racialism and colorblindness, positing that major achievements, such as the civil rights movement and President Barack Obama's election, signal an end to racial discrimination

(Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Johnston-Guerrero, 2016). Further, such post racial discourses indicate racism in only the most bigoted, hateful individuals (Bonilla-Silva, 2013).

Gusa (2010) documented the normalization of Whiteness in higher education more broadly, describing White institutional presence (WIP) as “the White normative messages and practices that are exchanged within the academic milieu” (p. 471). White ascendancy, WIP’s primary attribute, is a sense of White entitlement and a firm belief in one’s authority in racial discourses. A number of scholars have documented such feelings of entitlement as, in part, the result of racially segregated lives that offer little, if any, dissonance about who one is as a racial being (Gusa, 2010; Leonardo, 2009). Gusa found WIP upheld and maintained through White estrangement, or “the distancing of Whites physically and socially from people of color” (p. 478).

Entrance into the materially and symbolically enriched culture of White Greek letter organizations (WGLOs) remains a potent instrument for non-White empowerment, especially given the structure’s ability to supply members with myriad advantages in college and beyond. Yet, such access is not a foregone conclusion and remains contingent on members’ performances as authentic and belonging brothers and sisters. There is much prior work on non-White entrance into WGLOs (Chen, 1998; Highey, 2006, 2009; Matthews, 2005) and the general assumptions of a linear correlation between higher rates of acceptance and performances of Anglo conformity. However, I find that non-White members’ ability to frame themselves as equal and belonging Greek brothers and sisters remains paradoxically tied to the patterned reproduction of their racial identities as different and inferior. How, then, does a non-White member navigate such a space when these performances are intimately and subtly, yet no less importantly, tied to racist and reactionary schemas? In what ways do non-Whites draw upon the shared culture of WGLOs,

either to attempt new racial identity projects or to submerge their perceived racial differences? Throughout this process, how are such deceptively rational and seemingly utilitarian trade-offs interpreted and managed? (Sasso, p. 655). A sense of belonging on campus has further implications for students' integration into a college campus. As a result of this, one of the most utilized theories addressing student integration is Tinto's (1993) student integration model of attrition.

Tinto's Student Integration Model of Attrition

Tinto (1993) created the student integration model of attrition to explain factors that influence an individual's decision to withdraw from a college or university and how those factors and processes produce attrition (McCubbin, 2003). In a broad sense, integration is a term used to define people's developments in diverse elements, such as social environments, systems, communities, or other units (Beresneviciute, 2003). Tinto modeled the theory after Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide. According to Durkheim, suicide results from the lack of social and intellectual integration into society.

Additionally, Durkheim (1951) argued that having an adequate social support network and a significant amount of moral integration would diminish the possibility of individuals committing suicide. To that point, Tinto (1993) drew similarities between individuals committing suicide due to the lack of integration into the society and students dropping out of college due to the lack of social and intellectual integration into higher education institutions (Aljohani, 2016; McCubbin, 2003). Tinto further discussed ways in which students may choose to leave college, identifying academic failure, voluntary withdraw, permanent withdraw, temporary dropout, and transfer (Aljohani, 2016; McCubbin, 2003).

Tinto (1993) drew upon Van Gennep's (1960/2019) study on rites of passage in tribal societies from the social anthropology perspective. Van Gennep's theory focused on three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. Tinto modeled his theory after the concept of rite of passage to explain "the longitudinal process of student persistence in college" (p. 94). Tinto argued that in the separation phase, for students to embrace the norms and behaviors of the new communities, they should remove themselves from their old communities. In the second phase, college students transition toward the latter stage of incorporation of their new community. The third stage focused on students successfully disconnecting themselves from the norms and behavior of their previous communities and fully integrating into the new societies of their college.

Tinto's (1993) student integration model is based on the degree of fit between the student and the institutional environment. Tinto's model indicates that students enroll in college with a different level of academic preparation and characteristics. When students enter higher education, they create a different level of integration in the academic system of the institution that relates to the academic progress and performance, something Tinto referred to as academic integration. Academic integration incorporates the vitality, vigor, and energy of the classroom, effective study habits by students, faculty–student contact outside of the classroom, academic support services, and impactful faculty advisement (Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Additionally, Tinto insisted that students develop a diverse level of integration into the social system of the university, which includes formal, semiformal, and informal peer-to-peer interaction (i.e., social integration). Factors associated with social integration include peer friendships, involvement in campus activities, clubs, and organizations, and promoting respect,

understanding, and communication among all races and ethnic groups (i.e., racial harmony; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007).

Tinto proposed that students who have a positive academic and social integration into college are more committed and motivated to persist in their degree attainment (McCubbin, 2003; Tinto, 1993). However, when there is a significant level of integration in one system, the other system suffers. In other words, if students are too involved in their social communities, their academic performance will suffer, and if they spend a great deal of time on their academics, they will have very little time for their social lives (McCubbin, 2003). However, when students establish an equal balance between their intellectual resources and their social and external environments, they develop a sense of belonging on campus and have subsequent interactions with internal and external members of the university and community (Tinto, 1993).

Limitations of Tinto's Student Integration Model

Tinto's student integration model is one of the many theories researchers have used to address student retention and persistence (Deil-Amen, 2011; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Guiffrida, 2006). However, some researchers have criticized Tinto for suggesting that all students must go through the same assimilation process to be successful. Baker (2013) highlighted that Tinto's theory ignores the differences in race, class, and gender of students enrolled in college. Furthermore, Tinto failed to adequately address the racial environment of the institution and the differences between the overall college experience of students of color at PWIs and White students (Baker, 2013; Guiffrida, 2005b). Steele (1997) argued that the academic performance of ethnic/racial groups might be impacted by the campus racial environment, especially when they are stereotyped, something many African American students experience.

Other researchers further criticized Tinto's (1993) theory. Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) argued that for

Students who are not traditional in terms of race/ethnicity, age, and full-time status, the assumption is that to succeed in college (i.e., to persist), students must become integrated into the college environment by abandoning their history, heritage, and outside interest. (p. 415)

The general overview of Tinto's theory was that students are integrated into a larger community and view themselves as part of a larger group (Davidson & Wilson, 2013). If the larger group (the institution) is a prominent factor that determines retention, then student aspects are not a top priority. Finally, Tierney (1992) stated that Tinto modeling his theory after Van Gennep's (1960/2019) transition theory and breaking away from home does not apply to students of color because Van Gennep created the model to address cultural developmental progression as opposed to assimilation from one culture to another.

Despite the limitations of Tinto's theory, his model has been one of the most utilized theories in higher education. Tinto has revised and expanded the model over the last few decades to address the decision-making process regarding student goal commitment and attrition, the desire to align student expectations to the institutional mission, and the student transition through the college process (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). In the revised version of the model, Tinto (1993) recognized different student populations, including African American students, low-income students, adult students, and transfer students (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). As a result, Tinto presented three influences that would predispose a student to persist in college: background, precollege education, and personal attributes. Tinto measured students' background based on their socioeconomic status, educational expectations and aspirations, and

parent's education. Furthermore, Tinto indicated that precollege education focuses on students' academic preparedness and their social and academic ability.

Finally, personal attributes include race and gender (Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, Tinto (2004) denoted that to positively impact and enhance undergraduate retention, higher education institutions must offer academic, social, and personal support services that are easily accessible. To address the deficiencies of this model, I used Strayhorn's (2012, 2018) theory of sense of belonging. The student interaction with faculty, staff, and peers, in addition to their engagement with various support service centers and activities, can have a positive impact on students' sense of connection and belonging to the institution, as well as navigating the campus culture through their integration into the campus community (Tinto, 2004).

Overall, when students enroll in college, they have difficulty discovering their sense of belonging on campus due to their lack of social and academic integration into campus. Student sense of belonging and integration is even a greater challenge for first-generation students. Additionally, when students are not connected and integrated into campus, they feel isolated from their communities; as a result, they withdraw from their academic setting. The theoretical framework in this research used Strayhorn's (2012) college students' sense of belonging theory and Tinto's (1993) student integration model of attrition to address the persistence, retention, and academic achievement of FGMs in college. Tinto's theory addresses the academic and social integration of students in college; however, his theory does not account for students' race, ethnicity, and gender, which is one of the limitations of his model.

The Relationship Between Sense of Belonging and Student Integration

Because sense of belonging and student integration model served as the main theoretical frameworks in this study, it is salient to discuss the relationship between the two concepts. Sense

of belonging has been characterized as needing to interact with an individual or group of people; the interaction is perceived to be ongoing (Strayhorn, 2012). Through this interaction, students have experienced membership in various social, cultural, and academic organizations. This type of fit and interaction was linked to social and academic integration because integration is about the level of engagement in a formal and informal social and academic environment (Tinto, 1993).

Through academic integration, students were able to foster quality and effective relationships with their professors, be engaged in activities that influenced a higher level of academic performance, and used class and group discussions to improve learning (Tinto, 1993).

This level of academic engagement and interaction enabled students to develop a sense of membership in the classroom environment and have a positive academic integration.

Additionally, students used social integration to find their fit in a larger community. Social engagement refers to out-of-class experiences and participation in extracurricular activities and peer-to-peer interactions. When students are socially connected to the campus environment and their peers, they build trust with members of different subcommunities within their social milieus and discover their fit and sense of belonging within those subcommunities (Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1993).

Sense of belonging is a psychological factor that centers around people's subjective feelings of fit and membership in the institutions. When students are connected to their peers and faculty, they can focus on their academic and social common interests and discover their sense of fit and membership to their academic and social surroundings. This results in students experiencing a positive campus integration and sense of belonging to their larger community.

Campus Involvement

The more invested a student is in the academic experience while in college, the greater learning and development the student will experience (Astin, 1984). This investment, defined as the amount of psychological and physical energy a student dedicates to the college experience, refers to the student's involvement both inside and outside of the classroom. Outside the classroom, involvement may be extracurricular, separate from the academic experience, or co-curricular, complementary to the academic experience. Although there is continually a debate on whether extracurricular or co-curricular experiences, such as athletics or student organizations, detract from the inside of the classroom learning, Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement suggests that the object itself is less important than the energy invested into the object that contributes to connection and learning. A student who is motivated, committed, and enthusiastic about an aspect of their college experience will gain from that experience. Unfortunately, men tend to be less socially and academically integrated into the college community than women (Ewert, 2012).

Involvement benefits college students in a variety of ways. Astin's (1984) initial research showed that a student who feels more connected to their college experience is more likely to persist and complete college successfully. Over more than 4 decades, Astin expanded his foundational research to include the effect of the college environment on students while in college. In this theory of student involvement, the institutional environment is a critical component in student development, depending on the quantity and quality of involvement opportunities it provides.

Persistence

Persistence through successful completion is important as the students cannot grow and learn through their college experience if they do not persist in college. However, the paper degree is not the only outcome sought from attending college. Affective outcomes such as leadership development, self-understanding, and citizenship are important in the college experience for both the individual and society (Astin, 1996). Students attend college to learn and grow academically and personally (Pike, 2003). While the lack of research into the net effect of college creates difficulty in ascertaining the developmental opportunity cost of not attending college, the developmental outcomes of students while in college are well researched (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The growth and development in psychosocial areas such as gender or racial identity development, cognitive development in moral and ethical decision making, and sociological development such as interpersonal skills that a student experiences in college is invaluable (Evans et al., 1998). These developmental areas are in addition to the acquisition of content knowledge the student receives as part of their engagement in learning.

There are many options and opportunities in which students may immerse themselves while in college. The benefits of involvement result from the behavior regardless of the motivation (Astin, 1984). The student must be an active member of the learning process to receive the benefits of involvement. Active engagement is available in many forms. The forms of involvement that had the most significant effect on student learning and development were academic involvement, engagement with faculty, and involvement with peer groups. Involvement in peer groups could include group projects, residence hall community engagement, or, often, membership within student organizations.

When students arrive on campus, it is essential on many different levels for them to be fully immersed in the campus environment to socialize more with their peers on campus (Ward et al., 2012). For FGCS, this has been a difficult task to accomplish, especially since many FGCS live off campus to help their family with the cost of higher education or to assist with their financial needs (Schwartz et al., 2018). Because FGCS tend to live off campus, they are less likely than continuing-generation college students to be engaged in social activities on campus (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). When FGCS are not socially connected to the campus environment and their peers, they feel less involved with various clubs and organizations and do not partake in extracurricular activities (Engle, 2007).

The lack of student engagement in their social settings has resulted in FGCS feeling isolated, lacking excitement about college, struggling to persist from first to second year (Kuh et al., 2008; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Pike & Kuh, 2005). In a study by Pascarella et al. (2004), FGCS's participation in extracurricular activities was positively correlated with degree plans, critical thinking, and academic success. Pascarella et al. discovered that although FGCS were less likely to participate in campus activities than continuing-generation college students, FGCS reaped the benefits of involvement in extracurricular activities. Nonacademic experiences impact the academic and cognitive development of students (Timberlake, n.d.). Researchers further postulated that the involvement of FGCS in campus activities and programs served as a mechanism to help them achieve greater academic success and critical thinking skills compared to their continuing-generation college students. Pascarella et al. revealed that "the social capital gained through extracurricular activities and peer involvement during college may be a particularly useful way for first-generation students to acquire the additional cultural capital that helps them succeed and benefit cognitively" (p. 278). Although campus involvement has helped

with the retention and persistence rate of FGCS, not all extracurricular activities have had a positive effect. Timberlake (n.d.) denoted that activities such as volunteer work and employment have a negative impact on the college adjustments of FGCS. However, FGCS must work many hours because of the cost of higher education and the need to support their family. Due to this financial barrier, FGCS need financial aid, which is another important element in their persistence.

Involvement and Achievement

Being involved in student clubs and organizations is associated with academic achievement and persistence (Guiffrida, 2004). Astin's (1984) theory of student development indicated that when students are involved in the life of the university through participating in student organizations, they are more likely to learn, more satisfied with their overall college experiences, and eventually reach graduation. Astin defined involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to academic experience" (as cited in Patton et al., 2016, p. 34). In other words, Astin believed that students who engage in various aspects of college life tend to have a higher college success rate than students who do not participate in any clubs or organizations (Fischer, 2007). Astin referred to this as the input-process-output model, which means through their level of commitment and engagement; students' college experience is proportional to students' learning and development.

Researchers have argued that student involvement on campus is particularly critical in retaining students of color who attend PWIs (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001; Tatum, 1999). Hawkins and Larabee (2009) emphasized students of color's involvement in ethnic clubs and organizations, finding that when students of color enroll in PWIs, they face

pressure to coexist with the mainstream organizations and perceive traditionally White student organizations as socially exclusive.

Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) found that low-income and working-class students have particular difficulty covering costs associated with the college social experience. To better understand the relationship between costs of belonging and a student's access to social relationships, McClure and Ryder (2018) gathered survey and focus group data on financially independent students and those from low, middle, and high-income families. Participants with limited access to money often sought "relationships more commensurate with their financial resources" (McClure & Ryder, 2018, p. 206). Higher-income students were more likely to participate in sororities and fraternities and study-abroad trips, dine out with peers, and meet friends for coffee. In contrast, students from lower-income families turned down opportunities for organizational involvement and "ended friendships they could not afford" (p. 206). When cost is attached to sense of belonging in college, involvement opportunities and experiences can "effectively 'price out' students who lack the financial resources to participate" (p. 217). Another part of the equation is affording membership into a fraternity. Some members use financial aid as a means of funding their fraternal experience. A lack of financial resources further complicates students' abilities in becoming involved without having financial aid to join a fraternity.

Financial Aid

The existing research related to financial aid and student persistence clearly identifies a gap in the literature regarding the influence of student loan debt load on persistence for historically underserved groups (e.g., first-generation, low-income, ethnic minorities) in higher education. Recent estimates of student loan debt are reaching critical levels. According to the U.D. Federal Reserve, in 2018, the national student loan debt was \$1.48 trillion. Adding to that,

the average student loan debt for individuals graduating in 2017 was \$28,650 (The Institute for College Access and Success, 2018). With median entry-level starting salaries of \$44,000 annually for undergraduates, the investment in college degrees is becoming increasingly questionable, as Millennials (born 1980–2000) and Gen Z'ers (born after 2000) make critical decisions about remaining enrolled (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2018). Cofer and Somer (1999) asserted that loan debt affected persistence; however, few researchers have looked deeper into the influence of debt load on persistence decisions. Without careful inquiry of the influence of debt load on persistence, we risk negatively impacting degree attainment by advancing well-meaning programs—for example, Title IV loans that may do more harm than good. Over the years, Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) are seen as institutions that foster the student success of these historically underserved groups (Borden & Sharpe, 2015; Núñez et al., 2015; Santiago, 2006). Data showed that HSIs are second to historically Black colleges and universities in granting baccalaureate degrees to historically underserved groups (Borden & Sharpe, 2015). Though research is replete with stories highlighting degree attainment among historically underserved groups, it lacks a demonstration of how finances and persistence for these students impact their chances of success.

At one point, the value of higher education appeared unquestionable, and the channel of resources to support academic programs, research, and student financial aid seemed steadfast (Alvarez & Marshall, 2018). However, with the rise of student populations, increase in federal research funds, and robust investment markets, the landscape of higher education in the United States has shifted. Specifically, the amount of funding allocated to each state has diminished since the Great Recession. These funds show no hope for rebuilding, even as the economy continues to improve. The decline in state and federal funding has put a cost burden on many

students and their family members, making college affordability a real dilemma, especially for FGCS who identify as low-income students. (Alvarez & Marshall, 2018; Ishitani, 2006).

Despite an increase in the cost of higher education, students often rely on the combination of financial resources such as savings, parental contribution, employment income, work-study, scholarships, grants, and federal and private loans to help with paying for college (Ishitani, 2006; Schmeiser et al., 2015). More importantly, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) has served as an avenue for students' access to many different types of need-based aid, which is a gateway to billions of dollars in federal grants and loans (Furquim et al., 2017; Ishitani, 2006). For FAFSA to estimate financial need and eligibility for students, it requires information on family income, assets, and household size, among other financial information (Furquim et al., 2017). Nevertheless, despite the critical role that FAFSA plays in students receiving student financial aid, many low-income students, especially those who identify as first-generation, do not take the time to complete the application (King, 2004). Not submitting the FAFSA application has had implications for FGCS.

King (2004) and Kofoed (2017) noted that when FGCS and those with low-income backgrounds fail to complete the FAFSA application, they face with higher college costs by not making themselves eligible for significant amounts of financial aid. Sometimes not filling out the FAFSA leads to students not enrolling in college altogether, contributing to the lower college enrollment rates for FGCS (Bettinger et al., 2012). Kofoed discovered that close to 20% of students who were eligible to attend college and came from families earning less than \$50,000 a year did not complete their FAFSA application form. Other researchers have argued that the complexity of the financial aid system combined with the lack of clarity on aid eligibility have

put low-income and FGCS at a significant disadvantage (Avery & Kane, 2004; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2006; Dynarski & Wiederspan, 2012).

This is due to the lack of knowledge on the availability of financial aid and the processes of obtaining it, and not having a support system at home that could guide them through the financial aid system; all resulting in FCGSs needing help when completing the FAFSA form (Avery & Kane, 2004; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2006; Dynarski & Wiederspan, 2012; Perna, 2015). However, FAFSA continues to play a critical factor in providing financial assistance to FGCS.

As FGCS enter college, they do not have adequate information or knowledge of the financial aid process, which results in many of them facing financial hardships, even though they are eligible for financial aid (Engle et al., 2006). Having access to higher earnings and financial resources is linked to higher educational attainment (Furquim et al., 2017; Goldin & Katz, 2007). On the other hand, working more hours to either pay for college or meeting the needs of family's financial needs have been positively associated with FGCS having poor academic performance and a higher attrition rate (Furquim et al., 2017). Eitel and Martin (2009) found that 50% of FGCS were either likely or very likely to withdraw from their classes or the institution due to financial constraints. Moreover, FGCS were overwhelmed by the responsibility for taking care of their family's financial needs and paying for college, which places a great amount of emotional burden on them, while simultaneously trying to navigate the social and academic demands of college without the same resources, knowledge, and skills as their continuing-generation college students (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016).

As shared earlier, FGCS struggle to navigate college due to various challenges. These hurdles include not being academically prepared to perform well, having lower standardized test

scores, enrolling in more remedial courses, living off campus and not participating in any campus activities, not having as much access to financial resources, applying for more federal loans, and lacking overall student engagement on campus (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Ishitani, 2006; Moschetti & Hudely, 2015; Pratt et al., 2017; Schmeiser et al., 2015).

Young individuals who come from disadvantaged racial and social class backgrounds experience many hurdles with the college transition (Aries & Sider, 2005; Wilkins, 2014). Many FGCS are unfamiliar with leveraging financial aid, grants, and loans. The disparities in race and class in the academic and social environments are important issues for FGCS's educational success, social mobility, and personal well-being (Wilkins, 2014). Social mobility in higher education requires the right fit between students and their social and educational settings. Furthermore, it requires students making connections with their peers and obtaining social and cultural capital for a better life postcollegiate era (Wilkins, 2014). When students experience any major life-changing events, such as going to college, they go through a process of transition and adjustment (Fischer, 2007).

Summary

Models of college student retention have been around for decades, with Spady's (1970) model focusing on dropouts from higher education. The transition to college poses a significant challenge for all students; however, the move could be more challenging for first-generation students, since the transition often involves a very different environment than the one in which they grew up. Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure focuses on how and why students become or do not become socially and academically integrated into the campus environment. Integration is defined as the congruence between the student and institution, but Tinto also places

the responsibility of integration upon the student. The theory is that integration is a necessary precursor to persistence and retention and, eventually, graduation.

FGCS (those whose parents did not attend college) are less likely than other students to know how to create the connections that can help them persist to graduation (Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh; Saenz et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2006). Lower levels of engagement may be influenced by predispositions; however, involvement in activities known to influence student engagement (e.g., positively impacts first-generation students; Lundberg et al., 2007; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Somers et al., 2004). If first-generation students are less likely to be engaged, then connecting them to experiences that support their success is critical (Lundberg et al., 2007; Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; Somers et al., 2004). Specific activities have been linked to high levels of student engagement and, ultimately, student success. One such activity is fraternity/sorority membership (Bureau et al., 2011; Hayek et al., 2002; Pike, 2003).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research links sorority/fraternity involvement to enhanced personal development (Long, 2012), sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012), graduation (Walker et al., 2015; Yates, 2018) and career success (Gallup, 2014). Sororities and fraternities make up a diverse community of more than 200 national and international organizations (Bureau & Barber, 2017). While each organization has its own distinct values (Tull & Shaw, 2017), many promote a similar purpose – to create a social community of peers, encourage leadership and service, and establish a support network during and beyond the college years (Tull et al., 2018). These organizations can influence (positively and negatively) a student’s behavior and experience (Biddix et al., 2014). Fraternities are often touted as the premier leadership development opportunity for men on a college campus. This study sought to understand the lived experiences of first-generation college men (FGCM).

This study addressed the following research questions:

- How do first-generation male college students describe their experiences in fraternities?
- How does fraternity membership influence first-generation male college students’ sense of belonging on campus?
- How does fraternity membership influence the retention of first-generation male college students?

This chapter discusses the qualitative approach employed by this study to answer these questions. Finally, human ethical considerations and the researcher's subjectivity factors are discussed.

General Methodological Design

As Macintyre (1981, 2007) and many others noted, humans are storytelling animals. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) wrote that "lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities" (p. 35). People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is made personally meaningful. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Researcher Positionality

I approached this study believing fraternity and sorority membership positively influences first-generation students. Over 20 years of personal and professional experiences with fraternity and sorority leaders inform my epistemology. The unacknowledged yet overt bias of many qualitative researchers who study the fraternity or sorority experience position the research agenda in the academy in a way that limits positive counter discourse claims. While I viewed my experiences both personally and professionally as an asset to this study, some readers may consider this a serious limitation and overt bias. Nonetheless, through careful attention to developing trustworthiness by means of the methods described, I attempted to mediate this concern.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument. As an ethical and responsible researcher, I carefully weighed my positionality and subjectivity regarding the topic and the representation of the participants' (i.e., narrators') voices. In my previous chapters, I addressed these issues. Fraternity and sorority membership can provide a positive, life-changing experience that is paramount to the success of many college students and alumni, those from all manner of backgrounds and aspirations. My experience as a Life Member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated, is one which is organically made for members to understand, appreciate and know that it is a lifetime commitment. Also, as a previous campus based professional, and now as a Headquarters Staff member of Kappa Alpha Order, I see firsthand the contrast in the focus being on the undergraduate experience for KA and the lifetime experience of Kappa Alpha Psi. Neither is right or wrong; each is unique in their respective approaches to membership education.

In addition to my lived experiences as a Life member of Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, Incorporated, which is the cost of \$3000.00 in one payment versus most HWGL organizations life membership cost \$25.00. Another Difference between Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Incorporated and Kappa Alpha Order is that Robert E. Lee is the spiritual founder of Kappa Alpha Order(KA). Lee was chosen by the founders of KA as the Spiritual founders in 1924 and was named years after Lee's passing in 1870. The Founders of KA identified Lee as the spiritual founder based on their affection for him as the President of their university and they saw him as a leader. KA continues to share the story of Lee as the spiritual founder in 2021.

Sample and Participants

The NIC is an association of collegiate men's fraternities that was formally organized in 1910, although it began at a meeting at the University Club in New York City on November 27,

1909. The power of the organization rests in a House of Delegates in which each member fraternity is represented by a single delegate. However, the group's executive and administrative powers are vested in an elected board of directors consisting of nine volunteers from various NIC fraternities. Headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana, the NIC also operates a small professional staff. I will disseminate my findings to the NIC.

The target population criteria for this study were self-identified (a) first-generation, (b) members of fraternities, (c) second, third, fourth and super seniors entering their fifth-year male students. I solicited 10 students with the hope that at least six students would match the criteria and be willing to participate in my study. Hence, for the study, a first-generation student was defined as a person where neither parent has obtained a college degree from a 4-year institution (Pascarella et al., 2004). This was the definition used in recruitment emails sent to students.

I employed purposeful, convenience sampling techniques for this study. Study participants were identified via emails sent to members by their respective Executive Directors of Alpha Tau Omega or Delta Sigma Phi. The two fraternities were the first to volunteer to support my study and offered me an opportunity to interview their current undergraduate members. I worked closely with the Executive Director of the NIC in identifying the concerns of the NIC while also collaborating with the Executive Directors of the two national fraternities. I provided the Executive Directors with a recruitment email to send to their respective student listservs to solicit support for my study. I also worked with The University of Georgia to ascertain approval through the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The study sought to learn the lived experiences of first-generation fraternity men by focusing on their experiences on a college campus. Students who are classified as upper-class students were included in this study to capitalize on their length of experience within the

fraternity and within their major departments. The participants of this study included individuals from various academic disciplines. Once I received a confirmation email from students, I contacted each student directly by email to explain the study, its purpose, and the safeguards to protect the participants in greater detail. Furthermore, I informed students that their participation in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any point during the research. I also provided each student with a consent form that explained the purpose of the study, details of the agreement to participate, and the confidentiality of their identity.

Procedures

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym that was included on all audio recordings, transcripts, and notes collected by the researcher. A key for the participant pseudonyms was created on a password-protected spreadsheet on a password-protected computer owned by the researcher. A backup of the spreadsheet is kept on a password-protected USB drive in a locked box in my home along with any handwritten notes. All audio recordings were immediately transferred to a password-protected computer kept in my home and were deleted from the recording device upon transfer. Upon completion of the research study, all notes and recordings associated with the participants were destroyed. I shared information about my findings with the two Executive Directors of ATO and Delta Sigma Phi, by meeting with each of them via zoom, and I shared the themes and suggestions for future practice and for future studies. I will remind the Executive Directors that each participant has a pseudonym to protect their identities as members of their respective fraternities.

Data Collection Methods

My first form of data collection was semi structured one-on-one interviews conducted virtually through Zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Qualitative interviews consist of open-

ended questions and provide rich, naturalistic information. “Qualitative interviews are also called *depth interviews* because they can be used to obtain in-depth information about a participant’s thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations and feelings about a topic” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 233). I used an interview guide (see Appendix B). Prior to the start of each interview, I asked the participant if they felt comfortable with our interview being recorded. I then read the script detailing our upcoming interview. I asked if they had any questions prior to our interview beginning. I emailed consent forms to each of my participants after they had emailed me confirming their willingness to be interviewed.

I entered the interview session with a plan to explore specific topics and to ask open-ended questions of the interviewee (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). An interview guide ensured integrity for my interview process. My interview guide also allowed me to share the questions with my participants before the interview so they could reflect on their answers.

Interviews

Data were collected utilizing interviews. My interview included questions about the participant’s background along with how they were experiencing campus as first-generation fraternity men. These topics and questions were provided on an interview protocol written by the researcher before the interview session (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Each participant had an opportunity to recuse themselves from an interview at any moment. Interviews were recorded, and photos from the photo elicitation process were appropriately placed within my study to effectively articulate the lived realities of my participants. Each interview was transcribed for analysis.

Narrative Inquiry

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of the research problem addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. For this research study, I used narrative inquiry as my research methodology. Narrative inquiry is a study of experience when experience is understood as lived and told stories. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places and in a social interaction with their social milieus (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). I used narrative inquiry to help me to understand the lived experiences of my participants. Each participant's story elucidated their undergraduate experiences along with opportunities of success. Narrative inquiry does not only capture the individual's lived experience, but it places emphasis on the social and cultural norms that the person experiences. Narrative inquiry was consistent with the oral narration of many stories I have learned from my family members. Narrative inquiry allows for the individual to story their lived experiences. Narrative inquiry methods allowed me to understand the current experiences of the students within my research study. In qualitative research, collecting and analyzing data, creating and modifying patterns that emerge from the interviews, developing or recreating the research questions, and addressing the validity threat all happens simultaneously and they all influence one another (Maxwell, 2013). The purpose of qualitative research is to understand the social world and establish new paradigms that can be helpful in the human condition (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Furthermore, qualitative research is a method of research that seeks to explore and understand the meaning of people or different groups ascribed to social and human problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research uses various methods such as interviews, data collection, surveys, field notes, focus groups, or observations to contribute to the understanding

of the social world (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). My qualitative study used the method of interviewing my participants, and I also noted any observations that I noticed during our interviews. The results of the study provide recommendations for social changes based on the study's inferences. My research questions for this study were: (a) How does fraternity membership influence the retention of first-generation male college students? (b) How does fraternity membership influence first-generation male college students' sense of belonging on campus? (c) How does fraternity membership influence the retention of first-generation male college students?

