ALUMNI PERSPECTIVES: USING MEMBERSHIP WITHIN BLACK FRATERNITIES TO PROMOTE BLACK MALE SOLIDARITY AT HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES

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This work is dedicated to my niece and nephew, Rubi (Rue) Brown and Frederick Brown III (Trey). Never give up on your dreams, for they can and will come true.

Love,
Uncle Dee
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined the extent to which the sense of community, belonging, purpose and support of Black fraternities could be used as to enhance undergraduate black males’ persistence to graduation. Guided by a sense of community theoretical framework, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Black males who are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) alumnus and members of Black fraternities. Data analysis revealed that membership within fraternities, as well as institutional cues, contributed to both positive and negative perceptions of sense of community experienced by Black males attending HBCUs. Recommendations for fraternity members and decision-makers at HBCUs include the implementation of cross-collaborative programs between Black male undergraduates who are members of fraternities and those who are not, and the consistent use of positive Black male imagery on university websites.

Key words: Black fraternities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Sense of Community, social and academic assimilation theory, solidarity, engagement, Black males, membership
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“The reader is the leader”, were words constantly echoed by my parents, Frederick and Brenda D. Brown, to my brother and I as children. Years later, those words, which served as motivators, have stayed at the core of my academic journey. Honestly, this has become my favorite quote. Along with those words have been countless motivating prayers, conversations, text message and emails from a considerable number of supporters. I would like to take a moment to thank my supportive network. First, I like to thank God, for the gift of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and for never failing me and constantly listening to, and providing for me through this process. This journey was not easy, but through prayer, faith, grace and mercy, it was possible. Second, I’d like to thank my parents, Frederick and Brenda Brown, for having unwavering confidence in my academic abilities and for, above all things, inspiring and showering me each day with genuine, unconditional love. It is because of you and the values you instilled in me, I am the courageous and loving man I am today. Thank you both! I love you!!!

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You are truly a gift from God and I am glad to have you in my corner to share this moment. To my other grandparents: Ruthie Doss, Austin Doss, and Fred Brown; while you are not physically here to share this moment with me, I will never forget the principles of respect, honesty and hard work you taught me. I love and miss you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The motive for this dissertation was to uncover the lived experiences of alumni Black fraternity members’ lived experiences with sense of community and fraternity-life at four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Explicitly, the study attempted to reveal the extent to which the sense of community component of Black fraternities could be used to enhance undergraduate black males’ persistence to graduation, as well as their sense of belonging, purpose and support. This chapter provides a synopsis of the thesis.

Commencing the chapter is the problem statement and the researcher’s rationale for the study, which was to acknowledge and manifest barriers to engagement facing Black males on college campuses in climates where group assimilation into fraternities presented itself as a dualistic solution to the problem of practice. Following the problem statement are the research questions, which focused on understanding the lived experiences of Black males in fraternities, who are alumni, and what characteristics of fraternity membership they believed could be exerted to engage Black males who were attending HBCUs but were not in fraternities. What follows are the elements of the Sense of Community theoretical framework and discourse on how the framework was employed in the study.

Background

This section provides information on college assimilation percentages and patterns of Black males. Unearthing useful cognitive and non-cognitive ways to instruct, develop, engage, and graduate Black male undergraduates is conceivably one of the most pivotal problems facing institutions of higher education today (Strayhorn, 2014). Dating back to the 1960’s, affirmative action policies, and other aggressive program implementations have been made to address
societal wrongdoings imposed on Black males, increasing levels in educational equity via their representation at, and access to, institutions of higher education (Allen, 1992; Fischer, 2008, Levin, 2017). However, those measures may not be enough.

In an astonishing synopsis, the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Census Bureau (2016), found that between 1970 and 2015, the percentage of Black males in America has grown at almost six times but the rate of the percentage of Black males enrolled as undergraduate college students remains almost unchanged. The issue of engaging Black male students becomes critical. This matter has significance in society.

Engagement of Black males at institutions of higher education is considerable because of adverse societal effects, including increased criminal activity and incarceration rates associated with dropping out (Levin, 2017; Matthews-Whetstone, & Scott, 2015, Washington, 2013). Additionally, lack of educational equity for Black males have long-lasting effects on their political participation, intergenerational mobility, and overall mortality (Levin, 2017). Wong, Shapiro, Boscardin, and Ettner (2002) concluded that, on average, the lifespan of high school dropouts, is approximately six to nine years shorter than high school graduates. Fortunately, assimilation into academic (relationships with faculty and staff) and social environments (campus activities, student organizations, and peer engagements) on college campuses frequently equips Black males with a sense of belonging to those environments which, in turn, plays a role in contributing to their success (Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1988). For many Black males, they choose to matriculate at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and higher education institutions that were established with the purpose of educating Black students (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014).
Tinto (1998) posits that specific types and frequencies of academic and social interactions contribute to the success of Black males. Essentially, when Black males integrate themselves into academic and social environments on college campuses where success is deemed important, they are more likely to succeed. For some Black males, assimilation into Black fraternities, and other service-oriented academic support networks equip them with social and academic benefits. The benefits are often results of programs (e.g., time management workshops, networking functions, workforce development programs, service learning projects, etc.) that also serve as interventions to combat attrition. The next section provides background information about Black fraternities.

**Black Fraternities**

Black fraternities on college campuses date back to the early 1900’s, as social membership organizations with codes of ethics and mission’ that promote academic excellence and public service of their members. Additionally, these organizations have been known to provide their members with access to exclusive resources, enhanced social and economic capital, and controlled social and supportive environments (Bourdieu, 1986). Similar to most fraternities, Black fraternities are known to be very private in nature, releasing minimal information to non-members about their internal operations, processes and procedures. One unique attribute of Black fraternities is their length of membership commitment. While most collegiate fraternities have membership lengths that coexist with college matriculation, membership within Black fraternities carry lifelong commitments (Jenkins, 2012). Additionally, males within Black fraternities have proven higher levels of on-campus involvement, leadership competencies, higher graduation rates, and greater levels of satisfaction with campus social life than non-
members (DeBard & Sacks, 2011; Harris III & Harper, 2014; Kimbrough, 1995). Socially, Black fraternities have been known to maintain high levels of homogeneous interactions, avoiding forced interactions with non-members (Ray & Rosow, 2012). Since being established more than 100 years ago, these organizations are approaching one million members and, possibly, comprise the largest Black social institutions in the United States (Hughes, 2008). Moreover, Black fraternities have numerous rituals and symbols such as private doctrines, secret handshakes and chants. Due these attributes, Black fraternities may appear mysterious to non-members.

**Problem Statement**

This section discusses the problem of practice that guided this study. