

HOW MY BROTHERS KEPT ME: A NARRATIVE STUDY EXPLORING
SENSE OF BELONGING FOR FIRST-GENERATION BLACK MEN WHO
JOINED A BLACK GREEK LETTER ORGANIZATION AT A
PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTION

By

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(Under the Direction of Georgianna L. Martin)

ABSTRACT

This narrative research study explored the lived experiences of first-generation Black men who joined a Black Greek letter organization (BGLO) as an undergraduate student and graduated from a predominately White institution (PWI). In particular, this study focused on their lived experiences with finding a sense of belonging; and how their membership in a BGLO (Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, and Iota Phi Theta) provided advantages or disadvantages in finding their sense of belonging. Focusing attention on participants who have successfully graduated offered detailed context on their experiences attending a PWI and resources in which their BGLO provided help to navigate the campus culture and matriculate towards graduation.

Participants were recruited by using a convenience sampling approach within professional, social, alumni affinity groups. Data were collected from ten participants and strategically analyzed in an analytical coding and thematic process. Four themes emerged from the data (“Navigating Unfamiliar Territory”: Self-Independence Before Joining, “A Whole Different World”: Life In College After Membership, “They Were Always There For Me”: Experiences Among Other Black

Men, and Professionally Trained Staff for NPHC Greek Organizations). Three themes were explored in greater context within the findings, while the fourth theme provided important information for practical application recommendations.

Overall, the ten participants who self-identified as a first-generation college student, a Black man, a member of a BGLO, and a graduate of a PWI between 2015-2020 shared detailed accounts of their lived experiences. The participants shared how the PWI culture during their first year was daunting, isolating, and ultimately did not provide any means to find a sense of belonging to persist towards graduation. The presence of BGLOs from a programmatic lens, joint ventures to collaborate for community service projects, and ultimately the unity of friendship and brotherhood intrigued and propelled these first-generation Black men to seek membership in their BGLO. Recommendations for future implications and research detail how higher education and student affairs administrators can work in tandem with first-generation Black men to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment at predominately White institutions.

INDEX WORDS: First-Generation, Black Man, Black Greek Letter Organization, Predominately White Institution, Fraternity, Sense of Belonging

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DEDICATION

My work is dedicated to the past, present, and future generations of first-generation Black men. Those who have successfully navigated the unknown and unfamiliar terrain of attending a predominately white institution (PWI) while searching to find their place and voice. Those who are currently attending a PWI and seeking supportive and inclusive spaces searching for a sense of belonging. Those who shall come generations afterward, may this work be applied to make your experience better while attending a PWI. I salute every first-generation Black man for his efforts of defeating obstacles, breaking down barriers, and achieving his goals while attending and graduating from a PWI. This work is for you!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of Problem.....	2
Purpose.....	4
Research Question	5
Theoretical Framework.....	5
Defining Terms	6
Significance of Study	7
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	10
First-Generation Black Men	11
Sense of Belonging	15
Black Men at Predominately White Institutions	18
Black Greek Letter Organizations	22
Conclusion	27
3 METHODOLOGY	29
Research Paradigm.....	29
Theoretical Framework.....	31
Research Design.....	32
Narrative Inquiry.....	33

	Subjectivity/Positionality	34
	Recruitment & Research Site.....	35
	Sampling	36
	Data Collection	37
	Data Analysis	37
	Organizing the Data	38
	Memoing	38
	Coding and Themes	38
	Interpreting the Data	39
	Presentation of Data	40
	Trustworthiness.....	40
	Conclusion	41
4	FINDINGS.....	43
	Participants	43
	Thematic Analysis	49
	“Navigating Unfamiliar Terrority”: Self-Independence Before Joining	50
	“A Whole Different World”: Life In College After Membership	58
	“They Were Always There For Me”: Experiences Among Other Black Men	64
	Conclusion	69
5	DISCUSSION.....	71
	Summary	71
	Discussion of Findings.....	73
	“Navigating Unfamiliar Terrority”: Self-Independence Before Joining	74

“A Whole Different World”: Life In College After Membership	75
“They Were Always There For Me”: Experiences Among Other Black Men	77
Recommendations for Practice	78
One-Stop-Shop.....	79
Professionally Trained Staff for NPHC Greek Organizations	80
Opportunities for Black Men on Campus	81
Overall Assistance for First-Generation Black Men.....	82
Recommendations for Future Research	83
Conclusion	84
References	86
Appendices.....	94
A- Interview Protocol.....	95
B- Institutional Review Board Consent Form	97
C- Solicitation Flyer To Participants.....	100

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

August 22, 2005, November 17, 2007, and August 7, 2009, are three important dates in my history. They are three distinctive moments that signify the achievements of a first-generation Black man who joined a Black Greek letter organization (BGLO) at a predominately White institution (PWI). August 22, 2005, was my first day as a first-generation college student at a rural public institution. Although my parents did not attend a college or university, my knowledge of being a college student came from the lived experiences told by various family members and older friends who had already attended or were currently in college.

The experience of being a first-generation Black man at a PWI would ultimately evolve into a career opportunity and cultivate relationships that would develop character and values-building tenets throughout my life. I was able to find my sense of belonging during my undergraduate collegiate career while engaging and interacting with other Black men who were members of a BGLO. My knowledge of these organizations (Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, and Iota Phi Theta) was based on lived experiences told by others. However, I did not have extensive knowledge of how these organizations fit into the university system and why it ultimately would be important for me to join.

On November 17, 2007, I officially became a member of an organization that shared the same characteristics and demographics as myself. The experiences that came from joining this organization of Black men extended into my graduate and post-collegiate life. The tools and resources that this BLG provided offered a platform for Black men, such as myself, to be

successful academically and socially, which ultimately assisted in my matriculation towards graduation on August 7, 2009.

Statement of Problem

Overall, Black men account for 700,000 students enrolled at PWIs (Digest of Education Statistics, 2019). Unfortunately, the recruitment and retention of Black men have been challenging as colleges and universities are unable to help them matriculate towards graduation (Roach, 2001). A study completed by Harper (2006) focused its attention on 50 public flagship institutions that reported approximately 70% of Black men enrolled at a PWI leave before graduating, whether it be withdrawing or transferring to another institution. The report also uncovered major statistical implications that compare Black men at a PWI to their counterparts. The report stated that Black women outnumber Black men within enrollment by 27.2%, while White men successfully earned more degrees at 10 times the average of Black men.

Diving deeper into this study, the comparative analysis of Black men compared to other gender and racial counterparts paints a painstaking narrative about this marginalized population. In 2004, of the 500 Black men who were enrolled at 30 of the 50 public institutions in the study, only 44.3% completed their degree than White men at 61.4% and Black women at 53.2% (Harper, 2006). The mission of colleges and universities is to provide an opportunity for everyone to be successful through education, and many PWIs have created programs and services geared towards Black men such as the Black Male Initiatives; however, these statistics related to the enrollment and graduation rates of Black men continue to decline and separate them from their racial and gender counterparts (Baker, 2013; Harper, 2006).

Researchers such as Ottley and Ellis (2019) believed that it is essential that colleges and universities continue to focus on understanding and becoming familiar with Black men's

experiences to increase enrollment and graduation rates. One way to understand and provide a solution to this problem stems from understanding and increasing the sense of belonging of Black men on campus and their means of getting involved and assimilating to their new environment. Research has shown that sense of belonging is a major factor for Black men, especially for those who identify as first-generation and low income as they are less likely to get involved and join social activities in college (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016; Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging, which a plethora of academic researchers has analyzed, can be defined as a feeling of connectedness; the sense of being wanted, involved, and ultimately mattering (Allen, 1992; Hoffman, Richard, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002-2003; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1987).

In contrast, Hilton and Bonner (2017) suggested that it would be more beneficial for first-generation Black men to attend a historically Black college or university (HBCU) rather than a PWI due to the services and resources that are already in place. Black men are better integrated and receive better support in their academic and social environments attending an HBCU (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). However, many first-generation Black men may wonder if getting a postsecondary degree is worth it; some first-generation Black men feel as though they are making the wrong decision in attending college as they witness their peers accept employment opportunities directly out of high school and allowing them to remain within their community (Ottley & Ellis, 2019).

Interviews conducted by Ottley and Ellis (2019) on retention initiatives at a PWI with first-generation Black men noted that many feel unprepared and lack certain intellectual capabilities such as adjusting to a robust and rigorous academic environment and navigating the campus community as compared to their peers. Respondents also shared how their experience of

being stereotyped (Black athlete, not intelligent, aggressive, and competitive) by their counterparts adds to their frustrations of being a first-generation Black man at the PWI (Ottley & Ellis, 2019).

Factors such as the campus culture contribute to a Black man's sense of belonging at a PWI as they seek social outlets to connect and engage (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Ottley & Ellis, 2019). Palmer and Young (2009) felt that campus involvement and integration into the campus community help shape the student experience and provide an added benefit for belonging. Membership in fraternal organizations has been linked to enhancing Black men's experiences in their academic quest by providing a supportive outlet on campus (Brooms, 2018). Strayhorn's (2012) research further expanded this belief by noting that BGLOs help create social spaces and a sense of belonging for Black men, particularly at a PWI.

Strayhorn's findings revealed that "joining a Black Greek letter organization provides some Black men with the opportunity to interact with others who share similar perspectives" (p. 83). In a study comparing the disparities in academic performance between Black and Latino men, evidence was presented that BGLOs help Black men find their self-esteem and present avenues to promote a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2010). The study further stated that encouraging Black men to get involved in these organizations would be advantageous to their success at PWIs. It would prevent isolation and work in tandem between campus integration and adjusting to the PWI culture (Brooms, 2018).

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black men who joined a BGLO as an undergraduate student and graduated from a PWI. In particular, I focused on participants' lived experiences with a sense of belonging.

Research on first-generation Black men who attend a PWI offers context on the systemic barriers that impact a positive progression at the postsecondary level. These findings highlighted the lived experiences from participants who graduated and are members of the National Pan Hellenic Council (NPHC) men's BGLOs (Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, and Iota Phi Theta) and how their experiences provided advantages or disadvantages in finding their sense of belonging. Focusing attention on participants who have successfully graduated offered detailed context on their experiences attending a PWI and resources in which their BGLO provided to help navigate the campus culture and matriculate towards graduation.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this research:

1. What are first-generation Black men's experiences who join a Black Greek letter organization at a predominately White institution?
2. What support and resources do Black Greek letter organizations at predominately White institutions offer their members to feel a sense of belonging?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in this study is a sense of belonging. Sense of belonging refers to one's ability to adapt, engage, and evolve in a specific environmental space (Strayhorn, 2012). In this study, I explored first-generation Black men's PWI experiences and how their BGLO provided advantages or disadvantages in finding their sense of belonging. Research centered around Black men in higher education has categorized the issues facing this marginalized population in four categories: (a) representation, (b) access within the educational pipeline, (c) challenges, and (d) supportive factors (Strayhorn, 2012).

Strayhorn argued that belonging is the appropriate justification in addressing these concerns as belonging is a goal and needed accomplishment for Black men in addition to “promoting educational success” (p. 82). This sense of belonging for a Black man attending a PWI is paramount as it provides and aims to eliminate the cause for isolation, underrepresentation, and emotional trauma (Strayhorn, 2012). One avenue in which researchers such as Strayhorn believe will provide a true sense of belonging for Black men at a PWI is through BGLOs. These BGLOs assist Black men in adjusting to college, helping them make sense of their experiences at PWIs, and fostering a sense of belonging among BGLOs (Strayhorn, 2012).

Using this theoretical framework will help understand how belonging mattered to first-generation Black men who joined a BGLO as an undergraduate student and graduated from a PWI. The BGLO experience for Black men provides the needed guidance in adjusting to college life, understanding the experience at a PWI, and finding their sense of belonging within a peer-to-peer setting (Strayhorn, 2012). This framework, further discussed in Chapter 3, addresses the aforementioned four categories and how they can be applied to first-generation Black men who join a BGLO at a PWI.

Defining Terms

- First-Generation- a college student whose parents did not earn a college degree (First-Generation, 2020)
- Belonging- a students' 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 the group (Strayhorn, 2012)

- BGLO- Black Greek letter organization within a collective body of fraternities and sororities associated with the National Pan Hellenic Council (NPHC)
- NPHC- National Pan Hellenic Council is a collaborative organization of historically African American, international Greek lettered fraternities and sororities, commonly referred to as a Black Greek letter organization (BGLO)
- PWI- predominately White institution is the term used to describe higher learning institutions in which White students account for 50% or greater of the total student enrollment.

Significance of the Study

Palmer and Young (2009) believed that even though there are “social and economic” (p. 475) benefits of a college degree, Black men are deprived of these benefits due to higher education institutions' inability to retain them. According to a National Center for Education Statistics (2019) report, approximately 700,000 Black men are enrolled at a PWI. In this same study, an exploration of the 2012 cohort of Black men found that even though 36.2% completed their degree (the lowest of all men), an alarming 41.2% dropped out or withdrew from the institution (the second-highest of all men).

The research and literature on first-generation Black men who join a BGLO at a PWI are minimal. A study completed on first-generation Black men who attended a PWI reported that Black men found it quite difficult to advance academically and socially without fellow peers' assistance and a supportive institutional administration (Ottley & Ellis, 2019). As Ottley and Ellis noted, this assistance came in the form of “embracing the campus culture, joining student organizations, partnering with other peers, and developing positive working relationships with faculty” (p.100). Research has been completed by Ahren, Bureau, Ryan, and Torres (2014) that

provided data on first-generation students in general and their level of student engagement within fraternities and sororities. Their data inferred that membership in a fraternity or sorority produced successful engagement and belonging for first-generation college students. However, their findings did not convey any racial or gender implications, nor did it specifically state the impact that membership in a fraternity can have on first-generation Black men. Limitations on the research conducted by Ahren et al. (2014) specifically recommend that further research and studies be conducted on subsets of the first-generation population of fraternity and sorority members.

This research study will supplement those limitations and contribute to the body of literature and the student affairs profession by providing contextual findings and implications on how BGLOs provide tools and resources for first-generation Black men. Furthermore, these resources will highlight how these BGLOs foster a sense of belonging academically and socially for their members. Strayhorn (2010) argued that Black men would benefit from membership in a BGLO due to like-minded individuals' exposure in the organizations providing support and resources for each other. Strayhorn also stated that student affairs professionals would benefit from these findings. The data would provide context on how impactful BGLOs would be for first-generation Black men enrolled at a PWI.

From an institutional lens, Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) expressed that it would be advantageous for colleges and universities to support first-generation Black men in their academic and social experiences. The field of student affairs is encouraged to devote adequate resources towards understanding this marginalized population that appreciates the social interactions that can come from BGLOs and promote an advantageous exchange of out-of-classroom experiences (Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2015; Parker & Pascarella, 2018). The

campus environment is believed to be one of and potentially the most important aspect in increasing belonging for first-generation Black men at PWIs (Cuyjet, 1997). Strayhorn (2012) argued that Black men are more likely to get involved and excel academically when they find a sense of belonging to their campus community. Also, Strayhorn believed that for specifically, Black men, involvement associated with joining a BGLO contributes to a sense of belonging.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I explored the literature on the experiences of first-generation Black men, sense of belonging, the experiences of Black men attending a PWI, and the BGLO experiences for Black men. Higher education continues to be challenged with understanding why institutions continue to fail at retaining Black men and how higher education institutions can create avenues to increase enrollment and retain this marginalized population. In this study, I explored the lived experiences of participants who graduated from a PWI and how their membership in a BGLO as an undergraduate student provided advantages or disadvantages in finding their sense of belonging. These Black men come from different backgrounds and have a plethora of experiences that have shaped their outlook on their lives and the world around them.

Research on first-generation Black men who attend a PWI provides significant details on the issues, challenges, and achievements of this marginalized student population. Ahren et. al (2014) believed that even though this marginalized population is diverse in their characteristics, they share the common perception of being the most “at-risk” or challenged in their ability to integrate into the campus community, master their academic requirements and expectations, and ultimately find the financial support to pay for their education (p.2).

Research has shown that only about one-third of Black men enrolled in higher education will actually complete an undergraduate degree (Hilton & Bonner, 2017). In a study focused on Black men who attend public flagship institutions, Harper (2006) provided details concerning the staggering statistics of Black men and their inability to persist and graduate. The study shows

that the overall percentage of Black men enrolled at flagship institutions in 1976 was the same in 2002. In addition, the report notes that the persistence towards graduation among Black men only increased by 0.2% between 1977 and 2003.

Furthermore, the report provides concerns about the retention efforts of Black men enrolled at public flagship institutions citing that “more than two-thirds (67.6%) of Black men who start college do not graduate within six years” (Harper, 2006, p. vii). A multitude of scholars have posed the question and conducted research around why Black men are not attending college. Two different studies completed within a five-year span both found similar results concluding that Black men face challenges in their quest to get to college and experience structural and systemic barriers that prevents them from being retained if they do actually enroll (Cuyjet, 1997; Roach, 2001). Overall, there are several themes in the literature (first generation, sense of belonging, Black men at a PWI, and Black Greek letter organizations) that address how college and university administrators can assist in helping first-generation Black men who are members of a BGLO find their sense of belonging at a PWI.

First-Generation Black Men

The term “first-generation” is defined as a college student whose parents did not earn a college degree (First Generation, 2020). For first-generation Black men this one of numerous obstacles that challenge their success at the post-secondary level; especially at a PWI as it places undue burdens on their pathway to success (Wilkins, 2014). Tinto’s (1993) framework on student retention alludes to various components that first-generation Black men face in college such as isolation, unpreparedness for rigorous academic coursework, financial concerns, and family obligations . The implications of receiving an education predicts the access and opportunities that one can receive from the social and economic benefits that a degree carries

(Owens, Lacy, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince, 2010). These benefits are recognizable. Black men and women who hold a college degree earn significantly more income annually than those who do not have a college degree (U. S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

Charting a successful course for first-generation Black men, especially at a PWI, must start at home. Joe and Davis (2009) shared that the likelihood of first-generation Black men being successful involves parental engagement. In addition, research shows that early childhood academic administrators should work closely with parents of Black boys to ensure they are exerting their full academic potential as the perception of the teacher or faculty member plays an important role in fostering success; especially if Black men can closely identify with their teacher (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Joe & Davis, 2009; Strayhorn, 2012). However, for most first-generation Black men that are raised in inner city communities, they attend public schools and are taught by a White female or Black female; typically leaving the only presence of a Black man at school in the form of a custodial staff member or athletic coach (Palmer, Scott, & Taylor, 2013).

A study completed by Keels (2013) showed that students with college educated parents are more likely to do well and succeed in their first year in comparison to those students whose parents do not possess a college degree. In addition, Keels found that Black men with a college educated mother drastically increased the likelihood of their degree attainment compared to those whose mother did not have a college degree. Freeman and Huggans (2009) also noted that first-generation Black men struggle to succeed in post-secondary education at greater rates than those whose parents have a college degree. Even Black men who have conversations with their parents

about going to college and the implications that college may have on their future can result in exponential results (Strayhorn, 2010).

Pre-college preparation in high school is the primary source of setting these students on the right avenue for success. Olenchak and Hébert's (2002) research focused on the endangered academic talents of first-generation students; students that have performed well academically in the K-12 system yet found it challenging to succeed in their post-secondary educational journey as their academic talents have been suppressed by their first-generation identity. Further, they emphasized that colleges and universities cannot change a student's experience in high school (Olenchak & Hebert, 2002), however other researchers such as Harper (2006) have laid claims that colleges and universities are the perfect change agents to foster this positive experience. If colleges and universities want to increase the enrollment of first-generation Black men, services and collaborative methods such as TRIO and GEAR UP can be pipelines to help students excel before they enroll (Harper, 2006). According to the United States Department of Education, services such as TRIO and GEAR UP are federally funded grants and programs aimed at increasing post-secondary education access for first-generation and marginalized populations (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

First-generation Black men also experience disadvantages due to the lack of pre-college advice and exposure. Most first-generation Black men do not have the immediate or extended family support to provide guidance and knowledge on what is expected from a college student as it relates to rigorous academic coursework, social interaction, and the day to day involvement of a holistic student (Keels, 2013). Harper (2006) argued that college administrators and even community legislators should dedicate physical and financial resources to ensuring that institutions are creating awareness and access for Black men. This access includes creating

programs and initiatives that focus on college readiness and links the K-12 system to college for a clear pathway into higher education (Strayhorn, 2010).

First-generation Black men are not only dependent on their parents for support in getting enrolled but the need for financial support is also evident. The financial stability of the parent is vitally important in ensuring success on the collegiate level as financial aid packages from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) are based on the parent's income and tax bracket (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2014; Longmire-Avital & Miller-Dyce, 2015). The type of financial aid a student is given is a large determinant in the college or university that the student will attend and as a result determines the graduation expectancy of these first-generation Black men. Harper (2006) suggested that institutions dedicate specific staff related to admissions and enrollment management to recruit more Black men to the college or university. These admissions and enrollment management counselors would assist in identifying scholarships and appropriate aid packages that students can apply to receive.

As we dig deeper into the statistics, 74.3% of Black men are graduating from high school, however only one third or 33.8% of these students continue their education at a post-secondary institution compared to 41.9% of White men and 43.9% percent of Black women (Harper, 2006). Researchers such as Cuyjet (1997) believe that first-generation students who decide to enroll and earn a college degree should have dedicated resources and services available to assist them in this transition. Student affairs professionals are encouraged to work closely with first-generation Black men to improve their transition to college as statistics showcase the decline in enrollment and retention (Cuyjet, 1997).

The transition from high school to college is an important factor for first-generation Black men compared to their White counterparts. For White men this transition was seamless as

they fit right in and began to integrate themselves in the campus community, however, the ability for first-generation Black men to just “fit-in” was never an option especially at a PWI (Olenchak & Hebert, 2002; Wilkins, 2004). Services that focus directly on first-generation, cultural awareness, or aspects of entering college such as what first-year experience programs offer is critical to first-generation students’ success in college, especially at a PWI (Olenchak & Hébert, 2002). It is also noted that college and university personnel should explore the interest, abilities, and skills of first-generation Black men as the results of this intentionality will benefit not only the student but the university as a whole (Owens et. al, 2010).

Sense of Belonging

Belonging is the perceived idea of support and reassurance that one can receive from being connected to other entities (Keene, 2020). Keene further argued that the idea of belonging is the ability to recognize areas in a social, mental, or environmental setting that have been enhanced by one or multiple things. Sense of belonging is also a psychological and humanistic desire to find acceptance and appreciation in any given environment (Strayhorn, 2012). This desire is mutually exclusive to those around an individual and involved in the everyday interactions. Sense of belonging gives the researchers an opportunity to learn how students are connected to the college or university and to what extent this connection exists (Strayhorn, 2010).

Academic scholars have spent several years providing context to how sense of belonging relates to various populations including Black men. Sense of belonging is the connection point to the institution (Hoffman et. al, 2002-2003). However, others have suggested that not finding a sense of belonging is the reason why students find a void in their experience and opt to remove themselves from the environment (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Meanwhile, the term belonging has

also been identified as an aspect of overall fit into a system (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwseman, & Collier, 1992). Hagerty et. al (1992) believed that this fit characteristic refers to making sure that one's values and beliefs are congruent and align with others.

Sense of belonging for Black men is compounded by several different factors. Research has shown that Black men are severely underrepresented on a college campus, especially at a PWI, in addition to the atmosphere of a PWI being less welcoming and culturally insensitive (Strayhorn, 2012). Black men seek outlets within the campus community in which they have a direct and genuine connection to not only their peers but the institution as a whole (Strayhorn, 2012). Black men seek inclusive settings such as affinity groups and BGLOs, however, they still need the support of the greater campus community to solidify their place and feel as though they belong in the environment (Strayhorn, 2012).

Engagement on campus is one aspect in which Black men can experience a sense of belonging, however, it can become rather difficult for Black men as they attempt to navigate a non-inclusive campus environment (Lloyd, 2009). College and university administrators have placed an emphasis on getting Black men acclimated and accustomed to the university and their new environment. Campus involvement and integration into the campus community helps shape the student experience and provides an added benefit for belonging (Palmer & Young, 2009). It can also be noted that engagement in on-campus activities is pivotal to their success" (Palmer & Young, 2009, p.471). Student involvement creates an atmosphere for belonging and fosters a commitment to the campus environment among Black men. Black men who get involved on campus also become more familiar with campus resources that aid and assist in their academic and social endeavors (Palmer & Young, 2009).

Campus involvement has been linked to providing substantial aspects of belonging for college students. Astin's (1984) involvement theory links educational engagement to student's overall connectedness and involvement to the college or university. Research being conducted by Strayhorn (2010) asserted that campus involvement with diverse populations has a direct correlation to a Black man's sense of belonging. A study, which was centered on how diverse interactions with peers affect sense of belonging with Black men, concluded that diverse interactions with racial and gender peers were advantageous for Black men as it resulted in getting connected to the institution (Strayhorn, 2010).

Students are able to become acclimated with the university on an academic and social level when they get involved and begin to form a community or family like atmosphere within their new university environment (Tinto, 1987). Additional research by Strayhorn (2012) on Black men's sense of belonging concluded that Black men portrayed their experience with an affinity group or BGLO as a family. Mincey, Turner, Brown, and Maurice (2017) further attested that common spaces are needed for Black men to foster a sense of belonging; these common spaces are an opportunity for them to share about physical and mental health issues as these two are common reason why Black men drop out of college.

The affiliation in this type of social group can increase a student's sense of belonging especially when one feels distant from the dominant campus culture (Kuh & Love, 2000). Keels (2013) provided greater context that Black men would "likely benefit from the support of having same gender and ethnicity peers in their campus social network" (p. 311). A study completed by Harper (2006) reported that Black men seek social groups such as BGLOs to provide a sense of belonging; thus, offering tools and resources to connect and engage academically and socially.

Keels (2013) attributed Black men's persistence at a PWI to their on-campus social network within a similar or same racial group or organization.

Black men also need faculty and staff that resemble their same race and gender to fulfill this social component and satisfy their sense of belonging. Scott, Taylor, and Palmer (2013) argued that Black men desire to have relationships with Black teachers and mentors as it will promote a familiar parental like atmosphere that they have experienced at home. Harper (2006) suggested that institutions should invest in the recruitment of Black men to be a part of the faculty instead of recycling faculty and staff of color. Moving forward, we should not only mentor but take personal relationship interest in Black men as "success in college may not lie in the hands of any one person; rather, the entire university community working together to address retention and persistence" (Palmer & Young, 2014, p. 477). Palmer and Young's findings show that when faculty and staff intentionally and actively "demonstrate empathy, concern, and belief in their ability to succeed" (p. 476) Black men's academic success increases.

Overall, sense of belonging has been linked to the positive outcomes that Black men attending college, and especially a PWI, need to establish themselves and feel connected to the institution. Connecting Maslow's hierarchy of needs diagram with belonging, Maslow (1968) believed that students need to fulfill their state of belonging before moving forward to self-actualization. Belonging is a desire that is sought by every individual, however, Strayhorn (2012) recognized that all students will not experience it the same, but all will benefit from it.

Black Men at Predominately White Institutions

Separate but equal is a well-known statement throughout the course of American history as it refers to the status of educational facilities within the United States prior to 1954 (History, 2020). Landmark decisions such as Plessy v. Ferguson and Jim Crow laws in the early 20th

century prevented Black men from attending a PWI. However, in 1954 a decision by the United States Supreme Court ruled that the clause “separate but equal” was unconstitutional and all public institutions must desegregate with the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (History, 2020). Unfortunately, the research surrounding Black men who attend a PWI found that these students still face several hardships and difficulties. These hardships are related to systemic structures and barriers that can interfere with their success.

Davis (1995) stated that PWIs are not providing the support that Black men need to persist and matriculate to graduation. Lloyd (2009) expanded this belief by arguing that the PWI institutional framework of English Anglo-Saxon culture in which PWIs are founded upon and utilized by faculty and staff are one of the systemic structures that do not support Black men. These findings are one of several components that contribute to Black men having the highest rate of attrition compared with their other gender and racial counterparts (Strayhorn, 2013).

The non-inclusive programmatic efforts, discriminatory policies and procedures, and even the perceptions of Black men are evidence of systematic structures and barriers that Gordon, Gordon, and Nembhard (1994) believed to be pervasive among the experiences of Black men on a PWI campus. In addition, integration into the campus environment has been found to be a major factor in contributing to the lack of Black men succeeding at the institution (Lloyd, 2009). Black men attending a PWI often experience a disconnection to their new environment due to the lack of integration into the campus community (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002).

This disconnect leads to lower levels of academic performance and an urgency to find a different setting resulting in transferring or withdrawing from the institution (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Activities for students inside and outside of the classroom have been linked to the success of first-generation Black men (Ahren et. al, 2014). However, Lloyd (2009) found that

microaggressions, inside and outside of the classroom within a PWI, such as supervisibility and invisibility are reasons why Black men have difficulty engaging on campus.

Common indicators of the invisibility microaggressions are displayed when Black men are explicitly ignored by faculty in the classroom and their ideas and opinions are devalued when expressed (Solorzano, Cela, & Yosso, 2000). However, on the opposite end of the spectrum, Black men experience supervisibility when they are frequently asked to speak on topics such as race, gender, or poverty and frequently volunteered for purposes of diversity and inclusion. These microaggressions result in Black men feeling drained and overworked while aspiring to succeed academically and socially (Solorzano et. al, 2000).

Even though PWIs are more racially diverse than ever before, Black men still face significant challenges related to their social, cultural and economic status, over their White counterparts which ultimately affects their sense of belonging at the institution (Cuyjet, 1997; Ottley & Ellis, 2019). Statistically, White men earn a college degree at a higher rate than Black men while Black men transfer or withdraw at a higher percentage than any other racial group (Baker 2013; Harper, 2006; Ottley & Ellis, 2019). Cuyjet (1997) went further to note that some of the reasons why Black men fail to receive their undergraduate degree could be related to their inability to perform at the collegiate level which is a direct reflection of their high school experience.

The lack of Black men to serve as mentors at colleges and universities is also an area of concern. At public institutions within the United States, Black men only represent 1.1% of the overall faculty population (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper 2006). Black men thrive from having Black faculty and staff role models to provide guidance, life skills, and overall support (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011; Harper, 2006; Wood, 2014). Goode-Cross and Tager (2011) completed a study with

Black men who noted that “being mentored by peers, faculty, and staff with whom they identified was helpful” (p.1244). Respondents to the study affirmed the aforementioned sentiments that by having the connection to a fellow Black man in the faculty or staff role helped strengthen and improve their commitment to the PWI.

Ottley and Ellis (2019) believed that significant research should be completed on campus-based retention programs to accurately address the needs of Black men on campus. Ottley and Ellis argued that these programs lack substantial amounts of funding and administrative support to be successful. College and university administrators traditionally resort to antiquated theoretical models to understand the decline in the enrollment and retention of Black men, however a conscious effort should be made to establish programs and services in tandem with Black men to meet their needs while incorporating the university mission and vision (Ottley & Ellis, 2019).

Strayhorn (2012) believed that retention of Black men can be summarized by understanding their environmental, social, and psychological needs. He noted that the social aspects are the peer to peer interactions and receiving support from faculty and staff; while the psychological factors involve increased levels of self-grit and confidence. Self-grit is the mental ability to persevere and independently use self-efficacy to obtain desired goals and outcomes. Grit has been found to positively increase academic performance for Black men that attend a PWI (Strayhorn, 2013). The environmental factor is key to the social components of Black men at a PWI. It deals with getting accustomed to their new environment, understanding, accepting and embracing the culture, and ultimately finding their sense of belonging in this new space that will impact their life trajectory (Strayhorn, 2012).

Although recruitment material appears to be welcoming for all students, Black men who attend a PWI express feelings of isolation and prejudice from their racial counterparts (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). Black men experience situations that become constant reminders that they are members of a minority and marginalized community based on various events that take place. One of these situations is within the classroom, as Black men recognize the limited number of fellow Black men in attendance (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). The lack of Black men in the classroom is very salient when conversations concerning race and gender are discussed; Black men are often left feeling emotionally taxed due to constant representation (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011).

Some Black men attending a PWI even believe that it is their personal responsibility to get involved and engaged at their institution. This responsibility to is not only a means of having representation (as a minority) but also as means of opening up doors for future Black men (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). This access gateway mindset was expressed in an interview conducted by Hotchkins and Dancy with Black men concerning their success and academic values, who stated:

“It is important that I position myself as the most efficient and effective leader within all of my organizations. Doing so positively vets the next Black man, while giving me the opportunities to enter doors and spaces other Black students are denied” (p.16).

Black Greek Letter Organizations

Lloyd (2009) argued that Black peer groups are important in helping shape and form racial identity for Black students. In addition, fraternal organizations may help to embrace and cultivate racial identity for those who join a fraternity; which as a result may provide Black students the opportunity to share and experience positive affirmations within these networks

(Lloyd, 2009). McKenzie (1990) believed that BGLOs, specifically fraternities were formed and organized to offer various aspects such as leadership to the African American culture.

Furthermore, these organizations were founded to be a support system both academically and socially. Organizations such as BGLOs could possibly be the niche that Black men need to advance within their culture and community (Harris & Mitchell, 2008). Membership in activities such as fraternities are linked to phenomenal levels of student engagement for first-generation Black men (Ahren, et. al, 2014).

According to the National Pan Hellenic Council (2020), there are five Black Greek letter fraternities comprised within the National Pan Hellenic Council (NPHC) which are Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, and Iota Phi Theta. Incorporated under the laws of the State of Illinois in 1937, the NPHC is a collective group that advocates, supports, and promotes the general concerns that affects all of its members (NPHC, 2020). In addition, it is worthy to note that two of these fraternities were founded on the campuses of PWIs between 1906-1911 in the midst of racial discrimination and lack of equality and inclusion for Black men; while the other three were founded at HBCUs between 1911-1963 (Ross, 2000).

Isolated and segregated from the general population, a group of Black men at Cornell University, an ivy league PWI, were unsuccessful in integrating into the campus environment which resulted in them leaving the university (Ross, 2000). Ross explained that social groups in 1906 were not accessible for Black men. This plight spearheaded the need for Black men to find their sense of belonging within each other and their campus environment. Seven undergraduate students became the founders of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity on December 4, 1906 becoming the first BGLO in the United States (Ross, 2000).

Alpha Phi Alpha contributes to uplifting the African American community by participating in various national programs such as mentoring, world and national affairs, and education. Ross (2000) noted how members of Alpha Phi Alpha are involved in programs such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters to impact the youth prior to coming to college and advocate for social change within various levels of government that ideally impact its people. Members of this BGLO value their commitment to impacting the lives of youth by investing in its “Go to High School, Go to College” program with hopes of creating a continued legacy of Black men persisting towards graduation (Ross, 2000).

The second BGLO for men, Kappa Alpha Psi, was founded five years after Alpha Phi Alpha was established at Cornell University. Separate but equal was a common theme at Indiana University, a PWI, as students of color, particularly the Black men, found it very difficult to find their sense of belonging on the campus (Ross, 2000). Students of color were not allowed to use any recreational or entertainment facilities and rarely had opportunities to see each other. To change this theme, ten undergraduate Black men gathered and founded Kappa Alpha Nu Fraternity on January 5, 1911 on the campus of Indiana University. However, Ross (2000), noted that due to racial implications that referred to members of Kappa Alpha Nu as “Kappa Alpha Nig”, the fraternity changed its name to Kappa Alpha Psi in 1914.

Understanding the need to impact the youth in the community, members of Kappa Alpha Psi created its first national service program, entitled Guide Right. Ross (2000) believed that Guide Right is instrumental in aiding high school Black seniors in achieving with hopes to further their post-secondary education. Developing critical leadership skills is the foundation of the Kappa League program to help young men become successful in their desired career field (Ross, 2000).

The third BGLO for men yet the first to be founded at a HBCU was founded on November 17, 1911. The three Black men who founded Omega Psi Phi Fraternity recognized the need to establish another Black society for men at their institution. Ross (2000), noted that the founders believed that establishing a fraternity at the HBCU would embody the ideals, customs, and values of the African American culture. As noted, before Omega Psi Phi was founded, both BGLOs for men were founded at PWIs.

Ross (2000) pointed out that members of Omega Psi Phi contribute to the Black community in various ways such as achievement week, scholarships, and social action programs. The efforts of achievement week recognize noteworthy individuals that are impacting the lives of African Americans on a local and national level. Scholarships are given to fellow undergraduate members via their adjudicating graduate members to promote scholarship and excellence. And their social action programs work within the community to promote essential services and platforms that are integral to society. Ross (2000) believed that these three components help establish Omega Psi Phi at Howard University and throughout the United States at other college campuses.

By the start of the 1914 academic year, another BGLO for men was starting to form. According to Ross (2000), three undergraduate Black men at Howard University founded Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity on January 9, 1914. This BGLO for men instantly began working within the Black community and investing in businesses and activist organizations. Their motto “Service for Culture, Culture for Humanity” offered insight into their local, national and global missions as members of Phi Beta Sigma began outreach efforts domestically and globally with special interest in Haiti (Ross, 2000).

The fifth and final BGLO for men was founded during a time of racial injustice in the United States. According to Ross (2000), the 1960s were a turbulent time for the African American community and Black men were seeking a difference in the activism and organizations that were attempting to advance the cause of racial equity. On September 19, 1963, twelve undergraduate Black men founded Iota Phi Theta Fraternity.

This BGLO for men was not the traditional organization created by traditional aged college students; their founders were non-traditional college students interested in changing the current narrative of their time (Ross, 2000). Ross noted that one of the pivotal programs hosted by Iota Phi Theta African American Male Educational Network is the Iota Youth Alliance. This program seeks to mentor Black youth in creating opportunities for success.

While there are five BGLOs for men, collectively these fraternal organizations enhance the collegiate experience and offer a sense of belonging for Black men (Ahren et. al, 2014; Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). At their very heart, these organizations are invested in the uplifting of Black men at various stages of their educational journeys, evidenced through their philanthropic and service endeavors and the myriad mentorship and development opportunities they offer their members. Research conducted by Mitchell (2014) suggested that involvement in a BGLO resulted in a high level of student involvement on campus compared to students who were not a member. Mitchell found that students who were members of a BGLO were involved in multiple campus-based clubs and organizations and even held leadership positions. The social capital as it relates to personal gains are contributed by membership in a BGLO for Black men. McClure (2006) believed that BGLOs offer Black men a social community at a PWI. McClure noted that these fraternities give Black men the past, present, and future aspects of society within these organizations.

Conclusion

It has become the duty and responsibility of higher education professionals to focus on methods that would enrich and embrace first-generation Black men who attend a PWI (Cuyjet, 1997). Cuyjet believed that student affairs administrators and academic entities should be responsible for re-educating the campus community in order to dispel the cultural statistics of Black men. In addition, Arhen et. al (2014) noted that high performing fraternity and sorority members are a result of a working relationship with the institution and the organization which includes but not limited to, setting objective and strategic targets that focus on pre-college preparation, advisement on financial assistance, and assisting students in getting acclimated to their new surroundings.

Black students have found the PWI environment to be “isolating because of the lack of a critical mass of Black students, faculty, and administrators” (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001, p. 420; 2002; Strayhorn, 2012). The critical mass is subjective as each individual student must identify their support network and feel connected and comfortable among peers and individuals that encourage a sense of belonging. Goode-Cross and Tager (2011) argued that Black men thrive when they are connected to supportive environments that allow them to identify with likeminded peers and foster supportive relationships. The literature also argued that Black men are disinterested in furthering their education beyond high school because they will be less likely to see a favorable return on their investment compared to White men (Palmer & Young, 2009).

While many can identify the failures of first-generation Black men, this study focused on their strengths to explore sense of belonging academically and socially during college through BGLO membership. Changing the narrative of first-generation Black men in general must be redirected to showcase the achievements and accomplishments especially for those who identify

as first-generation college students (Strayhorn, 2012). Eliminating the need to focus on deficiencies and working to strengthen the voice of success displayed by first-generation Black men will help in establishing a relationship with those enrolled at PWIs (Strayhorn, 2012). Membership in a BGLO can produce positive benefits for first-generation Black men who attend a PWI in regards to increased levels of self-esteem; BGLO membership may also counter the narrative of social isolation and offer opportunities for influencing students' sense of belonging during college (Taylor & Howards-Hamilton, 1995).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative social constructivist research study focused on understanding sense of belonging for first-generation Black men who joined a BGLO as an undergraduate student and graduated from a PWI. The participants held membership in one of the National Pan Hellenic Council (NPHC) men's BGLOs (Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, and Iota Phi Theta). Using a social constructivism paradigm and framework, this qualitative research study explored the lived experiences of the participants. In this chapter, I detailed my research design, data collection and analysis, present my positionality as the researcher, and discuss the ways I ensured trustworthiness in the research.

Research Paradigm

Research paradigms help guide our beliefs and responses towards a certain cause and effect. In completing this narrative research study, it was appropriate to use the social constructivism paradigm as it gave me, as the researcher, an opportunity to intentionally connect with the participants by analyzing the cause and effect of how their experience of being a first-generation Black man in a BGLO played a significant role in their matriculation at a PWI. The social constructivism paradigm, which is the understanding of complexities associated through interactions socially and historically, assisted in understanding the participants' lived experiences and how specific actions or reactions to their surroundings, environment, and affiliations relate to the research topic (Creswell, 2013). The participants provided a plethora of viewpoints and areas of interest that are summarized and centralized into themes in the next chapter. In addition to the

social aspects, the participants shared insights on how the historical views of BGLOs played an important part in their fraternal experience. The ways in which participants perceived their organizations from a historical viewpoint prior and after joining is important as their collegiate experiences and membership in the organization can change their ideology or perception of the institution and organization (Armstrong & Grieve, 2015).

The social constructivism paradigm allowed the researcher to “recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation” (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). As the researcher with a vested interest in the subject matter, this provided an opportunity to understand the lived experiences of the participants and relate it back to my own experience. The social constructivism paradigm allowed both parties involved, the researcher and the participant, the opportunity to actively uncover and engage in making meaning of the research (Adams, 2007). Making meaningful sense of the findings and interpreting it to portray what the participants experienced was an important component in this paradigm.

The epistemological and methodological philosophical assumptions can each relate to the topic of the research study. Creswell (2013) described the epistemological assumption as “getting as close as possible to the participants” (p. 20). In order to fully understand and share in the lived experiences of the participants, the researcher must find ways to make a connection to the information that is offered by the participant. Utilizing social constructivism, I was able to gather the information that was spoken by the participants, and describe the actions and expressions observed by the participants. As time is spent between the researcher and the participant, similar interest context or conclusions should be drawn related to differing experiences and should offer connection points that allows the reader to make meaning of the lived experience. This epistemological assumption allows the reader to examine how the lived

experiences in the same category can be similar or different based on each person's unique experience (Adams, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

This study used Strayhorn's work on sense of belonging as a theoretical framework. "Sense of belonging in college is important for Black men" (Strayhorn, 2012 p.82). The experiences that Black men face in college, particularly at a PWI, have been linked to the central theme of belonging. Research has been conducted to illustrate how Black men desire and internally seek authentic and supportive environments to help foster their success in college (ASHE, 2014). These environments, constructed by higher education professionals and campus culture, should offer support for Black men to perform well academically and socially (Harper, 2006; Lloyd, 2009).

Strayhorn (2012) research on belonging stems from seven key aspects in which he believed fully explains the reasoning behind this desire. Belonging to Strayhorn is (a) a "basic human need", (b) "fundamental motive, sufficient to drive human behavior", (c) "takes on heightened importance in certain situations", (d) "related to, and seemingly a consequence of mattering", (e) where "social identities intersect", (f) promotes other "positive outcomes", and (g) a continuous gratification that must be met as "circumstances, conditions, and contexts changes" (p.18-23).

Using a similar model to Maslow's 1943 hierarchy of needs framework, which conceptualizes the humanistic desires and needs of a person consisting of five key elements (physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, and self-actualization), Strayhorn centers his framework in the same manner (Aanstoos, 2019). Belonging is the center and core function that enables a person to experience positive or negative outcomes (Strayhorn, 2012). The impact

from these outcomes are important as it relates to Black men at a PWI and their educational ability to remain either engaged or become disinterested.

One of the ways first-generation Black men find this sense of belonging on a college campus is their engagement and participation in a BGLO (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn believed that Black men engage and participate in these organizations to find a secure and welcoming atmosphere while attending a PWI. Using this theoretical framework, I gathered the lived experiences that are self-reported by participants to understand how they connected to their campus environment and found their sense of belonging through their respective BGLO.

Strayhorn's framework model was used in this research study to understand how participants recognized their third and core element which is belonging. The framework explored how first-generation Black men, based on the following research questions, received support from their PWI and from their BGLO that provided advantages or disadvantages in finding their sense of belonging:

This research is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of first-generation Black men who join a Black Greek letter organization at predominately White institution?
2. What support and resources do Black Greek letter organizations at predominately White institutions offer for their members to feel a sense of belonging?

Research Design

In this section, I discuss my overall research design including an overview of narrative inquiry, my positionality as researcher, participant recruitment, and my plan for data collection and analysis. I also include an overview of how I ensured trustworthiness in this research.

Narrative Inquiry

The methodology in this study was narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry allowed the researcher to understand and learn about the lived experiences of a person as it relates to the research topic. These experiences can be categorized as events that have taken place, objects that have a symbolic meaning or feelings and actions that one has encountered (Creswell, 2013). Narrative allows for multiple perspectives and accounts to be shared about a given research topic. Holley and Colyar (2012) believed that narrative research “generates multiple, frequently conflicting perspectives and accounts” (p.114). With a multitude of voices and experiences being represented in the data, as the researcher I carefully analyzed and transcribed the data to provide an accurate presentation of the participants experience.

Narrative allows for a thematic analysis of the information to help the researcher develop and convey themes (Creswell, 2013). The themes are a synthesis of the information that is gathered from the participant. Time is an important factor in the narrative research design process (Holley & Colyar, 2012). Time can be conveyed in multiple aspects by the participant related to the past, present, or future. As the researcher, I asked clarifying questions and then organize the material in a chronological format. In addition, time is important for the researcher. Holley and Colyar (2012) believed that it takes a great amount of time to interview participants, observe settings, and transcribe the information to formulize a conclusive understanding of the data. A narrative qualitative research study was the best approach for understanding the success factors that contribute to sense of belonging for first generation Black men who join a BGLO as an undergraduate student and graduated from a PWI.

This analysis was determined by several factors. These factors include the time and place in which these events occurred, the objects that are used to reference certain points, and even

body language and gestures used when describing certain aspects of their lived experience (Creswell, 2013). The information that the participants shared guided the direction in which the conversation was steered. Because the researcher and participants are mutually shaping the direction of the study, it is important to explore my own subjectivity and positionality as the researcher and human instrument.

Subjectivity/Positionality

I personally identified with the four major components of the study: first-generation, Black man, member of a BGLO, and graduate of a PWI. Each of these dimensions is related to one another and together may shed light on understanding sense of belonging for the participants in my study. As a first-generation college student, I was able to see how privilege worked for and against me as it relates to the opportunities, resources, and connections that were available to me. I believe that focusing on the experiences of first-generation Black men that graduated from a PWI is very important when trying to understand how they navigated finding their sense of belonging, particularly within a BGLO.

Joining a BGLO was one of the best collegiate experiences I had during my time in college. In fact, my experience as an undergraduate student enabled me to participate on a higher level (chair of two regional board positions) during my post-graduate career. After I became a member of a BGLO, I witnessed first-hand several advantages and systematic barriers that this role carried. Expectations were held to a higher standard and greater emphasis was placed on making sure that I was advancing in academics and social settings.

My undergraduate experience enabled me to continue to serve the institution on a greater level as an alumnus official. As an undergraduate student, I served as vice president of the student government association with the first ever and to date, only all African American

executive board, resident assistant, and member of a BGLO. My experience with these organizations strengthened my sense of belonging at the institution and enabled me to meet various stakeholders within the institution which later recommended by participation in the governing board of the alumni association.

While I am connected to this research study through the four major identity criteria, including first-generation, Black man, membership in a BGLO, and graduate of a PWI, I am cognizant of my subjectivity and positionality in this study. In order to gain a complete understanding of those who participate in the study, I presented the data and findings in a manner that articulates their lived experiences rather than my own. I believe that my personal experience allowed me to build rapport with participants and is thus important in the data collection process. I also believe that understanding the experiences of my participants through their stories needs to remain the primary focus during interviews. I was mindful of not sharing my personal accounts, testimonial experiences, and ideologies during interviews to gain the lived experience of the participants. Understanding that everyone's experience is different, it was my hope that those who participated in this study provided an accurate account of their lived experience. Interviewing participants using semi-structured interviews, notetaking, and electronic recording was helpful in understanding how first-generation Black men who joined a BGLO as an undergraduate student and graduated from a PWI recognized and experienced sense of belonging during college.

Recruitment and Research Site

This narrative research study involved recruiting participants via social media and professional networking platforms. In this digital age, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, in addition to, professional networking platforms such as GroupMe and

LinkedIn offer groups and resources to interact with users. Groups on Facebook such as NASPA Fraternity and Sorority Life Knowledge Community and Black Men in Student Affairs on GroupMe are platforms that offer researchers the ability to solicit interest from participants that are not physically in one central location. Each participant shared the same characteristics outlined that qualified them to participate in the study.

Sampling

Sampling for this research study was completed by interviewing 10 individuals that met the criteria of this study. Recruitment was completed by an approach called convenience sampling. Johnson and Christensen (2016) suggest that convenience sampling involves the recruitment of participants who are “willing and volunteer to participate” (p. 267). Information about the narrative research study was shared via social media, alumni affinity groups and professional networking platforms outlining the research question and the specific criteria needed to participate. Members for these organizations provided value and context that greatly contributed to the results. The criteria for participating in this narrative research study were based upon several predetermined factors:

- First generation college student
- Self-identify as a Black man
- Graduate of a predominately White institution within the last 5 years (2015-2020)
- Joined a National Pan Hellenic Council Black Greek letter organization (Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, and Iota Phi Theta) as an undergraduate student

Data Collection

The data were collected from a one-on-one virtual interview with each participant. Due to the global Coronavirus pandemic, local, state, and federal health officials suggested that in person gathers be limited (CDC, 2020). Therefore, all interviews were conducted on a video conferencing platform called Zoom. Zoom allowed the researcher and participants to visually see and audibly hear each other to conduct the interview.

An interview protocol (see appendix A) was be used in addition to notetaking and electronic recording. The protocol sample provided by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) as cited in Creswell (2013) consists of recording the date, time, and location of the interview. In addition, it was important to analyze each interview separately. To ensure and increase trustworthiness of the study and provide confidentiality, a pseudonym was used for each participant. The questions that were addressed with the participants were targeted towards their experiences being a first-generation Black man, the experience of attending a PWI, and the experience of joining a BGLO as an undergraduate student.

Data Analysis

Data analysis from a qualitative approach involved formatting the information that was shared from all participants into a concise method that spoke to their experience with the research question. Aspects involved in this process were exhibited in what is considered to be a data analysis spiral (Creswell, 2013). Organizing data, reading and memoing, coding and generating themes, interpretation of the data, and representation of the data are the five aspects of the data analysis spiral process to effectively analyze the data.

Creswell (2013) noted that the researcher should “analyze the participant story” (p. 74). Analyzation of the story means taking notes about the conversation, coding specific aspects and

placing each in a theme or group. The story is what Holley and Colyar (2012) considered to be what “draws the scholar to focus on one area as opposed to another” (p. 117). This story can lead to various avenues to formulize the themes.

Organizing the Data. As the researcher conducting a narrative study, it was advantageous to have multiple forms of note taking methods. As questions were asked of the participants in the study, responses were recorded via the virtual software platform, Zoom, and notepad. This double recording method was helpful in capturing the words for transcription purposes and on the notepad for participant reactions in regards to body language, emotional, and physical movements.

The data recorded on the notepad were transcribed electronically and stored on a password protected computer. Data that was captured on the virtual software platform was transcribed to provide accurate and detailed information from the interview. Finally, all of the interviews were organized in a chronologized method to tell the “lived experiences, turning points or epiphany” (Creswell, 2013, p.189) of the participants.

Memoing. A vast amount of time was spent reading over the entirety of the transcript and memoing. I created a written record of the thoughts, reaction, or logic to the response or visual image that was shared by the participant in addition to the coding process discussed below. The ways in which I memoed include taking analytic notes, highlighting, and placing emphasis on certain sections while drawing connections and conclusions. During this period of time, information shared by the participant that needed further clarification was discovered and marked to follow up to gain a better understanding.

Coding and Themes. Once the collected data was read several times and notations were made, I started coding and identifying themes. In a narrative research design, the researcher will

categorize the lived experiences of the participants line by line as they occur in the story. Codes are generated by comments that the participant use or gestures that are given in the interview. While analytically coding in the researcher journal, as the researcher, I began to make notes and comments on certain things that were said or expressed either vocally or emotionally. This process allowed me to start identifying themes that were related to the codes. Themes are “categories or broad units of information that consist of several codes” (Creswell, 2013, p.186). These themes helped group the codes together so reader could gain a better understanding of the data and information.

There were four themes drawn from the analytic coding process. Three of the themes (Navigating Unfamiliar Territory": Self Independence Before Joining, "A Whole Different World": Life In College After Membership, and "They Were Always There For Me": Experiences Among Other Black Men), which are discussed in chapter 4, are the key findings based on the information shared by the participants. The fourth theme (Professionally Trained Staff for NPHC Greek Organizations), which is discussed in chapter 5, gives context on additional resources that can be utilized and implemented for future consideration.

Interpreting the Data. As the information was collected, organized, read for coding and thematic purposes, I began interpreting the data. This process involved making meaning of all the information that was gathered. I started drawing conclusions as to why, how, and what happened, to make the participant react or do a certain thing. I started interpreting the data to ultimately answer the research questions. In addition, this interpretation centered around research that supports or rejects the findings. The interpretation phase is where the researcher “links his or her interpretation to the larger research literature developed by others” (Creswell, 2013, p.187).

Presentation of Data. The final stage of the data analysis spiral is to present the data or findings from the research study in a coherent manner. This presentation is in the form of a complete written document that showcases the evidence supporting the research question, transcript information gathered and shared by the participants in the study, codes, themes, and the findings that support or reject scholarly literature and research. In the case of a narrative research design, the presentation will be written based on the lived and told experiences by the participants. I offer a narrative account for each participant, followed by a grand narrative that seeks to draw connections and patterns across participants' stories.

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness in a qualitative research study involves finding reliable and credible sources, whether they be participants or documents, that can contribute to answering the research questions (Amankwaa, 2016). Providing content to the participants about your subjectivity and relationship to the research question is very important as it shows your vested interest. However, as the researcher, I was conscious and aware of my own experiences and how sharing them could shape the outcome of the study. Therefore, I refrained from implementing my feelings, thoughts or personal viewpoints, as readers should expect to get a clear and concise understanding of the findings.

One of the strategies I used to enhance trustworthiness in the research was to compare and cross reference themes across the participants in the study. Another form of trustworthiness comes in form of member checks. This is when the researcher completes their initial review of the data from organizing to coding, transcription, and allows the participants to review for accuracy and corrections (Pitney, 2004). Conducting the member checks allowed the participants to review the themes, analyze their transcript, correct any inaccurate statements that were drawn from the initial interview and gain a better understanding on how their information contributed to

the overall study. In addition, it allowed the reader to see how their experience was similar or different to others that participated in the study as well. Each participant received a copy of the Zoom video recording and transcription and was asked to verify for accuracy and provide any feedback. Nine of the ten participants confirmed that their transcript of the interview was accurate. One of the first-generation Black men responded back with a correction in the transcript that was in reference to his athletic status which was mentioned in his biography. All ten participants acknowledged that they understood how their information contributed to the overall purpose of the study.

A third form of trustworthiness is peer review. This method allows a qualified researcher to take the data and findings that have been collected and extensively review the information for accuracy, credibility, reliability, and overall trustworthiness (Pitney, 2004). Dependability of the data collected and how it was analyzed is very important in this process as the researcher should be able to draw the same conclusions. As the researcher, I selected individuals that have prior experience and knowledge on first-generation Black men who joined a BGLO at a PWI. These individuals were able to validate that the conclusions I was drawing from the findings, as the researcher, were accurate or make scholarly recommendations for adjustments and future considerations.

Conclusion

Overall, this study explored the lived experiences of first-generation Black men who joined a BGLO as an undergraduate student and graduated from a PWI. In particular, I focused on participants sense of belonging during college. The data gathered from participants was transcribed, analyzed, and stored in a proper manner. This process continued to emphasize the importance of ensuring trustworthiness by the researcher. I separated my subjectivity and

positionality in the research topic in order to gain accurate and reliable data from the participants. Using the social constructivism lens and sense of belonging framework, I provided detailed accounts from participants on first-generation Black men's sense of belonging in BGLOs at PWIs. Black men who are connected with "similarly-minded, academically-driven peers" encourage one another to be successful academically and socially (Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2010, p.99).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this narrative research study was to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black men who joined a BGLO as an undergraduate student and graduated from a PWI. In particular, the study focused on participants' lived experiences with a sense of belonging. Research conducted on first-generation Black men who attended a PWI offers context on the systemic barriers that impact a positive progression towards graduation at the postsecondary level. This study strategically focused on how BGLOs contributed to their sense of belonging at their PWI.

Participants

The 10 participants in this study, as reflected in Table 1, were recruited via social media and professional networking platforms, and all met the selected criteria to participate in the study:

1. Self-identify as a Black man
2. Graduated from a PWI within 2015-2020
3. Hold membership in an NPHC fraternity
4. Self-identify as a first-generation college student

The participants' demographics and geography varied between public, private, and liberal arts institutions located between the north, midwest, south, and eastern regions of the United States. Also, four of the five NPHC fraternities are represented among the participants.

Table 1:

Name (pseudonym)	Black Greek Letter Organization	University (geographically)
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Male	Fraternity A	Southern metropolitan university
King	Fraternity A	Midwestern flagship university
Nolan	Fraternity B	Eastern private liberal arts university
Langston	Fraternity B	Southern public university
Shad	Fraternity C	Southern public university
Kerrigan	Fraternity C	Midwestern public university
Nazir	Fraternity C	Midwestern public university
Shawn	Fraternity B	Southern regional university
Jamal	Fraternity B	Southern public university
John	Fraternity D	Northern public research university

Male

Male is a first-generation college student and former student-athlete at a southern metropolitan university. A pre-biology major with career aspirations to become a neurosurgeon, Male placed his immediate focus on academics and athletic endeavors. Unfortunately, athletics became obsolete when the university eliminated this particular sport due to NCAA regulations concerning the number of sports offered per gender. With little knowledge of fraternity/sorority life, Male joined a fraternity and instantly became a leader by merely one vote as president of the university NPHC. Male believes that it was the “Divine Nine or NPHC presence” that strengthen and increased the retention efforts of the Black student population at this PWI; whether they were a member or not”. Male has since earned a master's degree from a historically Black college/university and works in supply chain administration.

King

A criminal justice major at a northern flagship university, King, is a first-generation college student who explored athletics as a walk-on student-athlete. King had little knowledge of BGLOs before enrolling in college; however, his exposure to fraternity/sorority life grew after participating in a college-based first-generation program. King stated “I don’t really have any family members who are Greek and with the little exposure I did have, it wasn’t something that was high on my priority list going into college”. King continued his academic efforts to earn his master's degree and works in Cybersecurity Risk Management. King contributes his initial interest in fraternal organizations to movies and reality shows that portrayed fraternity/sorority life.

Nolan

Nolan is from a southern community who enrolled at an eastern private liberal arts university as a first-generation college student. He majored in sociology and minored in communications while also participating as a student-athlete. While in high school, Nolan was exposed to fraternity/sorority life from a high school advisor and began to research various organizations and the contributions that fraternities were providing for the community. Once he enrolled at the university, his interest in fraternities grew as he became exposed to current NPHC fraternity members. Upon graduation, Nolan returned home and started a career as a mathematics instructor. He contributes the success in his career to a fraternity members explaining the necessary steps he should take to advance. He said “my chapter really set me up for success. One of my prophytes was a principal so he tole me the things I should work on as far as being an educator”. He recently earned his master's degree with future aspirations of becoming a K-12 principal.

Langston

A first-generation student from a southern metropolitan community, Langston is the youngest of six children. He decided to leave home and enroll at a southern public institution five hundred miles away from his home state; in what he believed to be “unfamiliar territory”. Langston completed his undergraduate degree in three years in healthcare administration; however, he decided to switch careers while completing his master's degree. He joined his fraternity from the perceived idea of “achieving in every bit of human endeavor”. The experience he gained from joining his fraternity created a pathway to his current career as student affairs professional in fraternity/sorority life. Langston is currently researching law school programs to pursue a career in legal affairs.

Shad

A first-generation Black man seeking to make a change and difference for himself, Shad enrolled at a southern public university. Shad's first introduction to fraternity/sorority life came from several family members who were already members of NPHC fraternities and sororities. This exposure created an atmosphere to understand these organizations' significance and how they contributed to students at colleges and universities. He believed that these organizations created a “sense of camaraderie, brotherhood, and held each other accountable, always looking out for each other”. Shad had a desire to go to college, explore a new environment, learn something new, expand himself, and go beyond his comfort zone; therefore, he went off to college in hopes of making the best of his experience. He continued his education to earn his master's degree and currently works in higher education administration.

Kerrigan

Kerrigan joined his NPHC fraternity at a midwestern public institution while majoring in psychology. He continued his academic endeavors to earn his master's degree in research methods and statistics and explored a career in student affairs. Before joining his fraternity, Kerrigan did not know anything about fraternity/sorority life; however, later, he became interested after learning their purpose and its impact on the Black community. As a first-generation college student, Kerrigan faced obstacles academically and socially; unfortunately, he was not able to receive the assistance from family like his peers. He said “people don’t know the struggle I went through to get here and even be able to sit in this room. People really get help to get to college and stay in college and I had to do it all by myself”. Kerrigan is currently employed as a data analyst with a medical innovation company to utilize his degree in performing research methods and statistics.

Nazir

Nazir is a first-generation college student that attended a midwestern public university. His background experience with NPHC fraternities was through a close family member who was an NPHC sorority member. His introverted personality was a significant factor in his desire to do things independently. “Full of confusion and just a lot of unknowns” was his experience navigating the PWI campus community. However, he soon became interested in seeking membership after being around various fraternity members. His career aspiration was to become a football coach; however, he has since taken a strong interest in working with college-readiness programs. Nazir continued his education by earning his master's degree in higher education and works at a community college in his hometown.

Shawn

Originally from a southern community, Shawn graduated from a southern regional university for his undergraduate and graduate education. Graduating from a predominately White high school, Shawn became a first-generation college student reasonably close to home. Shawn had family support in the sense of someone to listen and talk to however he believed “not having a parent that went through a similar experience is hard because they cant give you guidance on the path that youre taking when they haven’t experience it for themselves”. Eager to join student organizations and get involved, Shawn joined an NPHC fraternity to help shape and define his collegiate experience. He attributes his career interest in higher education to fellow fraternity members who were already working in the same career field. Shawn is currently a mid-level administrator at a small private Christian college.

Jamal

As a first-generation college student, Jamal was raised by his grandparents. His mother served as a corrections officer; therefore, time constraints called for additional family support. His knowledge of NPHC fraternities grew from images and videos depicted in mainstream media. However, the negative portrayal of NPHC fraternities partially swayed his decision not to join. He knew that as a first-generation college student, it was vital for him to make sure he finished what he started; his collegiate degree. Jamal has since earned his master's degree in public administration and exploring a career interest with the United States Army human resources division. Jamal believes that his experience in his BGLO “pushed him to be great.” He continued by stating, “it pushed me to be a leader, specifically, and it help me grow as an individual and professional”.

John

John graduated from a northern public research university. His knowledge of fraternity/sorority life was contributed to by his family members, who are members of NPHC fraternities and sororities, and impressed upon him the need to join. Mainstream media played a big part in his decision to join, as images and videos portrayed several characteristics that piqued his interest. John's experience as a first-generation Black man was racially divided. He stated "it was like two campuses on one campus. There's literally a white campus and then there's a whole nother Black experience of campus on the other side". John decided to join his fraternity based upon the fraternity's various characteristics; those same characteristics that he believed the university lacked in providing for first-generation Black students.

Thematic Analysis

Participants in this study shared their stories and experiences related to their journey as first-generation Black men and an NPHC fraternity member while attending a PWI. These experiences, feelings, and moments of reflection provide a detailed account of the challenges and difficulties they witnessed at their institutions before joining their organization. Also, it denotes their appreciation and emphasis on how their NPHC fraternity contributed to their success as college students. Based upon these details following the guided research questions, I identified several themes across the interviews conducted. These themes include (1) "Navigating Unfamiliar Territory": Self Independence Before Joining, (2) "A Whole Different World": Life In College After Membership, and (3) "They Were Always There For Me": Experiences Among Other Black Men.

"Navigating Unfamiliar Territory": Self- Independence Before Joining

During the interview process, participants responded to a series of questions regarding their lived experiences attending a PWI as a first-generation Black man before joining their BGLO. Each participant used affirmative language that spoke about the neglect and unwelcoming atmosphere during their first year at the institution. Collectively, words such as lonely, isolated, confused, and difficult described how these first-generation Black men viewed their first-year experience while attending a PWI. These remarks were shared among all participants despite campus size (small, medium, or large), location (northern, southern, mid-west, or eastern), or status (public, private, regional, metropolitan, liberal arts, or flagship). Langston even went further to describe his experience as "unfamiliar territory." Shawn expressed his journey attending a southern regional university as "difficulty navigating the campus community."

Many participants attributed this experience to the ingrained campus dynamic when asked to elaborate and provide greater context to what they believed to be the root cause of their first impressions of the campus community. The campus culture, in general, was not a conducive and inclusive environment for a first-generation Black man. Jamal provided context on his experience attending a southern public research university:

"When you walk into a classroom, you do not see many faces that look like your own.

Right then and there, I got a glimpse of how it would be the remaining four years while at my university. It was not many of us there. Many times it was just me, and I think, wow, this is different."

Jamal further stated that going to college was an eye-opening experience for him, drastically different from what he received in high school. He stated, "when you go to college, it

is on you to figure it out for yourself. So that was a turning point for me, just going to class and seeing how it works". Nolan echoed this claim that White students did not associate with Black students in the same social circles. He continued to mention that "to be frank, the White people that they recruited to the institution were paying full tuition, so their families were well off, upper-class".

Unguided and unseen were the terms used when describing how John felt as a first-generation Black man attending a PWI. He shared that he battled with insecurities as a first-generation college student of not understanding the nuances of being in an unfamiliar space. He said,

"I did not know where to go for help. I was like a bird when it gets old enough, and its parents push them out of the tree; that is how it felt but not being ready to fly on my own.

However, the implications of being a first-generation college student were not the only concerns that John would face. Racial biases and vivid displays of invisibility inside the classroom by his counterparts forced him to realize that being a Black man at a PWI would play a major factor in his experience. He explained,

"it was also apparent that I was a Black student from how people would not associate or talk to me. I remember the first day of class, I would walk into class, and people would sit down and introduce themselves to each other, but not to me. I think that experience helped me seek out Black Greek life".

Racial concerns contributed to these unresolvable differences between the participants and the institution, but socioeconomic differences were also significant for these Black men. Kerrigan recalls a university-sponsored event (Family Weekend) that encouraged families to spend the weekend with their students, and all university events were family-related. However,

for Kerrigan, his parents were not financially able to travel and visit him. When asked by classmates if his parents were attending the university planned events, Kerrigan answered that "my parents do not even have a car to come up here even if I wanted them to come."

Unfortunately, Kerrigan also experienced unwelcome comments and facial reactions from students and their family members while attending family day events alone on campus and throughout the local community. Kerrigan shared that he vividly remembers venturing through the city to get food with his best friend since both parents could not attend the events. However, they would hear comments and see their white classmates staring, saying, "look at these two black folks walking together." These strong feelings and reactions were motivators for him to seek a supportive and robust niche within the campus community. Reflecting further on this experience, he shared that "we do not even have our parents here to make us feel comfortable, walk around and participate. So, we would just stay in for the rest of the weekend and have fun together".

Information on how to navigate a college campus, expectations of rigorous coursework, and ways to get involved are all areas that are typically passed down by parents, guardians or close relatives who have shared this same experience. However, these Black men entered these spaces without much knowledge about college, mainly due to their background as first-generation college students. Some of their parents did not complete high school, did not attend college, or completed some college coursework but did not graduate. It is worthy to note that one participant's (John) mother went back to college and completed her coursework after being inspired by him graduating from college.

Nolan believed that one of the things that would have helped him navigate the campus community during his first year as a college student was his parents' support, especially being a

first-generation college student and a Black man attending a PWI. He stated that it was not necessarily the support but gaining prior advice and understanding of what his experience would be like was something that would have been beneficial for him. Others shared these same sentiments about not having family support in the sense of prior collegiate experience was a nerve-racking feat for them.

Nolan, who attended an eastern private liberal arts university, was seven hundred and fifty miles away from his closest family member, making things feel even worse. He stated:

"As a first-generation college student, I completely moved away from home. I did not have the support of my family being right there because my closest family member was my mother, who stayed seven hours away from me. Thus, just realizing that I did not have that support, and this was the first time that anyone (meaning himself) in my family moved away from home".

Participants even recalled experiences of assisting their parents to complete their Free Application for Federal Student Aid and other important documents needed for college admissions. Male shared that his mother did not go to college; therefore, his knowledge of applying for aid and scholarships was limited. He further noted that his mom was sitting next to him, handing him the documents he requested to apply for grants and other tuition assistance programs. He said, "there was no college fund set aside for me. It was, you better get an academic scholarship, or you better get a scholarship of some sort. That is what it was for me".

Despite the challenges and obstacles that these 10 Black men faced during their first year at their PWI, they found various avenues and outlets to make an excellent connection to the institution. Four of the participants were first-generation college students and student-athletes. Each participant provided detailed accounts of their journey as a student and as an athlete. From

the student-athlete perspective, they received academic resources that would ultimately benefit the team and the university. The athletic department mandated academic advisors and tutorial sessions for those with positive and declining academic performances. Student-athletes also received priority scheduling for courses and stipends for food when attending away competitions, all amenities a typical student would not receive.

These four student-athletes believed that serving the university in an athletic capacity was a connection point for them into the university. They were connected with other student-athletes from various demographics and backgrounds and received the same support and resources. However, each echoed the same sentiments that if they were not student-athletes, they do not believe they would have had the same experience. Male said this about finding academic support before joining his NPHC fraternity:

"As a regular student, it was difficult to find tutors unless you were doing basic level math because there was an entire building for math tutors. Everyone was aware of that. I do not recall the professors stating, go here for biology assistance, go here for this subject. I never saw it".

Another necessary experience that all 10 participants affirmatively expressed and agreed upon was their affiliation with the multicultural center or minority-serving office at their PWI. This safe space served as their connection point to the university before joining their NPHC fraternity and provided their initial sense of belonging to the campus community. Several of these Black men were connected to these university-sponsored departments before enrolling at the university. In contrast, others either sought these spaces or stumbled upon them while searching for spaces and fellow students that resemble them. In many ways, these spaces were

the catalyst that prompted many of these first-generation Black men to seek membership in an NPHC fraternity.

As Male referred to it as "Little Africa," the multicultural center was the central meeting space for Black students on the college campus. Little Africa was their social support place to bond and be themselves. He said, "if you did not have anything to do and did not want to go back to your dorm, you would go to the multicultural center or Little Africa. Somebody was going to be there". The multicultural center attendees also included members of BGLOs, which provided exposure to the fraternity/sorority life culture to other Black students. The BGLOs were also active in collaborating with university departments such as the multicultural center or a minority-serving department. This collaboration included hosting programs, events, and community service projects such as assisting residential students on move-in day.

King and Jamal are two examples of first-generation Black men who gained exposure to BGLOs while being a part of a university-sponsored minority-serving department before starting classes. Both provided vital commentary on their experiences within these groups, which ultimately contributed to their sense of belonging at their respective institutions. These programs were designated for first-generation college students, primarily focused on minority students. King received a scholarship from this university department and immediately became involved during the summer months before traditional fall classes. King stated he immediately felt a sense of belonging at the PWI.

"I think just my interaction with different people, coming to the university as a freshman and immediately being surrounded by other first-generation and predominately Black students made me feel like I had a community initially coming into the university".

King continued to note that this university-sponsored program provided academic resources and social engagement for its participants, but it also provided a sense of belonging and lifelong connections. According to King, this group has been very influential for him.

"I felt like I belonged because I knew 95% of the Black people that went there because they stick together, and it is like a separate community going into a PWI. It is so big, but it is easier to know 2,000-3,000 people who look like you versus 48,000-50,000 that does not. Having that experience off the jump was great. So, that gave me my sense of belonging. I consider some to be family and have relationships with them still today".

Jamal was admitted into a first-generation college program at a southern public research university. He attributes his experience in the minority-serving department to be a pivotal starting point in his transition from high school to college. Jamal recalled being dropped off the summer before fall classes started, which was his first time on campus and the start of his collegiate journey. He relied upon this first-generation college program to assist him with the academic and social tools and resources that would "steer him in the right direction while on campus". Jamal noted that this program was his first introduction to BGLOs as the college program involved fraternities and sororities in their academic and social programming. Jamal stated that he appreciated this university-sponsored department for their services as other units outside of this department did not make attempts to assist students outside of this program. He said,

"a lot of my experience pertained to this first-generation college program, and that is where I spent most of my time. That was kind of like my go-to, in terms of direction, in terms of people they connected us with. Socially, that was where I was able to succeed the most".

Others who participated in this study referenced their universities' multicultural or minority student centers as their primary focus in finding a sense of belonging at their institution. The center offered these first-generation Black men the necessary, desired and wanted academic and social support that they needed to persist and become engaged within the campus community. Each of the participants stated how their involvement with the multicultural center shaped their collegiate career trajectory. From introductions to other Black students to providing accountability measures for performance, these multicultural centers catalyzed their successful graduation progression.

The mere fact of being around other Black students doing successful things was a positive affirmation for Shad. "Driven, goal-oriented, ambitious, leaders, really involved, and had a plan in which they wanted to follow"; those were the words that Shad used to describe his experience with the fellow Black students involved in the multicultural center at his PWI. Shad continued to note that "this organization is really what inspired me to continue at my PWI, and it just really had a tremendous impact upon me being a first-generation Black man at a four-year institution, a PWI to be exact". Shad ultimately found his sense of belonging in this program as they assisted with his academic and social performances.

Nazir expressed the same consent concerning the positivity that he experienced with the multicultural center at his PWI. Before attending their events and services, he was facing the unknown of where to go, whom to talk to, who could assist him, and what resources were available to him. The multicultural center, according to Nazir, gave him "support and pieces that I needed". The center also provided the social support he needed to make friends and complement his introverted personality.

In the midst of these first-generation Black men becoming acclimated to the university via the multicultural center, each of the participants made reference and shared detailed accounts on what prompted them to seek membership in a BGLO. The current members of the five BGLOs for men were active participants within the multicultural center and interacted with the first-generation Black men inside and outside of the classroom. The participants in the study recalled feelings of acceptance and appreciation that was shown from the BGLO members. In addition, some of the first-generation Black men shared thoughts on the genuine display of brotherhood, friendship and connectedness by the BGLO members. This display was witnessed while the BGLOs for men were hosting programs, volunteering at community service events and with their overall presence on campus. These ten first-generation Black men were intrigued and decided to seek membership. Participants such as King, Male and Jamal also felt that the members of their BGLO were a strong presence and resource for them before joining as they offered compassion, friendship, and brotherhood during pivotal moments in their life.

"A Whole Different World": Life In College After Membership

When asked about their academic and social journey after joining a BLGO, participants described the experience as drastically different from before they decided to seek membership. The common factors mentioned were that they found an authentic and welcoming space to be embraced and welcomed. Greater emphasis was placed on academics, and their visibility among fellow Black students and the university population increased. Each participant spoke highly of how their BGLO either required or mandated various academic measures to promote excellence. "The pinnacle of importance" was Kerrigan's term when describing the emphasis that his fraternity placed on academics. These social fraternities also provided outlets for their members to connect and engage with the campus and the local community. Ultimately, the participants

recognized how their BGLO provided tools and resources that contributed to their success as a Black man and a first-generation college student.

Overwhelmingly, each participant spoke about their BGLO placing a strong emphasis on keeping the individual chapter grade point average (GPA) at a high level. To accomplish this goal, members would have to perform well academically themselves, as their GPA would be included to calculate the chapter GPA. One of the major factors that motivated these Black men to perform well is their desire not to be the person that let the chapter down. Nolan noted that his chapter was small, and fellow chapter members had "complex majors" that consisted of statistics and engineering. So "I do not want to be the person who is bringing the GPA average down or has the lowest GPA". He continued to mention that he considered it to be "friendly competition of not wanting to be that person who is the lowest or bringing down the average of your chapter's GPA, that was the kind of support that I needed".

Langston commented that he attributes many academic initiatives to the fraternities' national headquarters' intentional mandates surrounding new members' policies and procedures. He said, "I think it was very intentional on the international headquarters to ensure that while individuals are putting so much time and emphasis on joining the organization, that we are also upholding our scholastic endeavors." He continued to express this thought saying:

"I think it is cool that they are actually giving me an opportunity to do my work, which I think is a necessity. There is this idea that so many people, when joining NPHC organizations, their GPAs drop but I had a 4.0 when I was joining my organization".

John's BGLO believed that academics was a significant factor as well. He stated, "I had a GPA to join, but you need to keep the GPA because we were not just a social organization; we are all about scholarship, which is one of our principles". Even participants whose chapter was small

in membership and struggling academically continued to encourage and promote academic excellence among their brothers. King stated:

"My chapter was struggling academically. When I crossed, it was immediately drilled in on us, academics first. We had to even sign agreements to where we would not participate in social events until we obtained a certain GPA. We even had to attend certain meetings and study tables, things of that nature. So, it was a high priority when I came in that I did not know going into it".

Jamal provided context on how his fraternity, who was not doing well academically at one point, received reprimands from the chapter advisor, which reinforced the notion that academics was a priority and social engagement was a luxury. He shared:

"There was one point where we were not doing well academically, and I remember my advisor shut us down from doing any parties. To get us back on track, we were required to host educational programs such as an achievement gala and various events that were dedicated to improving or educating students on campus".

Several participants made mention of a friendly competition attitude regarding their BGLO promoting excellence inside the classroom. King's philosophy was, "I was always good with grades, but we always had to look out for our brother and figure out how that was going to affect us as a whole." Shad's fraternity displayed this friendly competition mentality within the university fraternity/sorority community as well. He said, "there was always a goal to have the highest GPA of all the fraternities and Greek letter organizations on campus".

Shad and Kerrigan, who are members of the same BGLO at different universities, noted that their BGLO hosted strategic programs for their members but incorporated aspects for the campus community. These programs, such as general study tables in the library and

mathematical tutorial sessions, became a tradition in holding their members accountable and positively connecting the BGLO to the university. Shad said:

"Whether it be just us (the brothers) or inviting other college students, we would encourage people to come to the library and study with us. We need to get these A's so we can pass these classes and get up out of here".

Kerrigan explained this concept further about the study table initiative that it was not an event or program to get students to attend but hold their members accountable about academics.

"It did not matter what was going on or what was happening, even if it was just us. We had public study tables to be at to make sure we get work done. If someone was talking which was probably me, we would say sheesh, do your work".

Male considered it a "blessing" to be a member of a BGLO and have a supportive community of brothers to assist him academically. "Oh, do not take that professor,... Oh yeah, I can help you with this class,... Now you really need to study for this class." Those were the phrases he used to describe the conversations that his fraternity brothers would have with one another to assist in their academic pursuits of academic achievement. "It was a luxury for me, or at least a blessing, to be able to relate to one another and assist in our academics." His fraternity brothers were older in academic classifications (sophomore, junior, and senior), so they had the experience of assisting him in getting to where they were.

Kerrigan experienced the same type of commitment from his brothers when it was related to academics. He recalls a time when a brother who had joined the fraternity before him intentionally came to pick him up to ensure he was studying and focusing on grades. He shared the following statement:

"My ADP came and picked me up, took me to his house to help me with something in class. So, they made sure that they were investing in ensuring that I got good grades. They were huge in checking up on us and holding us accountable to ensure that we had those grades. On the flip side of that, we continued that tradition after joining, and we had study tables every Sunday. Every single Sunday, we were there".

Nazir reflected on his journey as an undergraduate student and received an undergraduate scholarship from his BGLO national headquarters. He was awarded this scholarship on multiple occasions for his scholastic endeavors. While he admits that this scholarship opportunity was not highly advertised but, it was an opportunity to highlight undergraduate members' achievements. He said,

"I do not think it is pushed heavy enough through nationals, which leaves it to be reliant on the individual chapters and the grad chapter, which has adjudication over the undergraduate chapter. So, if you have a grad chapter that's full of successful men or even Black men who are in education, I would imagine that the undergraduate chapter does a little bit better".

Socially, BGLOs have been very beneficial for the participants regarding their network and their visibility amongst the campus community. Nazir and Male are members of two different BGLOs however they share similar experiences of being elected to a leadership position immediately after joining their fraternity. Nazir was elected to serve as the chapter president, while Male was elected to serve as the NPHC president. Both shared the same sentiments of being propelled into a significant spotlight at the university.

Nazir recalls the experience as one that immediately put him in a position to lead. "I was voted president my neo year right after I crossed. It mandatorily put me in positions of having to

be in contact with the organization, to be in contact with certain school leadership, things like that". Male also pointed out that his experience not only called for him to multitask but to learn how to work well with others. He said, "you have to learn to speak to people. You also have to, in a sense, learn the game of business".

The "game of business" that he refers to connects with his experience leading the council of Black fraternities and sororities on his college campus. As president of the NPHC, Male quickly learned how to strategically and intentionally work with each organization to plan collaborative programs and support individual chapter initiatives while maintaining an impartial and unbiased opinion towards either organization, including his fraternity. Shad stated that his BGLO prepared him in the same manner as it related to socially being able to carry out the fraternity business on a professional level. He summarized his experience by stating, "it expanded a lot of different things for me. It went from the small doorway to basically being a whole outdoor valley".

Socially, Shad credits his BGLO in bettering himself in this aspect of becoming more social on campus, in the community, and within the fraternity. He stated,

"It really improved my social skills and made me more of an advocate. I find myself in a lot of positions where I am advocating a lot more, educating a lot more. I am trying to break stuff down to my brothers and get them to see a different perspective, a different view on things".

These first-generation Black men benefitted greatly by joining a BGLO regarding their increased visibility and social status on campus. Several participants noticed a change in the behavior of classmates after they became a member of their fraternity. John was one of these individuals who said people finally knew who he was. "People who never really gave me the

time of day would come up and talk to me or say hi." This increased level of visibility and social engagement even extended throughout the university. John was asked to collaborate with the African American cultural center to promote programming between NPHC fraternities and sororities in the cultural center. This opportunity would not have been possible before joining his BGLO.

For others like King, his BGLO opened up "a whole different world" for him related to the increase in visibility and social status at his PWI. King stated that "it was a different vibe and energy," and now he was able to "interact and meet even more people than I ever thought before." Even for Nazir, he attributes the friends and social networks that he still cherishes to the people he encountered after joining his BGLO. "A lot of the people I met and who I am still friends with are from after I crossed."

Langston, who joined his BGLO during his senior year, also found value in his fraternity socially as the membership experience opened doors and provided opportunities that he continues to cherish. He echoed, "I think they created many opportunities to engage especially with other brothers from across the US, and not only within the organization but also with people in other NPHC organizations." Langston said, "I am always grateful for those opportunities." Shawn, a member of the same BGLO as Langston but at a different institution, echoed that the fraternity attributed to his social status by connecting and learning from other brothers' experiences. He shared goals and gained an appreciation from the many connections he believed would not have been possible without him seeking membership in his BGLO.

"They Were Always There For Me": Experiences Among Other Black Men

The first-generation Black men who participated in the study provided context about their appreciation and fulfillment in connection with other Black men and the benefits that the

experience had provided for them. Many believed that the overall engagement with other Black men in their BGLO provided intangible tools and life skills that each still carries with them. For instance, John believed that his connection with the other Black men in his BGLO molded him to succeed in life. He said, "this experience has prepared me for real life. It has taught me how to carry myself as a Black man."

Shawn echoed similar statements on how the commonality of Black men supported his efforts to persist towards graduation at his PWI:

"I think being a part of something bigger than myself and being able to connect with other Black men who were also in college, who have similar lived experiences or going through some of the same things I was going through."

He further stated that even though he enrolled at the institution without any assistance from parental or family members, the exposure of being around other like-minded Black men aided in his progression and retention towards graduation. He said:

"As a first-generation student, parents do not necessarily understand what that process looks like or the different things that you go through as a college student. I was able to connect with people that had been through this experience of going through the experience, and they also were Black men, and so I definitely gained a lot of support".

Participants like John and Shad valued the meaningful yet straightforward interactions and experiences they had with other Black men in their fraternity and university. John said, "it molded me in a way and taught me how to carry myself as Black man. I was cognizant of my actions and the way in which I did things". He further stated that he believed being around other Black men was, in a sense, a society among the entire campus community.

"This experience helped prepare me for real life in a microcosm or a microcosm of campus, because I think college is a microcosm of the real world. And being a Black student and a first-generation student is a microcosm of the campus and the real world".

Shad appreciated the everyday things he received from being in unison with other Black men in his BGLO. He said, "it is about doing the simple things like fixing a car. Brothers have taught me how to change oil, change the tire, fix somethings that I never knew how to fix before coming to college". Overall, he believes that it has helped him become well-rounded as he has learned so many things since being a member of his BGLO.

"It was simple things like grilling, no one teaches you how to grill, you just naturally learn how to do it. But it was those moments of standing around the grill bonding with other Black men who were your brothers and chatting about homeownership, the stock market, 401K, and investments. Those are the things that you take away from grilling".

While also intrinsically motivating, challenge and support were aspects that Jamal found rewarding when speaking about his experience assimilating with other Black men, especially those that joined the fraternity with him. He shared the following:

"They were always there for me. I was very close with them, so they were always there to kind of motivate me and challenge me in the things that I wanted to accomplish; from exploring my passion in music, getting an internship, or just graduating in general. I felt like they were the people who I can go to for different advice".

Jamal also stated that it was in this setting and moment that he felt comfortable to share his hopes, dreams, and aspirations in an open setting because they were Black men going through the same things as well: "I was able to learn through them from their experiences that they have with their parents and their families who may have not been first generation."

Nolan mentioned that his appreciation for being a member of a BGLO and surrounded by other Black men was beneficial when he was seeking employment post-graduation. He spoke about how an older member from his chapter assisted him:

"My chapter really set me up for success. I did not know if I really wanted to become a teacher. Once I moved back home, I ran into one of my prophtyes, who was a principal. He told me things that I should work on as far as being an educator. He told me about opportunities that I should take advantage of".

Nolan also noted that it was the support and interaction around other Black men that shifted his mindset from a student-athlete who might not advance athletically after college to focus on his academic endeavors and life after college. He shared:

"Just being able to be around other like-minded individuals that looked like me really just supported me in wanting to be successful as a person. I was around my teammates a lot who didn't care about school, just football. However, being with my chapter members, they introduced me to a lot of different things than what I wasn't used to from being around my football teammates".

Each of the participants believed that being around other Black men always propelled them to be the best they could be. King exemplified this reasoning the best by stating how he appreciated and recognized the fact that it was just bigger than himself:

"It became to a point where it was, I am now representing the brother next to me and how I even present myself. It's the little things that I learned from the organization that really helps me with my career today".

King further stated that he "owe all gratitude to the professional aspect" of his BGLO and the Black men that instilled hands-on learning with him. King was able to see how to conduct

himself in a business meeting, communicate effectively and efficiently, and lead by example. All things he believes are essential tools for success that he learned from other Black men and still use today.

For Shawn, it was the ability to call and get advice for other Black men who had graduated and left the university but still provided mentorship to him on his future goals and aspirations.

"How do I take my career to the next level, or what are some things I should be doing at this stage in my life." Those are the things that I valued most about being connected to other successful Black men. Because when you're walking in that unknown, it's hard for you to know which path to take, so for me, it was the guidance and leadership".

Career advice and growth opportunities was something that Nazir experienced as well. He attributes his current career in higher education to the relationships that he cultivated with other Black men as an undergraduate student. "The Black men that I met at my PWI are the reason I decided to go into higher education." Nolan shared that his experience with Black men who served as mentors "allowed a lot of doors to be open and more opportunities to be presented to me."

Shawn mentioned his experience attending a local, regional, and national conference with his BGLO and the positive effects on him. Shawn stated that,

"I definitely contribute me joining an organization to my success today. I am able to continue to participate with my fraternity brothers while also bouncing ideas off of them while staying connected with them. It's definitely a benefit for sure".

"My brothers saw something in me that I did not see and pushed it out of me". Those are the words spoken by Male, who was the recipient of the "The College Brother of the Year

Award" two years in a row. The award was his BGLO's way of recognizing an outstanding member for their scholastic achievements, community services, and outstanding commitment to being an exceptional brother in the local undergraduate chapter. To receive the award, you must be nominated and supported by current members of your undergraduate chapter. Male believes that it was the experience of being around like-minded individuals within his BGLO that pushed him to succeed, and in return, they recognized him for his noble accolades.

Conclusion

This chapter provided the findings of first-generation Black men's lived experiences who joined a BGLO at a PWI. I included the findings through the lived experiences and stories portrayed by the participants. The themes discovered included (1) "Navigating Unfamiliar Territory": Self Independence Before Joining, (2) "A Whole Different World": Life In College After Membership, and (3) "They Were Always There For Me": Experiences Among Other Black Men. In this chapter, I focused on measures that were directly related to the overarching research questions:

- What are first-generation Black men's experiences who join a Black Greek letter organization at a predominately White institution?
- What support and resources do Black Greek letter organizations at predominately White institutions offer their members to feel a sense of belonging?

Each of the participants provided stories and lived experiences that answered each question and offered feedback on how future research could assist this marginalized student population. Male summarized his membership experience as a first-generation Black man attending a PWI by stating, "I got brothers now, I got people looking out for me here." Shawn went further by saying, "there is still so much to learn; there is so much to gain from others".

This statement was about his lived experience of being a first-generation Black man after joining a BGLO at his PWI. He continued to note that his participation in this organization provided methods to connect and engage with members across various backgrounds, disciplines, and functional areas to gain insight into others' lives and prepare for his next steps and continue moving forward towards graduation. Jamal summarized the experience of being a first-generation Black man and a member of a BGLO at a PWI as "essentially helping him grow as an individual, professional, and as a fraternity member."

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this narrative research study was to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black men who joined a Black Greek letter organization (BGLO) as an undergraduate student and graduated from a predominately White institution (PWI). The study included 10 participants from diverse backgrounds and geographical locations and focused on their experiences with adjusting to the institution and finding their sense of belonging. The participants responded to questions geared towards understanding how their institution and BGLO contributed to their academic performance and social engagement. Two overarching research questions guided the study:

1. What are first-generation Black men's experiences who join a Black Greek letter organization at a predominately White institution?
2. What support and resources do Black Greek letter organizations at predominately White institutions offer their members to feel a sense of belonging?

Summary

Overall, in this study, I explored first-generation Black men's lived experiences who joined a Black Greek letter organization (BGLO) as an undergraduate student and graduated from a PWI. Furthermore, I explored avenues to find out how these first-generation Black men found their sense of belonging at their PWI. Research such as Joe and Davis (2009) believed that support for first-generation Black men must start at home in order for them to be successful, whether it be academic or social. However, these ten first-generation Black men lacked the

parental support in regards to gaining access to higher education, receiving prior knowledge about college, or receiving financial support yet their parents and family members were there to be a listening ear and offer moral support in times of need. The ten first-generation Black men in the study defied the odds and sought alternative methods to support their sense of belonging, which ultimately aided in their matriculation to graduation.

Despite the systemic barriers that prevented their parents from enrolling or graduating from college, these ten first-generation Black men persisted to enroll at a PWI. They exerted their abilities via athletics and student organizations such as BGLOs. Their experience attending a PWI before joining a BGLO aligns with existing research from Tinto (1993) and Wilkins (2014), which argued that Black men face numerous obstacles such as loneliness and isolation. Also, these first-generation Black men encountered racial biases, implications that Lloyd (2009) found to be a major reason why first-generation Black men seek supportive environments outside of the classroom.

All ten participants sought interest in a BGLO as they navigated the campus community to find their sense of belonging. In this study, the first-generation Black men experienced positive outcomes that each believe attributed to their sense of belonging. Their experiences support researchers such as Goode-Cross and Tager (2011), Strayhorn (2012), and Ahren et al. (2014) that BGLOs offer the intentional and strategic development that first-generation Black men need to persist towards graduation. These BGLOs provided the foundation for creating a sense of belonging for their members. However, the organizations also created opportunities for their members to be connected to other Black men during their undergraduate experience. This connection aligns with literature conducted by Mincey et al. (2017) that stated first-generation Black men desire their own space to process, share, and bond with those that resemble their race

and gender. These connections also created networking relationships and mentorships inside and outside their BGLO, which have resulted in career advancement and post-secondary education aspirations.

Overall, I found that these ten first-generation Black men affirmatively believe it was their BGLO that provided the necessary resources, information, and support needed to thrive and become successful at their PWI. Also, each participant rejected the notion that their PWI provided the adequate resources that contributed to their success before joining their BGLO. I found that each participant provided supportive details that conclude that BGLOs intentionally and strategically set their members up for success and embraced them as first-generation Black men.

Discussion of Findings

Participants in this study shared their stories and experiences related to their journey as a first-generation Black man and members of a BGLO at a PWI. Their experiences, feelings, and moments of reflection provide a detailed account of the contributions and challenges they faced at their institutions before and after joining their organization. These Black men also expressed their appreciation and emphasized how their BGLO contributed to their success. While all participants had individual experiences, collectively, they provided descriptive information summarized into three themes. Each participant expressed their need for (1) "Navigating Unfamiliar Territory": Self Independence Before Joining, (2) "A Whole Different World": Life In College After Membership, and (3) "They Were Always There For Me": Experiences Among Other Black Men.

“Navigating Unfamiliar Territory”: Self Independence Before Joining

In this study, participants shared information on how they took an active role in finding their resources and methods to connect with the institution on an academic and social level. Their experiences navigating a PWI supported the literature on how Black men perceive the PWI campus community as daunting and cause moments of isolation, loneliness, and fear (Cuyjet, 1997; Ottley & Ellis, 2019). Collectively, they expressed their desire to be connected with other students that resembled their backgrounds and beliefs, which were the same findings that Strayhorn (2012) believed to be an essential component for Black men finding a sense of belonging at a PWI. This desire forced each of them to become self-independent in finding academic resources such as tutoring centers and writing labs and from a social engagement perspective of attending programs, making meaningful connections, and enjoying the campus experience.

All participants referenced their connection with either a university-sponsored first-generation student program or the institution's multicultural center to aid in this endeavor. These spaces served as their initial sense of belonging to the institution. They provided academic and social parameters to succeed, which, as Ottley and Ellis (2019) argued, help support Black men on campus. The first-generation Black men who enrolled at the institution within the university-sponsored first-generation program were members of a particular cohort program that required students to begin coursework the summer before the fall semester. The program provided these students with resources and information geared explicitly towards academic advancement. The cohort-based program strategically provided an instant connection for the students to engage with one another and build lifelong connections. These connections are still important to each

participant as they have continued communication with their cohort members following their undergraduate degree completion.

The multicultural center for these participants served a pivotal role in welcoming and embracing these first-generation Black men. These centers promote opportunities to engage in peer-to-peer learning centered around academics, social justice and activism, and authentic spaces for students to thrive (Schuh, Jones & Torres, 2017). Participants spoke about the warmth, reassuring, and affirmative atmosphere that they witnessed in this space. The multicultural center was the cornerstone of their existence at the institution and is believed to be an essential factor supporting their retention and persistence. McClellan and Stringer (2016) also found that the university multicultural center aids in the retention and persistence of students who participate and engage in these spaces.

Also, the multicultural center was considered a safe space regarding being vulnerable in conversations and discussions concerning their academic, social, and personal needs. It provided the participants with knowledge and information on pursuing their educational endeavors, intentionally making connections with faculty and staff, engaging with other first-generation or marginalized students, and exposing them to Black culture, including BGLOs. The multicultural center provided these first-generation Black men a sense of belonging at their PWI before joining their BGLO.

“A Whole Different World’: Life In College After Membership

As one participant stated, "it is like two different campuses within one university" when speaking about his PWI experience after joining a BGLO. For most participants, their knowledge of BGLOs was slim to none before enrolling at a PWI or understood that Greek-letter organizations existed but did not understand why. Their introduction to the Black culture at their

PWI prompted their interest in BGLOs. From either attending their first new membership presentation show, joining a study session hosted by a BGLO, or receiving assistance from a fraternity member during freshman move-in, these first-generation Black men successfully sought interest in membership in 4 of the 5 NPHC fraternities.

Participants believed that their BGLO was the driving factor in setting them up for success and paving the way for them to complete the degree and start their careers. These BGLOs aligned with Strayhorn's (2012) findings that BLGOs offered various tools and resources such as networking, accountability measures, academic requirements, leadership skills, mentorship, and a host of other components that these first-generation Black men wanted and desired. These aspects were methods the participants believed helped them become better college students and persons even after graduation. These claims support Harris and Mitchell's (2018) research that BGLOs provide the perfect niche for Black men to thrive and be their authentic selves while being successful at their PWI.

These BGLOs also served as a social connection to the university. For some of these first-generation Black men, their introverted personalities prevented them from interacting and engaging with other students at the institution. Furthermore, while the participants who possessed an extroverted personality thrived socially before joining their BGLO, they still believe their BGLO offered a different level of engagement at their PWI. Socially, these first-generation Black men could network and collaborate with other students, serve on governing boards and even serve in leadership roles within their BGLO. This social engagement supports Strayhorn's (2012) claim that Black men seek participation in student organizations such as BLGOs and desire to serve in leadership positions, ultimately connecting them to the institution and feeling a sense of belonging.

These first-generation Black men believed that it was within their BGLO that they found a sense of belonging at their PWI. These BGLOs offered the needed tools and services to help the first-generation Black men focus and feel like they were part of a group that supported and cared for their needs. On a larger scale, some participants noted that their BGLO provided a sense of belonging nationally. These first-generation Black men were able to network at conferences, learn essential life skills such as running a business meeting, serving as president of their fraternity chapter, and developing mentor-mentee relationships for lifelong learning.

“They Were Always There For Me’: Experiences Among Other Black Men

The mere fact that these first-generation Black men were near other Black men in college was a connection point that aided in their sense of belonging at their PWI. Participants recalled feeling good and proud to be in the same company of fellow Black men who were goal-seeking, concerned about making a positive impact on their community and succeeding in life. The 10 participants in the study could relate to other Black men in the BGLO as they shared a similar interest. This similar interest alludes to Mincy et al. (2017) research that articulated that Black men seek common space interactions with other Black men who can relate to their story and offer lived experiences and connections.

Not only was the BGLO experience a fraternity that provided friendship, but it also provided a family resemblance that provided brotherhood. A family-like atmosphere, which was also found in Strayhorn's (2012) research, was also present. The participants began to learn from fellow fraternity members and spend invaluable amounts of time with one another. Participants in the study came from various backgrounds, such as being the only child, one of many children, and even one participant being the victim of their blood brother, unfortunately, passing away during his freshman year in college. Being surrounded by other Black men offered these

participants an outlet to authentically express themselves. Harper (2006) claim that Black men seek out these spaces with other Black men to provide a sense of belonging, which helps them succeed at the institution. These first-generation Black men were able to share dialogue about their past, present, and future; while also educating one another on tools and tips to help them succeed at their PWI.

These first-generation Black men valued being around other first-generation and non-first-generation Black men attempting to navigate the campus culture. They cherished moments to gain support from one another and processed how to persist in being a Black man at their PWI successfully. While the participants did not have family support in the sense of prior knowledge coming to college, these first-generation Black men could connect with non-first-generation Black men to understand specific processes and methods in navigating the campus culture. Participants believed their connection with other Black men offered a sense of belonging, which ultimately helped their retention and persistence at their PWI.

Recommendations for Practice

This narrative study findings portray first-generation Black men's lived experiences who joined a Black Greek letter organization (BGLO) at a predominately White institution (PWI). The participants gave specific examples and implications that are viable accommodations for university and higher education professionals to consider. These implications will help assist those who self-identify as first-generation Black men and members of a BGLO at a PWI. Also, the implications will provide value to the collegiate experience and establish an authentic sense of belonging from a student organization, departmental, and institutional lens.

One-Stop-Shop

One major implication gathered from the participants centered around their lack of knowledge with understanding how to navigate the campus community for assistance. When asked how their PWI contributed to their success, participants reported not knowing where to go for tutoring, advisement, or counseling services and felt disconnected socially from their peers. To assist future first-generation Black men in overcoming these obstacles, colleges and universities should establish a one-stop-shop for all student success-related departments and offices. This approach would align itself with Cuyjet's (1997) research that spoke about the importance of first-generation students having dedicated resources and services at their disposal. This one-stop-shop should encompass dedicated professionals that would support enrollment, retention, and persistence for all first-generation students.

Departments such as academic advising, testing services, and retention specialists are areas where university officials can invest in this marginalized student population. TRIO and Gear Up coordinators assisting with first-generation students should also be available to serve as pipelines from highschool for first-generation college students seeking access into a PWI. Access through TRIO and Gear Up's pipelines are what Harper (2006) believed to be a fundamental component to ensuring success with first-generation college students.

Implementing a one-stop-shop for student success services and resources would help first-generation Black men who enroll at a PWI to become acclimated to the campus community. Students who participate with the student success center should have accountability measures set to monitor their academic performances. The student success center would also be available to recommend social engagement activities and programs for the students. Awareness and exposure to this one-stop-shop should be a focal point at all university orientation sessions and recruiting

events. Parents and students will have an opportunity to explore what is offered and inquire about potential concerns entering this unfamiliar territory. In the study, participants frequently mentioned the need for these services and independently sought various departments and offices to assist in their academic and social endeavors.

Professionally Trained Staff for NPHC Greek Organizations

Participants spoke very candidly about their issues and struggles with their university fraternity/sorority life office leadership. Throughout the interviews, it became evident that participants felt that their fraternity/sorority life office lacked the knowledge that university officials should have in understanding BGLOs and were unable to work with them. The participants spoke about the various policies and procedures put into place for fraternal organizations but were not inclusive of the NPHC organizations. As a result, BGLOs received penalties for not meeting specific requirements or were not eligible to compete for awards or recognition due to their fraternity/sorority life office's lack of inclusivity.

BGLOs have also been linked to enhancing and providing a positive experience for those who seek membership. Therefore, colleges and universities should work closely with members of BGLOs to select and train higher education professionals with a working knowledge of NPHC organizations. Specifically, participants believe that selecting a qualified candidate who is professionally trained and possesses membership in an NPHC organization would be more beneficial for their success rather than for someone who has only received training due to the nature of their job function.

Ideally, this concept of having one dedicated professional for each Greek council (Panhellenic Council, National Pan-Hellenic Council, and Interfraternity Council) would be beneficial to each organization and its members. This professional, in theory, would have a better

understanding of the unique and specific needs of BGLOs and advocate for their success to university officials. However, this would not be advantageous at every college or university due to staffing personnel and budget constraints. Therefore, higher education professionals should understand how to intentionally support and encourage BGLOs to provide a sense of belonging for their members academically and socially.

Opportunities for Black Men on Campus

Higher education professionally should consider creating formal and informal spaces on-campus dedicated to Black men. The first-generation Black men that participated in this research study expressed their passion and desire to be engaged and connected to other Black men at their PWI. This connection would benefit their sense of belonging and provide support from one another. In their classroom experiences, there were few or only one Black man in the classroom compared to their other racial and gender counterparts. The literature surrounding Black men finding their own safe space and outlet strengthens this claim that colleges and universities must dedicate attention to services targeting Black men (Baker, 2013; Harper, 2006). The Black men in the study intentionally sought to interact with other Black men throughout the university.

University officials at PWIs can intentionally address this recommendation by implementing a Black Male Initiative program, creating open spaces for connection and collaboration, and establishing a living or themed learning community dedicated to first-generation Black men. These opportunities would improve their academic, social, and mental abilities and offer a space to share their ideas and future aspirations. These programs should be a seamless partnership with academic affairs, campus services, and housing and residence life.

Each department and unit should dedicate physical and financial resources, in addition to personnel, to support and empower the first-generation Black men who participate in the

program. University administrators should intentionally work with current Black men on their campus to understand the needs and desired outcomes beneficial to the participants. Black men who serve in a faculty or staff role should serve as mentors and advisors to these programs. Research has proven that Black men desire to connect with faculty and staff of color, who can readily connect and interact with them.

Overall Assistance for First-Generation Black Men

Research conducted on first-generation Black men has shown that the PWI campus community and experience can be a daunting task to overcome. Scholars have even suggested that it would be more beneficial for first-generation Black men and even non-first-generation Black men to attend a historically Black college or university (HBCU) due to the programs and services already in place for them to succeed and feel included. However, first-generation Black men should not have to resort to only attending an HBCU to feel connected, embraced and a sense of belonging in order to persist and matriculate to graduation.

PWI's should take a hard look on their policies, procedures and practices that are preventing first-generation Black men from having a positive experience. Using antiquated theories and best practices should be eliminated and strategic methods should be used to embody this marginalized student population. Higher education professionals should also consider how the PWI culture can accomplish this goal without including student organizations such as BGLOs or culturally based departments such as the multicultural center. All first-generation Black men will not join a BGLO or seek the assistance of the multicultural center, therefore, it is the duty of the college or university to provide the necessary tools and resources for these students to feel a sense of belonging and succeed academically.

These resources start with changing the campus culture that would include all students from marketing signage to overall campus dynamics. The recruitment of Black faculty and staff members, outside of athletic coaches and janitorial personnel, needs to be a top priority. Black students who are able to interact and communicate with a Black faculty or staff member are more likely to stay connected, engaged and persist towards graduation. Academic resources such as tutoring and advisement should be focal points as they can serve as an early alert system to prevent any difficulties or challenges with coursework. And non-academic spaces should be available to allow first-generation Black men to interact, bond, and connect with other students. Implementing these mechanisms would contribute to first-generation Black men finding their sense of belonging and increase the retention and graduation rates for colleges and universities.

Recommendations for Future Research

This narrative research study focused on first-generation Black men and their experiences as a member of a Black Greek letter organization (BGLO) at a predominately White institution (PWI). However, data collected from the various stories and examples offered opportunities to explore further for future research. In this study, information was provided on first-generation Black men and their PWI experiences before joining their BGLO. One area that should be considered for future research is comparing and contrasting experiences by first-generation Black men to their counterparts of first-generation Black women. As part of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), four of the nine NPHC organizations (Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, and Sigma Gamma Rho) are sororities dedicated explicitly to women. Identifying how first-generation Black women navigate the campus community as a first-generation student at a PWI before and after joining a BGLO would help understand how to assist each gender demographic precisely.

In this study, the direct emphasis was placed on understanding how BGLOs contributed to first-generation Black men finding their sense of belonging. However, all first-generation Black men do not seek membership in an NPHC fraternity. Future research should be conducted to understand how first-generation Black men who attend a PWI find their sense of belonging without joining a BGLO. Understanding how first-generation Black men find support and resources outside of Greek-lettered organizations would help institutions with practical implementations and support in other areas outside of student organizations.

Lastly, gaining access to join a BGLO amidst several barriers such as the financial impact, misconceptions, stereotypes, and hazing allegations can be quite daunting for college students. However, research has shown that BGLOs offer Black students, men, particularly opportunities to thrive academically, socially, and culturally. Future research should be conducted to understand how Black men navigate a BGLO despite the challenges and impositions presented before seeking membership. This research would help supplement the gaps in the literature on first-generation Black men that attend a PWI and contribute to practical applications in understanding how to effectively and efficiently provide positive experiences for this marginalized population.

Conclusion

This narrative research study provided detailed accounts of first-generation Black men and their experiences as a member of a Black Greek letter organization (BGLO) at a predominately White institution (PWI). Throughout the study, participants spoke about how their first-generation background impacted their experiences. Nevertheless, each echoed the determination and persistence displayed in connecting with departments and resources to aid in their success. The 10 participants who are members of four of the five NPHC fraternities sought

membership with little to no previous knowledge of these organizations. Their reasoning for joining included the interactions and exposure to the current fraternity members at the PWI.

Despite their initial feelings of isolation, loneliness, and fear of failing when they first enrolled at their PWI, the participants began to feel welcomed, accepted and embraced after joining their BGLO. These BGLOs offered members support and resources in mentorship, networking, life skills, academic expectations, and social visibility. The BGLO provided the desired and wanted resources, tools, and skills that these first-generation Black men needed to advance and succeed at the PWI.

Overall, this narrative study provided a detailed account of the experiences of first-generation Black men who joined a BGLO as an undergraduate student and graduated from a PWI. It also provided recommendations on how institutions, especially PWIs, can establish a better working relationship with first-generation students, Black men, and students who are members of a BGLO. Should college and university administrators intentionally focus on these recommendations, future generations of first-generation Black men who enroll at a PWI would hopefully have a better first-year experience finding their sense of belonging. Also, support and advocacy would be given to BGLOs to continue providing opportunities for their members to succeed academically and socially.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

- Interviewee Name (pseudonym):
- Time of interview:
- Date:
- Place:
- Describe your knowledge of BGLOs prior to joining.
- Can you think of a particular situation in which being a first-generation Black man impacted you at your institution prior to joining your BGLO?
- Describe your experience being a first-generation Black man at your institution prior to joining your BGLO.
- Describe your sense of belonging and connection to the institution prior to joining your BGLO.
- How did your institution support you academically as a first-generation Black man prior to joining your BGLO?
- How did your institution support you socially as a first-generation Black man prior to joining your BGLO?
- What characteristics about your BGLO prompted you to seek membership?
- What experiences have you encountered as a first-generation Black man in your BGLO?
Can you share a story that exemplifies this?
- How did your fraternity support you academically? Can you provide an example?
- How did your fraternity support you socially? Can you provide an example?

- How did your BGLO contribute to your success as a college student?
- How did your institution contribute to your success as a member of a BGLO?

APPENDIX B

Institutional Review Board Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

“How My Brothers Kept Me”: A Narrative Study on First-Generation Black Men Who Joined a Black Greek Letter Organization (BGLO) at a Predominately White Institution (PWI).

Researcher’s Statement

I am Tyrone Michael Smiley, a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia conducting research under the direction of Dr. Georgianna Martin, Associate Professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services. We are 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: Georgianna Martin, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Counseling & Human Development Services
glmartin@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Black men who joined Black Greek letter organizations (BGLO) at predominately White Institutions (PWI). This research study will focus on these participants’ sense of belonging during college. The participants who consent to participate in this research study will need to meet the following criteria: (a) completed their baccalaureate degree at a PWI within the last 5 years (2015-2020), (b) identify as a first-generation college student based on their parental/guardian education level, (c) joined a BGLO (Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, or Iota Phi Theta) as an undergraduate student and (d) self-identify as a Black man.

This research study will not include current undergraduate students, females, individuals who self-identify as a woman, or BGLO sorority members. 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. If you are interested in participating in the study,

please read the additional information on the following pages, and feel free to ask questions at any point.

Study Procedures and Time Commitment

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Participants will schedule an appointment at a mutually convenient date and time. Interviews will be conducted virtually via Zoom, a web video technology platform. Participants will be asked at the beginning of the interview if they agree to have the session recorded via Zoom. Participants will also be able to select a pseudonym to represent their involvement and protect their identity. Data recorded in the interview will be audio via Apple iPhone and video recorded via Zoom to ensure your views are accurately represented in the study. Participants will be given an opportunity to review the transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy and editing purposes.

You will be asked questions pertaining to your sense of belonging as it relates to your (a) experiences as a first-generation Black man at a predominately White institution (PWI) and (b) experiences as a member of a Black Greek letter organization (BGLO).

Risks and discomforts

Participants should not experience any risk or discomforts while participating in this research study. However, due to the nature of uncovering aspects about one's own personal experience, participants might experience psychological discomforts such as feelings of stress/discomfort, sadness, guilt or anxiety. If you experience a negative reaction, you may choose to skip the question or withdraw from the study.

If you choose to participate in this study, you are encouraged to keep your participation in this study and your responses confidential. The researcher will maintain your confidentiality throughout the study and will destroy the records of your participation three years after the study is complete.

Benefits

There are no foreseen direct benefits to you regarding participation in this study beyond the knowledge that you are assisting in furthering the conversation related to the research topic. You are also a key participant in assisting the researcher in completing the doctoral degree requirements. There is no compensation associated with participation in this study. There are no incentives associated with participation in this study.

Confidentiality of records

Every attempt to protect your confidentiality will be made for the purpose of this study. Any reference to you will be by pseudonym, including any direct quotes from your responses. This document and any notes or recordings that might personally identify you as a participant in this study will be kept in a locked place that only the researcher will have access to. Only the researcher and the faculty advisor might know who has participated in this study. Three years after the completion of this research study all personally identifying information will be destroyed.

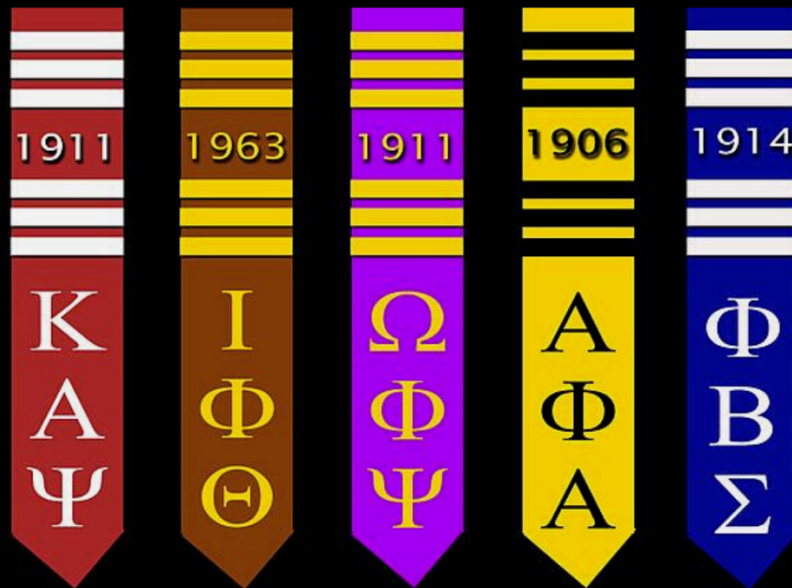
This research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed. Security measures will be utilized on the Zoom software by locking the room to prevent anyone else from joining the meeting and allowing the participant to list their pseudonym as their Zoom participant name. Transcriptions of the interview, which will be sent to the participant for editing and accuracy purposes, will be password protected and sent electronically to same the same e-mail address the participant used to consent to the interview. 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.

Participant rights

The main researcher conducting this study is Tyrone Michael Smiley, a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia. If you have any questions, you may contact me at tms83304@uga.edu or at (205) 718-0123 or my faculty advisor, Dr. Georgianna Martin at glmartin@uga.edu. 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.

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

APPENDIX C



BLACK GREEK FRATERNITIES

How My Brothers Kept Me:

A narrative research study on first-generation Black men who joined a Black Greek letter organization at a predominately White institution.

Criteria:

- first-generation college student
- self identify as a Black man
- joined a BGLO as an undergraduate student
- graduate of a PWI within the last 5 years (2015-2020)

Participation in this research study will require a 45-60 minute online interview



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