Research indicates that retention and college success is passively influenced by out-of-class experiences as well as course-based learning (Beregn-Cico, 2013). I sought to interview participants who are having positive and/or negative experiences with campus integration and may or may not have a sense of belonging to their academic and social environment. This allowed me, as a researcher, to look for new nuances that can be applied to first-generation fraternity men experiences who are having a difficult time finding their fit at their institution, which impacts their overall academic and social integration into campus.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research was an appropriate method of study for my research because it presented me with an opportunity to fully emerge myself in the research, interact with FGCS, and really understand their experiences as fraternity men on their respective campuses. This research strategy granted me permission to access the rich information that my participants shared with me regarding their sense of belonging on campus and how it impacts their overall campus integration. I designed my interviews (see Appendix B) based on the frames of Tinto

(1993) and Strayhorn (2012). I created questions with the hopes of gaining an understanding of each participants' sense of belonging along with their integration to campus.

Interview Data Analysis

My deductive reasoning came from theory and my own experiences and my inductive reasoning is what my participants brought in through their discussions on their lived experiences. For the data analysis, the researcher and participant co-constructed stories using narrative threads, tensions, and plotlines. After the interviews were transcribed, the data analysis was performed. I used techniques appropriate to narrative analysis (Creswell, 2007). Once the data were transcribed and organized, I incorporated open coding and read through each transcript with the goal of making notes about the stories within the text. The initial coding included a line-by-line reading which allowed me to attend to each part of the data (Charmaz, 2006). This open coding process helped to generate the initial research themes. Through memo writing, I organized and identified the stories and put them into chronological order for acknowledging the sequence and importance of events. I used the constant comparative method in this phase of the data analysis. The constant comparative method allowed me to compare the stories each participant shared to find similarities and themes across the transcripts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I then strived to illuminate the stories of the participants in the study by providing interpretation of the data. Furthermore, this thematic analysis allowed me to make sense of what I was seeing and hearing during my study, which is critical in narrative analysis. Therefore, coding allowed me to determine themes from my interviews which helped me to focus on what was being told in the stories (Clandinin, 2007). According to Riessman (1993), researchers must attempt to edit themselves out of the transcription process by using loose oral narrative to summarize the participants' perspective and accounts of their experience. Specifically, loose narrative means

being very transparent in accounting for the instances of tone changes and moments of silence, which may reflect a shift in thought or feeling. Accounting for these occurrences impacts readers' ability to understand the truth and authenticity behind the narrative.

Protection of Subjects

Protecting the participants and their identities was critical in the design of this study. Prior to collecting my data, I obtained IRB approval from The University of Georgia. I assigned a pseudonym to each participant to be used throughout the study to protect all participants' identities.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) indicated that researchers ought to avoid the urge to infuse their own personal, moral, and political views during the interview process of the research. Although I am extremely passionate about working with first-generation students and fraternity and sorority students, I have learned that my own knowledge and personal and professional experiences cannot be used to complete my scholarly work. With reference to the participants, their identities were protected and not disclosed to anyone. This helped to ensure that no one experienced any potential backlash or harm. The main expectation and obligation of the researcher is to confirm that the safety of participants is not put in jeopardy because of their participation in the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Due to the fact that the participants helped me as the researcher to advance my study, I had great respect and consideration for their time and contributions to this scholarly work (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure this, I kept all documents confidential, and the identities of each individual will not be shared with any member other than the researcher. This means that all interviews occurred virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which likely made the interviewees more comfortable in an online presence. I shredded and destroyed all documents and records.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Maxwell (2013) argued that, “Validity is a property of inferences rather than methods and is never something that can be proved or taken for granted on the basis of the methods used” (p. 121). Additionally, validity threats are made by evidence in research, not the methods. Research indicated that validity threats are seen as alternative explanations or interpretations, and the way in which data are understood in a different way. Trustworthiness focuses on the credibility and generalizability of the finding of a study (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). For a study to qualify as a systematic inquiry, the study must advance through a rigorous process of reasoning. This process must be completed in a meticulous, conscientious, careful, diligent, attentive, scrupulous, exact, precise, accurate, thorough, sensitive, and a particular way.

To maintain the trustworthiness and integrity of this study, I used member checking (McCoy, 2006). McCoy (2006) expressed that member checking is a terminology that is used in qualitative research that brings trustworthiness to data analysis. Furthermore, I used member checking as a method to ensure that the interview transcripts accurately and authentically reflected participants’ experiences and thoughts. To achieve this, I asked respondents to review the transcripts and to make sure the transcription reflects what they discussed during the interview. Moreover, based on the respondents’ experiences captured during the interview, I used literature to provide additional context to support the assertions made by respondents.

Establishing Credibility

Credibility takes place when results of qualitative research are believable from the standpoint of the research participants to convincingly rule out alternative explanation (Tracy, 2010; Whittmore et al., 2001). Miles and Huberman (1994) indicated credibility is achieved when findings make sense to individuals who are studying or those who are reading the study.

The determination of credibility is based on evaluating findings to the extent that they confirm what is already known (Curry et al., 2009). Researchers ought to convince others that the findings of the study are applicable or transformable to another environment or group of populations. Credibility brings attention to interpretations and the correspondence between the researcher and respondent's depiction of their experiences. One of the ways I confirmed credibility for my study was by doing member checking. Traditionally, member checking is defined as sharing either a brief summary of the findings or sharing the whole findings with the research participants. For my member checking I shared each of my interviews with my participants after our interview. I wanted to ensure that I had recorded their information for accuracy. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). Triangulation also has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. One of the ways I incorporated triangulation was by contrasting research methods, I combined by structured interview with observational research by using Zoom for my interviews. I was able to go back and play each interview to make sure that I my written data notes were congruent with the recorded interview.

Summary

Researchers have used many different methods of inquiry to investigate the experiences of first-generation and fraternity men in higher education. Some scholars have used quantitative, others have used qualitative, and few have used a study to research both at the same time. Although experiences of first-generation and fraternity undergraduate male students have been studied extensively, very little research has been done on the intersectionality of both

populations. Therefore, this study focused on the intersectionality of first-generation students and fraternity men and the influence of sense of belonging on their social and academic integration.

In this chapter, I discussed my intentionality in determining every aspect of my research design. I justified my decision behind selecting qualitative research as my method of inquiry and discussed my reasons behind utilizing narrative inquiry analysis as my strategy of inquiry, which will provide the researcher with the meaning of lived experiences of participants. My decision on different forms of data collection methods included individual interviews, and photos. I discussed these approaches as appropriate methods of data collection strategy along with important considerations to ensure trustworthiness and validity. A total of six first-generation fraternity men who entered into their second, third, fourth and some possible super seniors (fifth year) were selected to partake in this research study. I justified my decision on participants, subjects, and the setting, which aligned with my professional and personal interest of this study. Lastly, I discussed my procedure in analyzing the data, and my role as a researcher. It was important for me as the researcher to bracket my own assumptions and biases related to FGCS and fraternity men so that they do not influence my interpretation of lived experiences of my participants. In Chapter 4, I discuss the findings, themes, patterns, and results of data collected and analyzed.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to advance research and understanding of the lived experiences of first-generation fraternity men who are initiated members of Alpha Tau Omega or Delta Sigma Phi. The study was a means to understand the lived experiences of first-generation male college students in a fraternity regarding sense of belonging and retention. When I conceived this study, I could not have anticipated all participants being men of color. I initially expected that all participants would identify as White men within Alpha Tau Omega and Delta Sigma Phi, as both are historically White fraternities. The headquarters staff of the national organization handled student recruitment for this study. Both executive directors reached out to newly established provisional chapters or provisional chapters that had not yet received a charter. Therefore, my participants truly represented the diverse demographics of their respective campuses.

The study focused on joining, matriculation, and retention as members of their chapter. The findings could be useful for higher education faculty, staff, and administration to provide services for these students. Chapter 3 included the procedure and sequence for data collection and analysis, with the results presented in Chapter 4. This chapter provides a description of each participant, identified via pseudonym.

Three research questions guided the study:

1. How does fraternity membership influence the retention of first-generation male college students?

2. How does fraternity membership influence first-generation male college students' sense of belonging on campus?
3. How does fraternity membership influence the retention of first-generation male college students?

Organization of the Findings

Following the process outlined in Chapter 3, I transcribed verbatim each participant's interview. Transcribing recorded interviews provided a thorough understanding of participants' lived experiences, making it easier to understand and center their stories around the three research questions. The data collected from the interviews provided an in-depth explanation of the fraternity chapter's climate, as participants responded to a series of questions about their fraternity experiences. The interview transcripts provided data to answer the research questions. Following multiple readings of each transcript, I highlighted and organized the data into codes. Four themes emerged from data analysis to answer the research questions: (a) defining fraternity, (b) acknowledging support, (c) sense of belonging, and (d) race as being salient. Following are descriptions of the significant themes and trends that emerged from the data.

Participants

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Fraternity	Classification	Demographics
Eli	Alpha Tau Omega	Junior	Lower middle class, queer, lives on campus, Black
Danny	Alpha Tau Omega	Senior	Lower middle class, heterosexual, lives on campus, Latino
Kanye	Delta Sigma Phi	Senior	Lower middle class, heterosexual, lives on campus, Latino
Robert	Delta Sigma Phi	Sophomore	Lower middle class, did not disclose orientation, Latino
IC	Alpha Tau Omega	Senior	Lower middle class, heterosexual, lives off campus, Latino
Momarmon	Delta Sigma Phi	Senior	Lower middle class, heterosexual, lives off campus, Black

Participants belonged to the Alpha Tau Omega and Delta Sigma Phi fraternities, both historically White fraternities founded in the United States: the former in Richmond, Virginia, on September 11, 1865, and the latter at The City College of New York on December 10, 1899. Alpha Tau Omega and Delta Sigma Phi currently have 134 and 108 active chapters and colonies, respectively, across the United States. Alpha Tau Omega is under the leadership of Executive Director Wynn B. Smiley, who provided assistance with participant recruitment by connecting me with his Director of Chapter Services, Jaden Brown. Brown was very gracious, soliciting feedback from his team to identify the chapters and colonies that would be the most receptive to participating in the study. Brown sent personal emails to chapter leaders, and I started corresponding with the undergraduate members of these chapters. Executive Director Phil Rodriguez of Delta Sigma Phi emailed leaders within the organization, some of whom responded to the request for participation.

Seven individuals agreed to participate in one-on-one, semi structured interviews via Zoom. However, one failed to complete the study, leaving six men who fulfilled all requirements. The seventh participant initially emailed me with eager and excitement, and after our initial correspondence, he did not respond to any of my additional request for a Zoom interview. Four of the six participants lived on campus, and two lived at home. All participants identified as male. Four participants were seniors, two were juniors, and one was a second-year student. All six identified as FGCS and initiated members of Alpha Tau Omega or Delta Sigma Phi. The presentation of all quotes in this chapter remains true to participants' interview responses. Each participant received a pseudonym to protect his confidentiality.

Introducing First-Generation Fraternity Man Eli

Eli is a junior from Salisbury, North Carolina, who identifies as a queer man of color. Eli lives on campus, where he is highly involved in multiple organizations and has a close relationship with the chancellor. Eli shared the best piece of advice he had received, which he reminds himself daily: "This is something you are going to do. The baton has been passed to you, and you, sir, have an opportunity of seeking the heights. What I want is a career instead of empty goals; I have seen enough of that foolishness at home." Eli talked continually about the struggles of his home life. At home, his family expects him to serve the role of provider—the "financial savior"—while helping to raise, teach, support, and uplift his siblings. Eli found freedom and liberation in being able to be at college and living on campus, "shedding" the stress of his home life every time he steps foot on campus. I believe this is one of the many reasons Eli worked so hard to be able to "go away" to college. Eli felt prepared to transition to college and be a leader on campus because of his high school teachers and mentors.

Eli spoke about his experience as the only man of color in his chapter, where he is a self-identified “resident sass master within the chapter.” Eli sees himself as the voice of reason and an authority figure. The participant explained that he did not feel like he belonged in the chapter until he attended his first brotherhood retreat, where they discussed racial relations and other diversity topics. The brothers told him that “he mattered, and that they see him and hear him as a brother.”

Eli went on to talk about the “very nature of who I am. Experiences are different. You, as a human, you are valid, and I try to instill that in all the new members.” During this retreat, he also shared with the brothers that, at times, he wants to “walk away from all of this. [There was] a time I felt burned out and [felt like] walking away from all of this. I was ready to walk away from the chapter and leave my committee.” His brothers reminded him that he is “Eli the Rock Star” and had joined the fraternity to be “bigger than yourself.” Eli said, “Remembering my why has and always will be a big deal for me.”

Eli has so much personality, energy, and charisma, I felt like I was interviewing a reality TV star. Eli related,

Greek life has helped to remind me and others that we do belong to something much larger and greater than us on our campus. I joined Alpha Tau Omega—organically, the spirit squad and marching band. My fraternity made a world of difference. [It] makes it organic and easy to feel that connection that [comes with] being Alpha Tau Omega. I have seen these men in all walks; I have seen them during highs and lows—a sense of belonging to feel themselves. I really know who I am.

Eli wanted me to know that he is a proud member of “America’s leadership development fraternity. The people I interact with—I wanted to leave a positive mark on in my chapter.”

People often ask him if he is a legacy of Alpha Tau Omega, and he always reminds them: “I can’t be a legacy. My parents didn’t go to college.” Eli shared that people often mistake him for being an only child because he never talks about his siblings. He preferred staying on campus over the breaks instead of going home.

He struggled to explain and identify some of his experiences with his parents, but they did not understand. We discussed the similarities of having a very loving and caring family who could not comprehend why we joined a fraternity. In addition, Eli admitted he did not know if he would still be in college if not for Alpha Tau Omega. A group of his fraternity brothers reminded him that they were holding him to a higher standard: “You joined an organization which will push you to do better.”

Eli talked about his fraternity relationship being the piece that kept him in college while supporting him in his academics. Eli reminded me that home is not a physical location but a place where his brothers see the real him and accept him for who he is as their fraternity brother. Eli also acknowledged the strength of his chapter in reminding him and others within the chapter of the importance and value of putting scholarship before any social obligations. Eli identified one of his favorite times of the year as being the “senior sendoff, and watching and listening to the seniors talk about their experiences as seniors.” I could tell that event was important to Eli because he perked up as he spoke about looking forward to his senior sendoff and “being able to talk about how much ATO has poured into him.” Each participant described his reason for remaining enrolled and active within his chapter.

Introducing First-Generation Fraternity Man Danny

Danny is a senior member in his Alpha Tau Omega chapter who lives on campus to be close to his classes and girlfriend. Danny hails from San Antonio, Texas, and decided to stay

nearby because of his close relationship with his parents, specifically, his mother. Danny identifies as a Mexican American, heterosexual, first-generation college student majoring in business and wealth management.

Danny was, by far, the most forthcoming participant. He began our Zoom interview by sharing that he comes from a “grand” large family: “None of them have had the guts to leave the bloodline and be successful.” His family was proud of him for his willingness to go away to college and live on campus. Danny was comfortable living on campus because it was a Hispanic-serving institution not far from his home. Danny feels college is easier for him than high school due to the schedule flexibility; however, he believed that high school had prepared him for college.

Danny stressed the respect, admiration, and love that he has for his mother, saying, “I love her until the day I die. She was hard for me to leave.” Before he left for college, his mom told him, “We will work every day to make the sacrifices for you [and your siblings]. We [will] work endlessly to help you to be at a 4-year college.”

Danny talked about what he had to explain to his parents about a fraternity, such as “dress like a fraternity guy. What do fraternity guys do?” Danny discussed the perception of “White passing” as a fraternity man. At times, his fraternity brothers would make disparaging comments about Latinx students in his presence. I asked if he ever confronted those individuals; in response, Danny shared an experience. One of his fraternity brothers had said to him, “Why are all Mexicans so lazy?” Danny replied, “Excuse me. I am not lazy, and neither are my family members.” The fraternity brother said, “I am sorry. I did not know that you were Mexican. I thought you were Italian, like me.”

Danny recalled his parents driving him to campus his first year. His mother started crying as they pulled into the campus, and his father put an arm around her for comfort. Danny said he shed some tears in the back seat, thinking, “Have I made the right decision? Is this the right place for me? Should I have stayed home and [gone] to a community college? Should I have stayed home and worked like the rest of my family?” Danny’s mom said, “I know this is the best place for you. I am looking forward to you being the first in our family to graduate from a 4-year college.” His dad shed a couple of tears, as well, and immediately wiped them from his face. His father said,

I’ve never been on a 4-year college campus, son. This is really nice. I know you will make us proud. We have saved and picked up additional jobs to support you this year and so that you could live on campus.

Danny recalled, “I really started to cry then, as I thought about the sacrifices that my family was making for me to be on this campus.” Danny discussed the importance of not letting his parents down and making them proud. He explained, “That is why I had to finish this degree in 4 years.” Danny spoke about fraternity membership, the support of his parents, and finishing his degree. Along with the other participants, Danny talked about the importance of seeing the degree as a goal, watching his older brothers order their ATO stoles and wear them on top of their gowns as they walk across the graduation stage.

Introducing First-Generation Fraternity Man Kanye

Kanye was from Carrolton, Georgia, and is a very proud member of Delta Sigma Phi. Kanye identifies as a first-generation Mexican American college senior. His two older brothers could not afford to attend college. Kanye discussed his appreciation for his fraternity brothers and how he learned from them, including observing the older members. Before joining the

fraternity, he recalled, “I’ve never seen a Hispanic guy or person be that successful. You know what I mean? Growing up, my dad—my dad is well off now, but growing up, I always saw my parents struggling.” Kanye also talked about the importance of remaining open-minded during his chapter experience.

Kanye shared some of the lowest times he had in college. He was “experiencing depression, I contemplated dropping the fraternity, money was scarce, and I was driving an hour each way to get to campus.” What kept him going were text messages from his older fraternity brothers, saying, “Hey man, if you ever need anything, like from the members, you’re more than welcome to talk to me.”

As we explored this statement further, Kanye opened up even more about not letting his family down. He had seen his older brothers unable to attend college and had watched other relatives who failed to complete high school. Kanye said, “My brothers remain my source of optimism and hope for a brighter future.” His fraternity experience was the first time he had ever seen a Hispanic person “hold a spot of authority and [others] respect him.” In addition, Kanye talked about the respect shown to him as one of the few Biden/Harris supporters in his chapter. On election night, every fraternity brothers’ house he went to was filled with Trump supporters; however, they never showed him any disrespect. Kanye truly appreciates the familial aspect of his fraternity experience.

Kanye also talked about seeing so many people throughout his life start goals and never finish them. Some of these goals were as simple as finishing a puzzle at home; others intended to never finished high school. Kanye discussed his fraternity experience, watching his brothers excel in their internships, prepare for graduation, and graduate. Each brother within Kanye’s chapter had a senior ritual to pass down their favorite items from their chapter experience. For

example, he had received a Delta Sigma Phi paddle made by his grandbig's great grandfather. Kanye talked about the admiration and appreciation he has for that item. The one thing the brother asked was that "Kanye must graduate within 4 years and leave the chapter better than he found it." Kanye said he accepted the challenge as an honor and remains committed to following through with this.

Introducing First-Generation Fraternity Man Robert

Robert identifies as a first-generation college student who is Mexican American and a proud member of Delta Sigma Phi. Robert's single mother raised him, and they are very close. Robert currently struggles with his undergraduate experience, as evidenced by his first words to me: "I am very much looking forward to transferring to a flagship institution at the beginning of the next semester." Robert talked about what he most wanted at this next institution and his new chapter, as he would be transferring his membership, as well.

The participant discussed feeling a sense of belonging at the beginning of his Delta Sigma Phi experience. He said,

When I initiated, I felt like I belonged. I felt like I was a part of something, but as the year has gone by, as I've been going on and off between active and inactive, I find that I don't really feel as though I belong anymore or as long as, as much as I felt like I belonged as soon as I initiated. I sort of feel this disconnection, this sort of alienation. I just don't really feel as though my voice matters as much as my other brothers' voice matters.

Robert also talked about not feeling a sense of acclimation in his chapter:

I don't feel like I've been acclimated. At least my experience, once I became initiated, I was just sort of thrown in there. I had no one to turn to for advice. I had no one to ask

how to do this. “How did I do that?” And it’s really unfortunate, but that’s the reality of my experience in my fraternity.

He discussed how his brothers responded to his lack of enthusiasm for the chapter and his current institution. Robert also talked about not having a relationship or connection with his big brother in the chapter. Concerning what it means for him to be Hispanic within his chapter, he said, “I can’t help but think that they dismiss my opinion strictly because I don’t fit in with their ways of thinking and approaching various topics.”

Robert is so focused on the future, like many others and I have been, that he cannot even focus on and or enjoy the present experience. I have had to remind myself to take a moment to appreciate and enjoy each of these narratives, as they are rich in lived experiences. I acknowledge that these participants made time in their schedules to be vulnerable and transparent about their fraternity experiences. That is why I would politely remind Robert to try to find the positive in each day before transferring to his “dream flagship experience.” Robert acknowledged that he did see the importance of community, even during his lowest times of being in the chapter. Robert said, “One thing I could always depend on is being able to text someone in the chapter and knowing that they would at least respond.” I acknowledged and affirmed that it is a small part of the community, knowing that you could turn to individuals and learn about their experiences while also sharing parts of your experiences from that day or that moment.

Introducing First-Generation Fraternity Man IC

IC identifies as a first-generation Mexican American college senior who lives off-campus. IC had an interesting way of describing what piqued his interest in recruitment, stating,

Those people really don't know each other. They had so many experiences with one another. Many times, you will hear inside jokes that you, as an outsider, have no idea what they're talking about, but it just shows how tight-knit that community is. And, for many, it might have turned them away. I'm sure it does for some, but for you being a first-generation student, trying to figure it all out, it definitely intrigues you.

IC spoke about his decision to apply to a 4-year institution. He shared, "My brother and sister hadn't gone and completed a 4-year degree. My sister, at most, completed an associate's degree at a community school, so that's what [my parents] were accustomed to with my previous siblings. They didn't expect me to really want to branch out, but if I did, they weren't encouraged [by] it."

IC was able to talk about his experience as the chapter treasurer and his impact on the chapter from his leadership position. In some cases, he said, "I mean, you are deciding between rent and the fraternity." IC coached and supported many of his brothers through those situations. IC saw the many benefits of his fraternity experience, one being the opportunity for landing an internship by networking with one of the chapter's most successful alumni. IC also talked about the importance of grades, explaining, "If somebody is failing a class, it is very different from somebody getting a C or D. That's a huge, huge weight on the average GPA, especially if your chapter is not the biggest."

IC recalled some of his favorite early memories in the chapter, saying,

"That's the motivation. It's the fact that there's new guys that are coming in, rushing, taking college classes. I mean, people for the first time, and I want them to get that exact experience out of it. So sometimes, even at the events I was responsible for, I was worried about the outcome of the event and the satisfaction of those in attendance. First

years don't have to stress about that; they have an opportunity of enjoyable bonding with their brothers in a very meaningful way.

IC frequently spoke about the holistic experience based on his time in the chapter, along with the meaningful relationships he has with his chapter brothers and alumni.

IC watched his older fraternity brothers during their internship experiences. Maintaining a passion for their fraternity helped him to see those older brothers as role models. IC remained motivated from seeing so many examples of financial success from within his home chapter. IC shared the importance of the fraternity experience as an opportunity that helped him navigate the fraternity experience. This is just one of many reasons I hope that IC will serve as a chapter advisor one day.

Introducing First-Generation Fraternity Man Momarmon

Of all the participants, Momarmon had the most to say as a nontraditional-aged fraternity man. Momarmon identifies as a first-generation African American college senior who is a proud member of Delta Sigma Phi. Momarmon's mother moved the family from Connecticut to College Park, Georgia, when he was 8 years old. Momarmon was in a lot of fights growing up in that area, where they teased him for "talking White, dressing White, and for not fitting in." After the family moved to Sandy Springs, he felt much better there with his White peers. Momarmon discussed his relationship with and love, respect, and admiration for his mother, as well. He mentioned having no one in his family to ask about college. Momarmon had been married for 5 years and talked about all he had given up during that time, including his dream of playing college football.

When Momarmon decided to join Delta Sigma Phi, he immediately noticed an age difference, especially when he met his pledge brothers, many of whom he found immature. The

age gap affected Momarmon's dating life and ability to connect with sorority women during social events. In addition to his age, Momarmon was concerned that his race was a factor in the women's concerns.

Momarmon talked a lot about race and how it affected his chapter experience. At one off-campus retreat, Momarmon was talking with one of the brothers and felt a tap on the shoulder. He turned to find one of the older brothers, who said, "May I have a word with you about stealing my girlfriend?" After they went upstairs, the older brother tried to take a swing at him, which infuriated Momarmon such that he "kicked the older brother's ass." He earned a reputation as "the angry Black man...for defending yourself at a retreat as the only, Black-identified person in the woods." Momarmon shared that he stays in the chapter to reap the networking benefits. He expanded,

I wanted to be able to interact with some of the brothers for them to get a different sense...just so they can see what Black people are more like this because they're out of it; [they] don't really get that. Some of them don't really see what it means to be or who like a Black person is more or less how they act on a regular basis, or talk to them and actually get to understand. If you're a country White boy, you don't mix with Blacks unless there is something that ties you together. We have a lot of fraternities like that here that are predominantly White with a few Black people in them.

Momarmon shared much about his experiences with me as a Black man. I appreciated his vulnerability and transparency about some of the micro- and macro-assaults he faced as the only Black-identifying man in his chapter. Momarmon found moments of support within the chapter until he was called "boy" by one of his chapter brothers. Momarmon processed this with me and asked my thoughts on that specific incident. Momarmon talked about the need for others who

identified as having minoritized identities. Having others within the chapter would have made some of his experiences not so isolating, especially those pursuant to race that resulted in verbal or physical altercations. Despite each of these incidents, Momarmon remained committed to his chapter.

Based on Momarmon's experience alone, If you're a country White boy, you don't mix with Blacks unless there is something that ties you together. We have a lot of fraternities like that here that are predominantly White with a few Black people in them. How do we expect community, respect or education to occur within chapters if we are not about making an organizational culture shift. As part of the organizational culture shift, we must identify from the leadership of each inter/national fraternity sorority that they are going to embrace, indoctrinate and support Diversity, Equity and Inclusion within their organizations. For example, if organizations are going to truly do the work of supporting members with minoritized identities, the organizations must start to actively search for diversity within their staffing models and Executive Boards. Each participant asked me, who can I turn to at the national organization for support pursuant to a commitment for diversity, equity, and inclusion. I was able to confidently ask them to work closely with their respective Executive Directors. I said both of your organizations have publicly stated that they are committed to diversity and inclusion.

Themes

To begin the analysis of participants' narrative interviews, I read each transcript at least 10 times, letting the themes emerge. I was thankful for this process, as the themes represented all the participants as they talked, smiled, and laughed. Four themes emerged from data analysis to answer the research questions: (a) defining fraternity, (b) acknowledging support, (c) sense of belonging, and (d) race as being salient

Defining Fraternity

The participants defined fraternity differently and similarly, talking about the experiences they had during their undergraduate collegiate experiences. Each participant spoke about the importance of relationships within their chapter while explaining the shared definition of brotherhood. The men understood their brotherhood in ways that manifested an explanation to their family members and peers. This was an important moment in each participant's undergraduate first-generation fraternity experience: the understanding and knowledge in communicating the value of joining a fraternity and committing their time, energy, and finances to an unknown yet often read or learned experiences from older siblings or television.

IC related, "You want to check out everything that the university wants to offer as a first-generation college student. You are there to find it, find everything out for the first time." IC's initial enthusiasm for student involvement was similar to the other participants. Each man recalled the Inter Fraternity Council's tables on the lawns of their respective campuses and wanting to know more about the "bond" shared by the men at the table or in conversation around the tables. One of the greatest opportunities for a first-generation fraternity man is the ability to share his experiences with the generations that will come after them. They are proud in their ability to help their family members see the rewards of joining a fraternity during their collegiate experience.

The participants reported finding connections with individuals they would have never met without joining the fraternity, people influential in changing the trajectories of their and, ultimately, their family's lives. If he had not joined his fraternity, IC said,

I would have just went to class and back to my dorm room. I would not have joined other student organizations, challenged other chapter brothers for a higher GPA, ventured

around the campus and the community. Each of these experiences are the moments and memories I will cherish for the rest of my life.

The participants discussed what fraternity meant to them. Momarmon reported, “It gave me a platform to meet people and get to understand what more Greek life was like in the South, and an IFC fraternity, not including that Greek Week thing. So that was cool for me.” Danny described his experience:

I came into college curious; I had that in the back of my head. People in high school told me I dressed like some fraternity guy, and I never understood; I was just wearing my button-up t-shirt and some chinos, and they were like, “Look at Danny’s girlfriends; [his] best friend’s brother was the past chapter president. And he was a cool guy, so all fraternity guys must be as cool as him.” And the only thing—I brought up the idea of going into a fraternity to my parents. And at first, they weren’t so fond of it, because it’s everything that you see in the movies, that you hear in the news. And, you know, sometimes terrible things do happen. I still wanted to give it the benefit of the doubt. So they weren’t about it, but me being rebellious and 18, I said, “I’m going to go to some of these restaurants and parties and see what they are all about.” And it was when I met Andrew at rush, a recent alum, and he asked me, “Lakers or Clippers?” We both loved the Lakers. Andrew the alum started telling me about his background and how diverse of a group ATO is, and it’s a great group of guys that accept each other, no matter the background, because, why not?

Danny recalled, “When I was going into fraternities, I wanted to join an IFC fraternity, but also to have diversity within that fraternity. ATO gave me that and led me to some great opportunities.”

Robert talked about joining the fraternity as a first-generation student and how he explained it to his mother:

I do want to say that, being a first-generation student, it was difficult for me to explain to my mom what a fraternity was and what the purpose of it was. And I mean, to this day, she still doesn't understand. She doesn't fully grasp the concept. When I tell her I can't go home 'cause I have chapter, she's like, "Why do you have to go to chapter? Why is it so important? Why do you do it every week?" Just sort of all these questions that I've answered time and time again, but she still can't wrap her head around. And it's not just my mom. My big [brother] also says his parents don't fully understand what a fraternity is, the purpose of it and why it exists, all this and all that. But it was definitely a barrier to overcome, to sort of ping against my mom that what I was doing. It's not a cult...it's not all these things that they think it [is]. And that's something that I guess is unique to first-generation students. And I'm assuming that it's not necessarily a barrier...to overcome. Oh, huge mistake, because I then begin to think about many other Mexican Americans I know that live in this country and have joined a fraternity.

Robert continued,

I think that my mom would also see fraternities in a different light if I do start bringing her to family tailgates and stuff like that. But I didn't want to because of the relationship that I have with my fraternity. So if I want to bring my mom around and my mom for me is the ultimate standard— If I do something and my mom doesn't agree with it, that sort of makes me question everything and not because I am a mama's boy, not because I let her control my life; just because I know that my mom has lived through a lot and I know that she has this—she's a parent. So I just know that. And so if I were to bring her around

my fraternity, she would automatically know; she would be like, “What are you doing here? You know, I don’t feel as though you belong.” So I’m hoping that I have a different experience at my new institution and I can bring her around, and she can sort of experience the Greek life that she never got to experience.

Danny talked about defining fraternity, saying,

I was always voicing my concern with the fact that we weren’t really just a fraternity. We were just different pledge classes that would hang out under one name, the ATO name. It should be that we be more inclusive, too. If you’re a senior, that doesn’t mean you can’t hang out with freshmen. They might be more energetic and wanting to do crazier stuff, but that doesn’t stop you from going out to dinner with them and enjoying a nice glass of beer, wine, a dinner, whatever you want; enjoy your time with them. So I think now we are in a better spot where everybody interacts with each other. Everybody has a good time. Everybody gets everybody up. So you can expect to get a text from a pledge and get a text from a third-year member. Because we didn’t have that before; it was definitely separated by ages. So the relationship within our chapter, it’s just a whole bunch of guys that love each other and want to have fun and sometimes even do dumb stuff together. But that’s the best part: Being a guy who is in college, enjoying your friendships with your brothers. Nowadays, I think we really do that. No matter where you come from...no matter if you’re the guy with the big wallet or the...smaller wallet, everyone is just cool with each other. And that’s so perfect to me. And I hope that whenever I leave this chapter, it continues to be that way. Even during this time—a very, very, very political time in our country—I never felt that we leaned more one way or leaned another, and it was all a place of inclusion. So, I’m happy with that part of my fraternity experience, too.

Acknowledging Support

The theme of acknowledging support paralleled one of the research questions: How does fraternity membership influence the retention of first-generation male college students? One of the positives enjoyed by each participant was support from their peers, family members, and other acquaintances throughout their lives. Each participant acknowledged the encouragement he had received from his family. Danny explained,

My family is definitely my ground where they recognized my accomplishments. They make sure to let me know that I am doing probably one of the hardest things my bloodline has ever done. None of them has ever had to move out of home and gone to school and do what I'm doing right now. So, it's it makes me happy to know that they're happy, as well, with everything that I'm doing.

IC discussed his brothers acknowledging the support they received from him:

I had multiple members come and tell me that they really liked the messages that I made for them. It was something simple where I would just take a template, and...I would adjust the amount of monthly payments that they would have to make when it's something simple that previous treasurers hadn't done. It makes them feel like they were constantly being reached out to personally by the treasurer, their account, rather than just, "Hey, you do this; your dues are past due." They always shared with me how much they appreciated my support.

It was also important for IC to discuss the support he received from his parents:

My parents were very, very, very open and very excited for me, even some of the things that people might not find all that exciting about their chapter or what they had to do to get in the chapter. And my parents, it sounded funny— Sometimes they would laugh

alongside me. They would be excited about the future that we were to have. ...My parents aren't up with or even see much of the movies or Hollywood, or just any other association with fraternity and Greek life, at least some first gen[eration]. And it may not be for everyone, but in my personal experience, they didn't have a bad stigma of a fraternity. So it allowed them to be much more open when I joined and even seeing what I was paying to be in the organization because they didn't have a bad image of what it meant to be a guy in a fraternity. They were open and willing to let me in. And because they trusted me and they wanted to see me succeed, they were just happy and excited, which is something that, as a student, I got to really, really enjoy my parents discovering that along with me and then being supportive. I'm not sure that is the case for every single first; I'm sure that some of them have pushed back because of the amount of unknowns. [That] wasn't my parents. I just got lucky. I would hope that every other first-generation student eventually is able to convey to their parents how meaningful it really is to be in a fraternity and how beneficial it truly is outside of the stigma.

IC had such a kind and warm disposition. As he spoke so passionately about his experience, I could not help but ask if he ever thought of being a chapter advisor. He responded, "I've never thought about that experience. Maybe someday I will think about it, after I am married and have some children."

During our time together, Eli talked about his family not knowing how or what type of support to offer. He said,

I listen to other fraternity brothers talk about the love and support they receive from their parents and grandparents, for example, one of my chapter brothers talks often and fondly about the notes his mom places in his laundry, the baked goods she sends with him after a

weekend visit home, along with the unwavering support and belief in which they have in him as a college student.

Most of his chapter brothers do not identify as first-generation scholars; however, they are supportive of him and his lived experiences. Eli discussed a time when he went home with one of his chapter brothers and was amazed at the experience. He recalled,

[His family members] were excited, and they had all of his favorite meals prepared for him. They even incorporated some of my favorite nonalcoholic beverages and treats in which I enjoy. Everyone was happy, not stressed, not worrying about paying bills and trying to get the family car fixed.

We were able to play games in his room. His parents would bring us snacks while we were playing games. During that evening, we went to their local country club for dinner, and everyone was very welcoming to us, especially their parents. ...I called that weekend #housegoals. I enjoyed every moment of that experience while also seeing how the other side truly lives.

Eli's story reminded me of some of my high school experiences. When I would go to my high school friends' homes, I was amazed at the clean air. I remember thinking, "This must be what heaven smells like." Years later, I would talk to my therapist about growing up in a home with two parents who were substance abusers, even throughout a portion of my adult life. Now, my father has been clean for 7 years; my mother passed away in 2009 to lung cancer. Listening to Eli recall his experiences of going to the homes of his White-identified fraternity brothers reminded me of my house dreams as a teenager. I would stand in each room of my brothers' homes and think about what it would be like someday to have a home like them. How would it be not to stress about finances, or to have a running car and be dependent on city transportation.

Eli talked about his appreciation for his chapter brothers' parents to send baked goods with them for their drive back to campus. I will always appreciate the Krohn family for driving me home, to the city from the suburbs, and always making sure I had enough food at each meal. They would always send all of the leftover food with me back to my house, and I remain eternally grateful for the grace and civility they showed me. Eli and I shared laughter about how different our fraternity brothers' experiences were compared to the homes and ways in which we were raised.

Danny and his girlfriend had recently gone to see a dream house. His girlfriend's mother said that someday it would be their home and they should take a picture in front of it. Danny shared,

I will always remember her exact words: "You both work hard, and Danny, you are in that fraternity that you always talk about. You deserve a house like your fraternity brothers; they are all very successful. I have worked for many of them during my time on this earth.

At that point, Danny and I were both crying, thinking about the sacrifices our family, friends, and ancestors made for our lives to be better. I thought about my 94-year-old grandmother, Betty Louise Gibson "Sweetie," and the many sacrifices she continues to make for me. One of her first jobs was as a cook for the men of Alpha Tau Omega in Nebraska. Who would have imagined that over a half-century later, her grandson would be writing a dissertation sponsored by Alpha Tau Omega? These are similar to some of my participants' lived experiences as first-generation fraternity men.

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging emerged as a theme in line with Research Question 2: How does fraternity membership influence first-generation male college students' sense of belonging on

campus? Each participant appreciated when members of their respective chapters would notice them for their sense of belonging. The only participant who discussed both sides of his sense of belonging was Robert. This interviewee talked about noticing and appreciating his sense of belonging in the chapter; however, he also looked forward to a new sense of belonging within the chapter at the state's flagship institution where he was transferring. This theme's congruence with the research question strengthened the study while elucidating participants' understanding of and appreciation for having a sense of belonging within their respective chapters.

Referencing a sense of belonging, Robert stated,

When you're a new member and you're not initiated, you feel like you are part of something, but you're not fully in it. ...When we initiated, we finally felt like we were a part of this fraternity. We were a part of something, and you were no longer visiting.

The participant continued,

It was sort of like a sigh of relief that we are now officially in this fraternity. We can change the direction of the fraternity if we want to. We can. Really, it was just so important because that's when I really knew that I was a part of something. That's when I really knew that I belonged somewhere and, and all my effort to get to that point really paid off, and it was worth it.

Robert also talked about a different aspect of his sense of belonging regarding his fraternity big brother:

I've lamented, I guess, that I don't have that connection with my big [brother] that perhaps other brothers do. ...Your big is supposed to be the one that guides you, the one that helps with everything, the one that is always there for you at all times. And my big really hasn't been that important to me. Not to say that I don't care about him; that dude's

one of my brothers. He's my big. I care for him, and I'm always there for him, but he just hasn't made any effort to establish that relationship with me. And he hasn't made any sort of— He hasn't gone out of his way to make me feel like I'm his little brother.

Robert continued, talking about another time when he felt a sense of belonging:

And a lot of my other brothers think that it should be run the other way. So I think that I'm the one that they turn to for opposing views on whatever they want to do. And I think that a story or a time I felt like I belonged, I would say it's the brotherhood retreat that we had in the spring. We went up to what I believe was Tennessee. We were just all talking and...you just feel you belong here, talking to your brothers and just having a good time. I always look to that time when I think about improving my relationship with my chapter. I'm always like, well, you know, I did have a good time with the brotherhood.

Momarmom also discussed feeling a sense of belonging:

There are times now, like, even me still being there now...the newer kids...give me that feeling of belonging because they kind of look up to me with a sense of belonging. I'm one of the older guys and they know that I'm one of the more protective, supportive guys, kind of no nonsense. ...Like, did I come there, the sense of security and protection, more or less.

Kanye said, "We do feel like you belong because you had a say in every, every single decision, whether your chair was relevant to that decision at the end."

IC, too, felt a sense of belonging. He explained,

I could easily see how, if I hadn't joined the fraternity during my first year...the first two and a half, 3 years would have been strictly going to school, going to my pre-med society meetings, going back home and studying, and getting to know some people in class,

getting to hang out with them outside of class. But it wouldn't have been the same as having a responsibility to be there for social events where you have to be there to meet people. You have to be there to fundraise. You had to be there to do certain things. And that gave me a bigger sense of belonging to the university, because pretty much every single event has to be approved by the university. And many of them end up bringing money or attention [or] publicity to the university. So many of the events that we had on campus did feel like I was more involved since I wasn't there on campus all the time.

Danny continued with the topic of belonging, saying,

I think being a part of a fraternity gives you that sense of belonging within the chapter, especially when the chapter's involved on campus. Now there's so many different chapters out there that do different things, and they do it in different ways. But I think if your chapter does their job in school by giving back to the local community, giving back to school, mixing with sororities and even other fraternities, that eventually your name just starts to get recognized where we're whenever you walk around. So I would have other people come up to me and call me on a first-name basis just because they've heard of the things that I've done or the things that I do, or the people that aren't associated with. And you do get that sense of belonging. 'Cause it's like, "Yeah, I am Danny from ATO," and you're like, "Yeah, that's me." They knew my name already. And even if it's within the circle of Greek life, Greek life is still part of the university's community. I do feel that it helped me feel part of being a part of campus and a part of San Antonio itself.

Race as Being Salient

Race was an essential theme that resonated with all six participants. Each man discussed the racism and micro- and macroaggressions he had felt or heard from his chapter brothers. For

two of my participants, race was the most salient identity for them, as they identify as Black men. The other four participants identified as Latinx—specifically, Mexican American. Each participant recalled at least one time their race made them feel “other” in fraternity settings. For some, race was a topic discussed during recruitment and bidding. Other participants encountered race at social events, being othered and feeling out of place in their chapter. Race was important to the six participants. Robert stated,

[In] my childhood, [my peers were] majority White, me being Hispanic or Hispanic origin. I don’t necessarily feel as though it has something to do with race, but I can’t help thinking...that they dismiss my opinion strictly because I don’t fit in with their ways of being.

Momarmon recalled how his fraternity brothers

Came to me. We sat down for lunch, and it was a pretty cool vibe. I didn’t necessarily think too much of it; I just was seeing it as a group of guys. It [made] me a little bit cautious because they were all Caucasian, and me being Black, I’m like, “Okay, well, how am I going to necessarily fit into this group of people? I just looked at the table. ...It was about five or six White guys. And then the rest were—it was one Black dude on the side of the table, and it was a Mexican dude, and it was an Asian dude. I’m like, “Whoa, this is actually pretty diverse.” You know, I didn’t expect for it to be that. There [were] some people that were not necessarily just White. I sat and stayed and talked with two of the brothers, and that’s what kind of really made me feel like, “Okay, I can definitely stay here,” because it was just that diversity aspect that I was looking into.

Momarmon discussed another incident with one of his fraternity brothers:

One of the biggest challenges that I always had faced was the fact that I'm a lot older. Sure, sure, and so the age difference and being Black, I felt like it was something slighted. It was always just a slight that I would observe from some of the brothers just because I'm pretty sure that they were raised in an environment where— Their parents probably raised them in a certain way, you know? And so they'll grin, and they all treat you with respect [to] your face; it's more or less the slight things. ...I'm a very observant person, and I can kind of see and observe when people's energy isn't right.

Another incident Momarmon discussed resulted in him getting into a fight during a chapter retreat at a lake, deep in the woods. When they were leaving, he explained,

I get to the top of the stairs and it's that one country boy from the balcony [in a previous incident, one brother had urinated on the others from the balcony] swings at me. Right. Legitimately swings at me and is like, "What you going to do, boy?" And that was just so triggering for me in many different ways. It triggers so many different things to be called "boy," as the only Black boy in my chapter, now in the woods with all of these White guys.

Robert talked about a committee meeting as an example of when race was an issue. He recalled,

There was a meeting for something, and it was a committee meeting, and they were making all these decisions. I was voicing my opinion, but no one really seemed to listen to me, and not one bothered to care about my opinion. That's a small example, but it fits in with everything else that I've described. It's sort of fits right into place with my relationship I have with my brothers.

I politely informed Robert that I call that a microaggression, and it was unfortunate that his chapter did not acknowledge his opinion. Robert also recalled someone in his chapter saying to him, “You’re the whitest Mexican I ever met. You don’t even speak like a Hispanic person.”

Danny talked about standing for diversity during recruitment:

One guy should be recruited and people not wanting Brown people in our chapter. The next potential new member we had was a guy that people were worried about him being gay, straight—you know, it wasn’t clear to us, and that became a problem to some people. And I told them, I was like, “Look, it might be that his lips and skin look nicer than ours, and he’s well-groomed. And he actually cares about his physical appearance. But just because he’s possibly gay doesn’t mean we should neglect him.” We extended him a bid. He didn’t accept it, but I get it. It should never come down to whether someone just prefers people of the same sex. That should never be the case, but it’s still something that in fraternity culture we have to combat. And I think we are. We have some steps until we move forward, but hopefully, we continue moving forward and not backward.

Eli discussed one of the many experiences when race was the topic of conversation. One of the more recent memories was the aforementioned visit home with one of his fraternity brothers. They were discussing a current issue at dinner, when his chapter brother’s uncle asked Eli, “How do you and your family feel about this issue as Black people?” Eli responded, “I am not equipped, nor do I answer on behalf of all Black people. However, this is how I feel about the current issue you are referencing.” Eli and I processed that moment, which was not the first time we are asked to speak on behalf of our race, nor would it be the last.

I was thankful for the candor and transparency of each of my participants as they talked about race and how that was a part of their lived experiences as fraternity men. Each man was very open with me, something I attribute, in part, to my positionality as also being a first-generation fraternity man with an affiliation of The National Pan-Hellenic Council and having relationships and employment with the Kappa Alpha Order fraternity. Each participant commented on his ability, ease, and comfort in talking to me. One participant (Danny) even said, “I haven’t shared this much about my fraternity experience with anyone. However, you were very easy and approachable to talk to about my fraternity experience.”

Summary

Each theme represented the lived experiences of participants in this narrative inquiry study in the order in which they occurred. The themes were defining fraternity, acknowledging support, sense of belonging, and race as being salient. Participants described explaining to their families why they decided to pledge their respective fraternities, helping their family members understand the value of brotherhood. As data analysis continued, I realized that without the support of family and friends, the men would not have continued in their fraternal experiences.

Each participant recalled his first memory of having a sense of belonging to his fraternity and with his fraternity brothers. The participants also talked about their race being salient, as they joined historically White fraternities as Black and Brown men. The men appreciated fraternity as providing opportunities for networking, overcoming challenges, and achieving better grades while also joining other campus organizations. Each participant understood and appreciated the oath he had taken to uphold higher standards for his campus and community.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

“If my life’s history be written, the truth will be that its most splendid service was performed through Alpha Tau Omega.

Alpha Tau Omega holds before the young men of the country an ideal.

Alpha Tau Omega stands for heart as well as head. It has given men a future ideal of life. It seems as if I originated Alpha Tau Omega in a dream. I should like to believe this, for then I could conclude that it was not man-made, but God given.”

—Otis Allan Glazebrook, Founder

Every fraternity and sorority has a ritual to remind members of the reasons for the organizations’ founding. The founders were visionaries, and members still look to their words and ideals today. Otis Allan Glazebrook, one of the founders of Alpha Tau Omega, had a dream of the ideals: How are the members living up to those ideals today? For Delta Sigma Phi, it is “the courage to dare, the poise to take action, and an unrelenting focus on excellence.” Members read those words and find inspiration to lead and serve a community.

Delta Sigma Phi has a reputation for being the atypical fraternity, which the members embrace. Members and fraternity leaders demonstrate the courage to dare, the poise to take action, and an unrelenting focus on excellence, beginning with the fraternity’s founding. In the late 1800s, no established fraternities awarded membership to both Christian and Jewish students. Institutions tended to be linked to religious organizations (Thelin, 2011), although some were more religiously progressive than others. Much like the rest of the country, segregation was

the norm. On December 10, 1899, in a secret meeting at City College of New York, Delta Sigma Phi became the first organization to initiate members from various socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. The foundational principles were diversity and good character with the purpose to spread “our mission is to empower and encourage our members to become Better Men- men of courage, men of action, and men of excellence” (Delta Sigma Phi Fraternity, 2021, “Mission Statement” section). Delta Sigma Phi has always prided itself on being the *atypical* fraternity. Members and Fraternity leaders demonstrate the courage to dare, poise to take action and an unrelenting focus on excellence. By the 1800’s several other fraternities already existed, but none awarded membership to both Christian and Jewish students. Much like the rest of the country, segregation was the norm; it was *typical*. Delta Sigma Phi was founded on the principles of diversity and good character. Delta Sigma Phi incorporated with the purpose to spread “the principles of friendship and brotherhood among college men, without respect to race or creed.” (Delta Sigma Phi, 2021)

Alpha Tau Omega and Delta Sigma Phi approved of me interviewing their members for this study. In showing support to each organization, I wanted to talk about their members’ current lived experiences, as evidenced by the title of my study, which is, in part, “The narrative experiences of Black and Brown first-generation fraternity men in historically White fraternities.” Despite their vision of inclusion, none of the founders would have imagined that all representatives in a 2021 study would be Black and Brown men.

This narrative inquiry study entailed interviewing six first-generation fraternity men to answer the following research questions:

1. How do first-generation male college students describe their experiences in fraternities?

2. How does fraternity membership influence first-generation male college students' sense of belonging on campus?
3. How does fraternity membership influence the retention of first-generation male college students?

Four themes emerged from data analysis: defining fraternity, acknowledging support, sense of belonging, and race as being salient. Each theme represented the participants' most relevant lived experiences. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings. All six participants reported being stronger and better-equipped students as a result of their fraternity experiences. The men discussed the importance of having a sense of belonging while matriculating through college. Another benefit was having older fraternity brothers to ask questions of and turn to during their undergraduate years. The six men felt they could not ask their parents and siblings about certain aspects of college without offending them or making them feel inferior; therefore, they appreciated their fraternity support.

Discussion

There are four primary takeaways from this study: (a) the value of a fraternity experience that is supportive and helpful to the undergraduate members, (b) the importance and value of a sense of belonging, and (c) retention pursuant to the value placed on grades and graduation. (d) Race remaining a salient part of each of their experiences. Each participant discussed the importance of having good grades and representing the chapter through his academic success.

One of the most fascinating and unpredictable elements of the study was that all participants identified as men of color who had joined historically and predominantly White chapters. Chang (1996) identified students of color who join historically White fraternities and sororities as "integrationists and assimilationists." These individuals negotiate their racial

identity as they move through college, developing strategies and attaining positions through various experiences and relationships that enable them to move through racially diverse societies. However, after deciding to join WGLOs, minorities can face the paradox of participation: the process by which minority members balance their relationships between their WGLO Greek brothers and sisters and members of their ethnic/racial group. Students of color who do assimilate into the mainstream culture to avoid alienation are seen by members of their own race as having “sold out” or “acting White,” abandoning their cultural heritage to achieve success (Banks & Banks, 2007; Nieto, 2004; Ogbu, 1994; Thompson, 2000). Tucker (1983) similarly noted difficulties for Black students who accepted membership in predominately White organizations, including facing ostracism and criticism from other Black students. Furthermore, Thompson (2000) found that minority students who joined WGLOs viewed their membership in a positive light; however, some Black participants showed levels of dissonance in their responses. Hughey (2010) reported,

The majority of respondents indicated that they felt genuinely accepted most of the time.

Yet, simultaneously, most of the respondents were quick to point out that the strength and authenticity of the kinship bond [were] fragile. Racial tensions, as one respondent told me, always lurked beneath the surface. (p. 669)

As Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) concluded, students of color on predominantly White campuses live in a world significantly different from their White peers in almost every aspect: academically, socially, and psychologically. Considering these factors, students of color who chose to become members of WGLOs on predominantly White campuses have put themselves in a position puzzling to many.

Strayhorn (2012) discussed “students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering of feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty peers)” (p. 3). Furthermore, Whipple (1998) declared that being a member of a Greek organization means belonging to a group whose members care about one another. Many WGLO members of color reported having social support and feelings of belonging within the organization. Even though my participants have minoritized identities, each of my participants reported having a social support and feelings of belonging within their organization. As for my framework being a sense of belonging, my study was truly in alignment with the literature by Dr. Strayhorn.

Student leadership development is an important outcome of higher education (Astin & Astin, 2000; Dugan, 2006; Haber & Komives, 2009; Johnson, 2014; Soria et al., 2013). As Haber and Komives (2009) noted, “Leadership development of college students has increasingly become a focus of Student Affairs work” (p. 134). Astin and Astin (2000) argued that many cocurricular contexts, such as residence life, Greek life, service learning, and student government, offer opportunities for developing leaders to serve as social change agents. Such efforts represent the critical role of higher education in preparing individuals to participate in a diverse, democratic society.

Relating Whiteness to My Lived Experiences as Members of Color

All six participants identified as men of color—specifically, Latinx and Black men. As I think about each participant recalling different parts of their experiences pursuant to being people of color, I wanted to relate and show some current literature pursuant to Whiteness and explaining some of the moments and feelings of exclusion which my participants felt as the

minority members within their respective chapters. Some of the participants described their experience as organizational slavery, where they felt a sense of ownership from the chapter instead of a sense of camaraderie. As Black and Brown members of these historically White fraternities, they had been tasked with the position of being the minorities in these organizations and educating their peers.

Drawing on Mills's (2007) conceptualization of racial ignorance, Cabrera and Corces-Zimmerman (2017) highlighted the discursive strategies White college men used to avoid or ignore conversations on race and Whiteness, insulated from meaningful racial dissonance with limited opportunity for critical reflection about their White racial selves. Cabrera (2014b) documented how White college men rationalize racial joking in all White environments as nonracist. In doing so, these men situated themselves as victims of reverse racism and political correctness. These findings echoed what Picca and Feagin (2007) described as backstage racism, or how White Americans exhibit a level of comfort in expressing overtly racist views in all White spaces.

A consistent thread throughout Cabrera's (2014a, 2014b) work is how White men minimize the role of racism in the lives of people of color while also making claims of reverse racism against Whites. Such findings are unsurprising, given contemporary racial discourses defined by postracialism and colorblindness, positing that major achievements, such as the Civil Rights movement and Barack Obama's election, signal an end to racial discrimination (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Johnston-Guerrero, 2016). Further, such postracial discourses indicate racism in only the most bigoted, hateful individuals (Bonilla-Silva, 2013).

Gusa (2010) documented the normalization of Whiteness in higher education more broadly, describing White institutional presence (WIP) as "the White normative messages and

practices that are exchanged within the academic milieu” (p. 471). White ascendancy, WIP’s primary attribute, is a sense of White entitlement and a firm belief in one’s authority in racial discourses. A number of scholars have documented such feelings of entitlement as, in part, the result of racially segregated lives that offer little, if any, dissonance about who one is as a racial being (Gusa, 2010; Leonardo, 2009). Gusa found WIP upheld and maintained through White estrangement, or “the distancing of Whites physically and socially from people of color” (p. 478). My participants explicitly talk about their own racial experiences during each of our interviews. Here are just a few of their overt experiences with racism, “You’re the whitest Mexican I ever met. You don’t even speak like a Hispanic person.” Legitimately swings at me and is like, “What you going to do, boy?” Yes, these are two separate examples, however, this shows that a foundational change needs to happen within our historically White Fraternities. Yet, another example of a participant that just wanted to offer his insight into a chapter issue, and he was ignored. There was a meeting for something, and it was a committee meeting, and they were making all these decisions. “I was voicing my opinion, but no one really seemed to listen to me, and not one bothered to care about my opinion.” These are just a few of the examples as to why I am committed to working with historically white organizations in making foundational changes.

Study participants talked about having a sense of belonging and its importance in their fraternity experience, recalling the moments when this occurred. One participant related having an initial sense of belonging to his chapter. However, he quickly noticed that his sense of belonging began to diminish when his brothers learned of him transferring to another institution.

Conceptual Framework

Believing in the ability to complete a particular course of action does not guarantee persistence (Tinto, 2017b). In institutions of higher education, students’ persistence requires their

inclusion in the community of faculty, staff, and students who value their participation, making the students feel that they matter and belong (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Kuh et al., 2005; Strayhorn, 2008a). When students feel valued and appreciated, they experience a sense of commitment, which unites the individual and community members, despite adversities (Tinto, 2017a, 2017b). Thus, being engaged in the campus community is essential for persistence, as students equate engagement with a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 2017a).

Students' sense of belonging derives from the broader campus climate and their ongoing daily interactions with peers, faculty, staff, and administrators (Hurtado & Punjuan 2005; Tinto, 2017b). A sense of belonging, or lack thereof, is a critical factor in student retention or withdrawal (O'Keeffe, 2013). Sense of belonging occurs when students share common interests with their peers in the same discipline or sociocultural background or the broader institutional climate (Tinto, 2017b). However, when students do not feel they belong, their motivation to persist declines, leading to withdrawal from their institution. Students of color endure even more significant strains that can interfere with their college transition and integration as well as sense of belonging (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007).

Higher education institutions can contribute to students' sense of belonging in various ways. If the faculty, staff, and administrative makeup is representative of the diverse student population, students will likely feel more connected to the campus climate and classroom environment (Tinto, 2017a). Additional means of promoting the concept of sense of belonging is providing different activities to support students' academic and social needs. For instance, in the academic milieu, a sense of belonging can accompany cohort programs, learning communities within residence halls, and the use of diverse and effective pedagogical practices. In the social realm, institutions provide opportunities to engage with diverse social groups and organizations,

permitting students to discover small subcommunities within a larger community. These subcommunities lead to collective learning experiences, creating a sense of belonging among students.

Strayhorn's Model of College Students' Sense of Belonging

Having a sense of belonging with other students is a key component of the college experience (Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging impacts academic achievement, retention, and graduation. Strayhorn (2012) defined sense of belonging as a “student’s perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to a group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)” (p. 3). Strayhorn based this definition on the hierarchy of needs, in which Maslow described belongingness as a fundamental human motivation; thus, people have a desire to belong. Individuals must achieve their physiological and safety needs before the need to belong emerges.

Other definitions of belonging merit discussion. Erickson (1987) defined belonging as the basis of formal and informal organizations where people participate in activities to belong to a group. Yuval-Davis (2006) viewed belonging on three levels: (a) social positions, identification processes, emotional bonds, and ethical and political values; (b) belonging to policies and ways of integrating into various plans and projects of people who live in a society; and (c) belonging in political, cultural, social, and religious projects. Bagnall (2009) described belonging as a form of social organization and association with various communities. Finally, Osterman (2000) identified belonging as occurring when an individual’s feelings matter to another member or group, with a shared faith and commitment between members.

For this research, I used Strayhorn's (2012) definition of belonging, framed as "a basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior" (p. 3). Furthermore, specific to college, sense of belonging focuses on the social support of students on campus, feeling connected, being valued and cared about, having a sense of acceptance and respect, and being important to a campus community or others on campus.

Sense of belonging serves as a pathway to academic achievement, retention, and persistence to degree attainment (Strayhorn, 2008a). Additionally, when students are socially and academically engaged, they tend to have a stronger sense of belonging on campus (Strayhorn, 2012). Students who are engaged with others have more frequent interactions and foster meaningful relationships and friendships; as a result, they feel more supported and experience a positive college experience. All of these factors have contributed to students' commitment to their achievement, connections, and, ultimately, retention. Strayhorn (2012) contended that a lack of sense of belonging leads to a lack of interest or engagement in everyday life activities. Moreover, students have various needs that, if unmet, can lead to diminished motivation, limited developmental skills, poor academic performance, and the inability to sustain a high academic engagement and commitment to their environment. Male students who do not conform to prescribed standards of masculinity may be subject to ridicule or isolation from peers of both genders (Strayhorn, 2015). College can be a challenging time for the male student who does not naturally conform to these standards. Each of my participants were able to navigate the challenging environments on their respective campuses while also striving to make a difference within their respective chapters.

Membership and Sense of Belonging

Fraternity men and sorority women conceptualize belonging as part of the experience of brotherhood (McCreary & Shutts, 2015) and sisterhood (Cohen et al., 2017), respectively. The feeling of belonging associated with membership is not limited to the chapter experience.

Matthews et al. (2009) found that joining a fraternity or sorority chapter assisted with a student's connection to the Greek community and the institution as a whole. Further, the relationships can be qualitatively different from other peer relationships college students develop.

Researchers have explored belonging for minority students who join Greek-letter organizations. For example, pledging a fraternity or sorority increases sense of belonging for Latinx students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007). Latinx students who join Latinx-interest fraternities and sororities yielded some of the benefits associated with belonging, such as a smooth transition to college and identity development (Guardia & Evans, 2008; Orta et al., 2019). Similarly, other researchers have connected belonging and membership in an identity-based Greek-letter organization for Asian American students (Chen, 2009; Tran & Chang, 2013), Black men (Strayhorn, 2012), deaf women (Stapleton & Nicolazzo, 2019), gay men (Yeung, 2009), and racially minoritized students in general (Johnson & Larabee, 2003).

Degrees of belonging can vary between members (McCreary & Shutts, 2015; Shutts et al., 2017). Specifically, chapter officers report a statistically greater sense of belonging than general members (Long & Snowden, 2011). This finding could be related to the time spent with the organizations due to their positions; however, too much involvement can actually reduce belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). In terms of social identities, straight men in fraternities report higher levels of belonging than their gay or bisexual brothers (Long, 2010).

Expectations could adversely affect belonging due to inhibited personal acceptance (Vaccaro & Newman, 2017). Socioeconomically, students who cannot pay the extra costs associated with membership may feel a reduced sense of belonging if they cannot have the same experience as their chapter brothers and sisters (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; McClure & Ryder, 2018). Individuals' sense of belonging within the Greek-letter organization community could suffer from the racial biases of members of historically White chapters, impacting minority members and contributing to structural inequities between the groups (Garcia, 2019; Ray, 2013). Further, struggling chapters that lack the members, social connections, and resources to be among the top campus chapters could create feelings of being out of place within the community (DeSantis, 2007). Fraternity membership and sense of belonging were highlights of all participants' lived experiences as men of color that contributed to their sense of belonging to the fraternity experience.

Because narrative inquiry relies on participants' ability to produce reflective and detailed accounts of lived experience, I relied on purposeful sampling (Hatch, 2002). Narrative researchers recommend engaging participants on specific times, situations, and experiences instead of broad questions about an extended period (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Riessman, 2008). Doing so yields data that are topically centered and temporally ordered. I engaged the participants in discussing their recruitment, new member period, time in the chapter, and highs and lows as a member.

Themes Aligned With the Research Questions

In this section, I connect each research question to the themes and participant responses.

RQ1. How do first-generation male college students describe their experiences in fraternities?

Answering the first research question entailed discovering each participant's respective experiences in a fraternity. For example, Momarmon talked about the "American dream perspective" and wanting to experience a memorable college experience like he had grown up seeing on TV and in the movies. The participants talked candidly about their respective fraternity involvement, showing appreciation for their opportunities as first-generation fraternity men. Each man discussed multiple fraternity experiences, providing information to answer RQ1.

RQ2. How does fraternity membership influence first-generation male college students' sense of belonging on campus?

The theoretical framework of sense of belonging was apparent in each participant's retelling of his initial feelings of belonging. Each participant spoke candidly about moments of belonging and not feeling a sense of belonging. In some cases, as they discussed these moments, they admitted they had not verbalized or processed them before. Momarmon shared his introduction to the fraternity:

One of the biggest experiences that was memorable was after I've been getting my... Getting the bid was kind of memorable because it was the initial starting point as well as even meeting the brothers and seeing how diverse they were. It was a special moment for me.

During our conversations related to sense of belonging, I reminded each participant of something Strayhorn (2019) had said during a webinar:

If you leave your fraternity for 2 weeks and no one misses you and/or you don't miss them, you do not have a sense of belonging to that chapter and should probably seek other avenues in identifying a sense of belonging. (n.p.)

Each participant paused to think about that statement. Eli had the most favorable response, saying, "I know my chapter would miss me. They talk about when I leave for a weekend that our chapter is not the same without me being physically or virtually present due to COVID."

RQ3. How does fraternity membership influence the retention of first-generation male college students?

Each participant talked about the importance of scholarship as an obligation and commitment to his respective chapter. Robert discussed his scholarship commitment in ensuring he could transfer to the state's flagship institution. Eli referenced scholarship by way of his relationship with the Chancellor, saying, "I know that the Chancellor would not be happy if I decided not to take my scholarship serious[ly]. Each time I walk [his] dog, [the Chancellor] reminds me of the things I will be able to do once I complete my degree." Danny spoke about his commitment to the chapter when he served as an officer. IC also stressed setting an example for his chapter while serving as an officer. Each participant understood the importance of earning his degree.

The narrative inquiry design in this study supported Strayhorn's model of sense of belonging. Each participant talked about his pathway to academic achievement, retention, and persistence to degree attainment, experiences that were different before joining their fraternity. Eli says, "I remember how much time I spent in my residence hall room prior to joining my fraternity. I am rarely there now other than for sleeping." Each participant also acknowledged the challenge and support the chapter showed pursuant to their grades. Danny recalled, "I was

excited to have a 3.2, and my brothers were like, “That’s cute; however, we know that you can achieve a 4.0.” Danny had a 4.0 every semester after that conversation. Momarmon said, “I remember the excitement of my brothers as they would yell out their chapter GPAs during chapter meeting.”

Sense of belonging serves as a pathway to academic achievement, retention, and persistence to degree attainment (Strayhorn, 2008a). Additionally, when students are socially and academically engaged, they tend to have a stronger sense of belonging on campus (Strayhorn, 2012). Students who are engaged with others have more frequent interactions and foster meaningful relationships and friendships; as a result, they feel more supported and experience a positive college experience. All of these factors have contributed to students’ commitment to their achievement, connections, and, ultimately, retention. Strayhorn (2012) contended that the sense of belonging leads to a lack of interest or engagement in everyday life activities.

Fraternity Membership and Retention and Why It Matters for My Participants

Each participant discussed the importance, relevance, and value they found within their respective chapters pursuant to fraternity membership and retention. Each participant talked about how if they were not present at a chapter function and or meeting, someone would text them and ask where they were and why they were not present. No participant ever described or talked about their experiences being tokenized, as if they were the token members of their chapters. One of the participants shared that if it were not for one of his minoritized identities as a black man, his chapter would not have had such an eye opening, provoking and educational chapter meeting post the death of George Floyd. He was able to talk about his lived experiences on this earth as someone which identifies a black, queer man raised in the south. In addition to

that experience and others, participants were able to identify retention efforts within the chapter in supporting brothers to remain active and committed to the chapter until commencement.

Recommendations for Policy or Practice

Based on the findings of this study, it is apparent that university student affairs departments should establish or extend First-Generation Centers to fraternity and sorority headquarters. Each headquarters must acknowledge and support the needs of first-generation students, a vulnerable, at-risk population of young adults susceptible to degree noncompletion without organizational support.

When I asked a respondent to think of services and people helpful to him as a first-generation student, he responded,

Well, I would say to have someone like you and Ricardo Siggs. A person who is more of a mentor or counselor to minorities who fit a specific demographic to have someone to come to when they are in need of guidance with some of the problems involving all aspects of college, such as finance, mental and emotional support, and life coaching.

In addition, the leaders of each respective fraternity and sorority should create curricula pursuant to unconscious bias, micro- and macroaggressions, critical race theory, and systematic racism and how it is still very prevalent today. I acknowledge that funding is not available to create full time positions, if you are unable to identify another full-time position, at least commit to retaining the services of a diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant/educator.

Recommendations for fraternity administrative office and headquarters staffing practices follow. Each of these suggestions would greatly enhance the experiences of first-generation fraternity men's experiences within their chapters, enhancing and, for some, restoring their sense of belonging in their fraternity experience.

Hiring and/or Incorporating the Responsibilities of a Full-Time Staff Member Supporting First-Generation Students

This position would support and enhance the work of first-generation students on campus. Each student would know where and to whom to turn as first-generation student leaders. As a first-generation student, this would have been immensely helpful to me as I was trying to navigate offices and individuals across a campus of over 35,000 students. Each participant discussed the people in whom they found support.

Hiring a Full-Time Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Staff Member

Having a full-time Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity staff member would mean having one person focused on the opportunities for diversity, equity, and inclusion for first-generation students on campus. A full-time Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion staff member could focus on the issues: care and concern, specifically of first-generation student leaders. This person would take a deeper dive into the racial issues expressed by this study's participants and other student leaders.

Identifying Someone Within the Current Headquarters Staff to Challenge and Support Chapters Academically

Such a staff position would support academic inclusion groups and honor the academic talents of first-generation fraternity men regionally. Each inclusion group would have an opportunity to work closely with this staff member to identify metrics and goals for strengthening their academic profiles.

Improving Alumni and Networking Opportunities Within the Undergraduate Experience

A full-time alumni and networking engagement specialist would identify first-generation alumni and pair them with current first-generation students. Each alumni member would have an

opportunity of mentoring these first-generation students. Each participant talked about having the opportunity to connect with first-generation alumni. The current students saw the alumni as resources and advocates on their behalf in supporting them through graduation.

Recommendations for Administrative Offices/Headquarters Staff

Based on my study and having the privilege of interviewing members from ATO and Delta Sigma Phi, I provide the following recommendations to enhance some of the schools' services to their undergraduate, first-generation population.

Hiring a Full-Time Staff Member Supporting First-Generation Students

This virtual position would support multiple chapters in identifying intended goals and outcomes and performing a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats assessment of each chapter. The individual would work collaboratively with chapter services staff members in identifying opportunities for supporting chapters across the country. The person would also do programming to specifically meet first-generation students' needs while also educating the chapters in recruiting, supporting, and retaining first-year students. Even in times of economic downturn, these first-generation students must have additional support and mentoring throughout their undergraduate experience. If a full-time position is not within the current budget structure, universities could find opportunities of serving this underrepresented population of students until securing the funding for a full-time position.

Hiring a Full-Time Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Staff Member

Based on this study's theme of race, it is evident that organizations should have a professional in place to support students of color while also atoning for the storied and unique historical context and past of each of these organizations. This position would also create the curriculum for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion curriculum as students navigate more-inclusive

campus environments. Many of these students are trying to understand the historical context of their respective organizations while also seeking to explain the historical context in recruitment sessions, introductory meetings with parents, and settings with other student leaders asking based on their lack of information.

Each student's interview had an undertone of wanting empathy and implicit and unconscious bias training. As I listened to the students talk about their experiences, I could not help but think how different each situation would have been if students had at least a basic level of diversity, equity, and inclusion training. If the funding is not currently available, university leaders could incorporate such initiatives into the chapter services staff's planning for the upcoming year. At a minimum, the new member curriculum should include diversity, equity, and inclusion going forward.

Identifying Someone Within the Current Headquarters to Challenge and Support

Chapters Academically

Each participant talked about his understanding and appreciation for a stronger academic record for their chapters. It was important for them to have a high GPA for the chapter and within the community. A full-time professional would be able to challenge and support the ideals and goals of the chapter members. In addition, a full-time professional would also support the needs of the chapters nationwide, creating synergy within the national organization while raising the standards pursuant to academic goals and initiatives. If funds are unavailable, the chapter services team could take on some of the goals for student leaders which can incorporate academic enhancement initiatives in their meetings with the student leaders. The opportunity for this position to interact with the proposed alumni position is also a possibility.

Improving Alumni and Networking Opportunities Within the Undergraduate Experience

An alumni and networking position would be a great opportunity for a new professional, which could be virtual, as well. This position would have connections throughout the fraternity while also helping first-generation students with internships and networking events. Ideally, this individual would plan regionally based networking opportunities for first-generation students. During these events, first-generation students would connect with first-generation alumni and learn about their educational journeys as fraternity men. These networking opportunities would show first-generation students about positions they might have never considered as first-generation students. In addition, this position would also visit campuses and host first-generation alumni as speakers to the local chapters. The individual would also showcase the talents of first-generation fraternity men to the chapter and the campus if the alumni were also willing to speak to a larger audience. Again, if funds are an issue, these tasks could become part of the current development teams' other duties as assigned. Within the current structure, development teams can identify highly engaging individuals within their provinces and regions to start the programming needs.

Suggestions for Student Affairs Practitioners

As someone who has worked for over 10 years as a proud and dedicated student affairs professional, I had been looking forward to sharing my suggestions with my student affairs colleagues. Although limited, the suggestions could be opportunities for first-generation Fraternity and Sorority students to grow stronger as student leaders on campus. My suggestions are as follows.

Signature Title

Student affairs professionals should be able to identify themselves as a first-generation graduate or a first-generation student. Such identification would be an opportunity for first-generation students to recognize first-generation faculty and staff on campus. As a result, students could easily find mentors or sources of support to keep them engaged as students in good academic standing until they are walking on stage during commencement. I also appreciate this as showing pride in being the first and decreasing imposter syndrome. Students need to envision themselves graduating and see others who look like them in successful careers.

Centers or Residential Environments

Some institutions have identified spaces on campus for first-generation centers; others provide residential spaces for first-generation students. Participants stressed the importance of having individuals who care and are following their progress. Mormarmon expressed,

I just needed to know that someone knew that I was not able to return for a semester because all of my financial aid was gone. Instead, I almost sat out a semester until I kept calling and emailing the Care Team. They did nothing until I emailed the Vice President of Student Affairs.

Mormarmon's experience is an example of what happens when first-generation students cannot find the resources they need on campus. Universities could provide a center or assign a residential environment staff member to each first-generation student to support and coach them throughout their matriculation.

Speaker Series

Each campus needs to do programming in supporting the students on their respective campuses. However, I have not seen a speaker series devoted to showcasing first-generation

students, faculty, or staff. A speaker series providing opportunities for first-generation students to learn about campus resources would be a solution. First-generation fraternity students could showcase some of their most prominent fraternity alumni. This speaker series would not cost the institution anything other than publicity. It would provide an opportunity for first-generation students to learn about successful first-generation faculty, staff, students, and fraternity alumni in an intimate setting. The speaker series could turn into a conversation with the speaker. This approach is another way to identify successful first-generation alumni who can share their stories with first-generation students.

Programming Opportunities for First-Generation Parents

Danny said, “My parents never knew what I was doing or what their role was as parents of a first-generation student.” As one participant stated, “I wanted my parents to have a better understanding of the work I was doing as a first-generation student; however, neither my fraternity or my four year college never sent anything to my parents.” Schools miss the opportunity to engage first-generation parents who might not have the time or means to check and respond to email. Conference calls can be another option for first-generation parents to learn about their students’ experiences. University leaders can ask parents about their preferred mode of communication during events like orientation. Student affairs professionals need to seize the opportunity to reach out to our first-generation parents and guardians, especially those unable to attend Parents Weekend. One of the simplest ways to involve parents and guardians is to send a bumper sticker or magnet home that reads “Proud Parent of a First-Generation Student at [name of institution].” There are several opportunities for engagement beyond new student orientation and commencement.

One of the organizations in this study has a scholarship program for LGBTQ+ students. A policy recommendation would be to establish a scholarship for first-generation students. Fraternities should facilitate support groups, either in-person or virtual, for first-generation students throughout their college and chapter tenure. Each fraternity headquarters has staff who can outreach on behalf of their members for financial aid, course registration, and academic support, ensuring students are on track to complete their undergraduate degrees.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study focused on the experiences of first-generation fraternity men. It is also important to examine the experiences of first-generation sorority women and compare the two. In addition, this study could be expanded across institution types and geographic areas.

Fraternities should recruit, retain, and support students of color. Each participant talked about being the *diversity* within his respective chapter. Educational programming surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion should undergo analysis for effectiveness on knowledge of diversity, equity, and inclusion issues, increases in self-efficacy, and decreases in imposter syndrome.

As dissertations must be delimited to remain manageable, not all questions will receive examination. Determining how fraternity policies affect chapters and doing a deep-dive into how racial discrimination affects members in chapters are important issues. Some participants talked with disdain during certain parts of their chapter experience because they felt othered by the majority members, with no sanctions or consequences imposed on those members.

Future researchers should examine the experiences of first-generation fraternity men and women. The literature abounds with research on FGCS; there is also plenty of information on

fraternity and sorority students. However, I was unable to find studies of both lived experiences together.

There are collaborative opportunities for further research on race and the intersectionality of first-generation fraternity men and how to improve their experiences within their chapters. In addition, further research could take place on the lived experiences of first-generation LGBTQ+ members about their willingness to stay connected and involved within their fraternity or sorority experience. One participant discussed his lived experiences as a Black, queer, first-generation fraternity man. I would relish seeing additional literature about the intersectionality of those identities and how they affect students' experiences within their chapters and the campus community. Further studies could assess how well first-generation support centers are supporting, retaining, and helping those students to succeed.

Limitations

The limitations of my study are that I had initially set out for this study to interview men with their most salient identity being that of White men. However, after the solicitation of participants all of my participants identified as men with minoritized identities. In addition, these men were also interviewing during a political time within our country that was extremely polarizing, which could have led to my participants of color feeling more comfortable sharing their experiences with me. One of my suggestions for a future study would be to offer the same study to historically white sororities at the same time of the year to see if the participant pool is different. In addition, I am a member of an NPHC fraternity; perhaps this study would yield different results if the researcher was a member of a historically white fraternity.

Conclusion

I am humbled to be the author of a narrative inquiry focused on first-generation fraternity men. I often tell the story of when I was a first-year student at The University of Toledo in fall 1997. I saw a friend wearing a Kappa Delta Rho sweatshirt and asked him what it was about, learning that it was his fraternity. I honestly thought it was a new Gap sweatshirt. I had heard about Omega Psi Phi and Alpha Kappa Alpha; however, it never registered until I started doing research on fraternities and sororities. When I started the community college portion of The University of Toledo, I heard several voices in my head about all the things others had told me I would never finish. People told me I would never finish high school and, later, that I would never finish my bachelor's and master's degrees. Each time I left it in God's hands, saying, "Lord, please continue to guide my dreams and my steps." I began my doctoral journey at The University of Georgia in 2016.

As I met each participant in this study, I enjoyed the opportunity to hear their stories and listen to their fraternity experiences. Each man shared details that were not only helpful but reminded me of some of my own struggles as an undergraduate fraternity man. As I completed data collection and listened repeatedly to their interviews, I realized that I have the privilege of sharing their stories. I pray that I have shared their experiences to the best of my ability.

I will continue to champion my story as a first-generation fraternity man from Toledo, Ohio, raised by a single mother and primarily cared for and loved by my paternal grandparents. I am hopeful that this dissertation will help future first-generation fraternity men. I am thankful for participants' time, transparency, and vulnerability in sharing their stories and lived experiences as first-generation students. Each first-generation fraternity student deserves respect, to be seen and treated as an individual and not a number. Each student has so much to offer campuses and

communities; some of them just need help during their matriculation on campus. I will continue to be a champion and spokesperson for first-generation fraternity men wherever I go.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM**

[Dissertation on First Generation Fraternity Men]

Researcher's Statement

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Marlon L. Gibson
College Student Affairs Administration
marlon.gibson25@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study

I will attempt to understand how does fraternity membership influence the retention of first-generation college male students? How does fraternity membership influence FGCM sense of belonging on campus? I am attempting to understand the lived experiences of these students.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to ...

- During our interview, you will be recorded by my audio device, I will ask you all of the questions from the interview sheet which I sent to you prior to today's interview.
- 90 minutes for this study
- All questions are listed on the sheet before you, none of the questions are intended to be sensitive in nature; however, if you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, we can skip that question.
- I will be recording today's interview

Risks and Discomforts

- I do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.
- If you feel uncomfortable at all during this interview, please let me know.

Benefits

- No direct benefits to the participant.
- Possible expected benefits to society/humankind or to scientific knowledge.

Incentives for participation

No incentives for participants, other than hope for strengthening the resources for First-generation Students.

Audio/Video Recording

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by research team. Specifically, as the principal investigator, I will be transcribing the audiotape and then look for emerging themes and patterns that comes out of the interview.

The recording(s) will include your name and the answers to the interview questions. However, your identity will not be used during the analysis of data.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file on my personal laptop that requires having a password to access information. The recording will be retained until the end of the study. Once the study is completed, I will be discarding the recordings. Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

If audio and/or video recording devices will be used, explain why the recordings are needed for the research and what will be done with them upon completion of the research (e.g., kept indefinitely, archived after transcription, destroyed after X years).

If the recording is optional for participation, provide a separate line on the consent form for the participant to signify agreement to be audio/video recorded. For example:

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview (specify audio or video) recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

I do not want to have this interview recorded.

I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the researcher. Specifically, as the principal investigator, I will be transcribing the audiotape and then look for emerging themes and patterns that comes out of the interview.

The recording(s) will include your name and the answers to the interview questions. However, your identity will not be used during the analysis of data.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file on my personal laptop that requires having a password to access information. The recording will be retained until the end of the study. Once the study is completed, I will be discarding the recordings. Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the

above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

(1) retain and analyze already collected data relating to the subject up to the time of subject withdrawal; or (2) honor a research subject's request that the investigator destroy the subject's data or that the investigator exclude the subject's data from any analysis. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions

Explain how the participant can contact you if he has any questions or concerns. A standard statement in this section is as follows:

The main researcher conducting this study is Marlon L Gibson, a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Marlon L. Gibson at Marlon Ladell Gibson-marlon.gibson25@uga.edu or at 419-376-2877. Please also contact the chair of my study, Dr. Diane Cooper if you have questions, comments and/or concerns at dlcooper@uga.edu or 706-542-1812. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

Hello. My name is Marlon Gibson, and I am a 4th year doctoral candidate in the College Student Affairs Administration Program in Counseling and Human Development at The University of Georgia. I am conducting this study under the guidelines of my Chair, Dr. Diane Cooper. Thank you for agreeing to be a part of my research study. Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me. As you know, I am conducting a study about how does fraternity membership influence the retention of first-generation male college students? How do first generation male college students describe their experiences in fraternities? How does fraternity membership influence first generation male college students' sense of belonging on campus? How does fraternity membership influence the retention of first-generation male college students?

I am going to ask you a series of questions regarding your college experiences pursuant to being a first-generation male college student. As a reminder, I will be recording our interviews. If at any time, you no longer want to participate, please let me know and I will conclude the interview. Please feel free to let me know if you have any questions.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and I am not being paid by The University of Georgia or any outside agency to conduct this study. During the interview, I will be asking you questions regarding your background and your social and academic experiences as a First-

Generation Fraternity man. At the conclusion of the interview, you will have the opportunity to review the findings before they get published.

Tape Recorder Instruction

If it is okay with you, I will be recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can obtain as much information as I can and be able to be attentive to our conversation. I will assure you that all of our conversation will be confidential. That means, I will not be discussing our conversation without your permission to anyone outside of my dissertation. Furthermore, I will be giving you a pseudonym to protect your identity. This interview could last between 45 to 60 minutes and you are in control of the direction of the interview. Although, each question will be used, your responses may warrant more probing questions that would aid with answering the research questions.

Joining as a first-generation male college student in a fraternity

- What place do you identify as home, how did you choose this institution for college?
- Do you remember your first memory of the possibility of attending college?
- Was going to college a choice that you made for yourself or did your parents participate in the decision-making process?

First-generation male college students describing their experience in the fraternity.

- When and why did you decide to join a fraternity/sorority
- Describe some of your memorable experiences you have had in your fraternity. What made these experiences memorable/important?
- Talk about any challenging experiences you have experienced within your fraternity.

First-generation students sense of belonging.

- How did you become acclimated to your chapter? Follow up question- who helped you become acclimated to your chapter?
- In what ways do you feel like you matter/belong within your chapter? Can you please tell me a story about a time when you felt you belonged?
- Can you share a story about a time when you did not feel that you belonged?
- Does being a member of a fraternity enhance (or not) your sense of belonging in the university? Please explain.

Retention as a first-generation fraternity man.

- What motivates you to stay involved within your chapter?
- Have you thought about being a leader within your chapter? Why or why not?
- Have you connected with other first-generation students in your chapter? If no, or any other first-generation students within the Fraternity/Sorority community?
- How did your involvement in the fraternity contribute to your decision to persist at your college/university?
- Would you like to share anything else with me about your fraternity experience pursuant to your first-generation status?

Wrap up by saying- Do you have any questions, comments, suggestions or clarifying of items from me prior to our interview ending?

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Hello,

I am a Doctoral candidate in the College Student Affairs Administration program in the Counseling and Human Development department at the University of Georgia. I am contacting you to participate in my research study aimed at:

How does fraternity membership influence the retention of first-generation male college students?

How does fraternity membership influence FGCM sense of belonging on campus?

Eligibility criteria • First-Generation college student • You are an affiliated member of Alpha Tau Omega or Delta Sigma Phi • Pursuing a Bachelor's degree.

Procedure • 60-90-minute virtual interview scheduled based on your time • Provide chapter advisor contact information if you think they will be interested in learning more about this process • The interview will be audio recorded.

If you are interested in participating, or have any questions, please contact Marlon L. Gibson-419-376-2877 or Marlon L. Gibson at Marlon Ladell Gibson-marlon.gibson25@uga.edu

Sincerely,

Marlon L. Gibson

APPENDIX D

AUDIO RECORDING CONSENT FORM

The University of Georgia INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE
ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Mr. Marlon L. Gibson. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape the interview as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the researcher. Specifically, as the principal investigator, I will be transcribing the audiotape and then look for emerging themes and patterns that comes out of the interview.

The recording(s) will not include your name, I will identify you with a pseudonym and the answers to the interview questions. However, your identity will not be used during the analysis of data.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file on my personal laptop that requires having a password to access information. The recording will be retained until the end of the study. Once the study is completed, I will be discarding the recordings. Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX E

EMAILS FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

From: Rodriguez, Phillip <Rodriguez@deltasig.org>

Sent: Friday, October 25, 2019 4:41 PM

To: Dawn Wiese <dawn@beingplaid.com>; Marlon Gibson <mgibson5879@gmail.com>

Subject: RE: NIC research

Good afternoon all,

Candidate Gibson has my full support in conducting his study with first generation students from Delta Sigma Phi.

Please let me know if you need any other information at this time!

Sincerely,

Phil Rodriguez

From: Dawn Wiese <dawn@beingplaid.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 24, 2019 8:38 PM
To: Rodriguez, Phillip <Rodriguez@deltasig.org>; mgibso5879@gmail.com
Subject: NIC research

Phil,

As we have discussed, I am working with doctoral candidate, Marlon Gibson, on his dissertation for his doctorate at the University of Georgia. He proposes a qualitative case study on the effects of fraternity membership on first-generation college students/leaders/chapter presidents within three separate North American Interfraternity Conference, specifically including Delta Sigma Phi.

He is in the process of putting together his prospectus (overview of the study). As part of that, he must meet with and seek approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Georgia.

Kindly respond to this email by “replying all” acknowledging that Candidate Gibson has your support in conducting his study with first-generation college students from Delta Sigma Phi. As we have discussed, he also plans to study alumni.

Marlon Gibson’s contact information is below should you have any questions.

Marlon Gibson
103 Westmont Way
Tyrone, GA 30290
e: mgibson5879@gmail.com

Dawn Watkins Wiese, Ph.D.
Vice President - Plaid, LLC
Cell: 540.461.0746
Email: Dawn@beingplaid.com
9525 Knollcrest Blvd.
Johns Creek, GA 30022
Toll Free: 855-BEINGPLAID
www.beingplaid.com

From: Wynn Smiley <wsmiley@ato.org>
Sent: Friday, October 25, 2019 10:59 AM

To: Dawn Wiese <dawn@beingplaid.com>
Cc: Marlon Gibson <mgibson5879@gmail.com>
Subject: RE: NIC Research

Thanks Dawn,

Marlon has Alpha Tau Omega's support. This is a very interesting topic and clearly something Alpha Tau Omega is interested in learning more about.

Wynn
Wynn Smiley, CEO

WYNN R. SMILEY | CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
ALPHA TAU OMEGA NATIONAL FRATERNITY
333 North Alabama Street, Suite 220, Indianapolis, IN 46204
Phone: 317.684.1865 | Fax: 317.684.1862 | Twitter: @WynnCEO
National Website | Alpha Tau Omega Roadshow | JoinAlpha Tau Omega | Facebook | Twitter

From: Dawn Wiese [mailto:dawn@beingplaid.com]
Sent: Thursday, October 24, 2019 8:35 PM
To: Wynn Smiley <wsmiley@ato.org>
Cc: mgibson5879@gmail.com
Subject: NIC Research

Wynn,

As we have discussed, I am working with doctoral candidate, Marlon Gibson, on his dissertation for his doctorate at the University of Georgia. He proposes a qualitative case study on the effects of fraternity membership on first-generation college students/leaders/chapter presidents within three separate North American Interfraternity Conference, specifically including Alpha Tau Omega.

He is in the process of putting together his prospectus (overview of the study). As part of that, he must meet with and seek approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Georgia.

Kindly respond to this email by “replying all” acknowledging that Candidate Gibson has your support in conducting his study with first-generation college students from Alpha Tau Omega. As we have discussed, he also plans to study alumni.

Marlon Gibson’s contact information is below should you have any questions.

Marlon Gibson
103 Westmont Way
Tyrone, GA 30290
e: mgibson5879@gmail.com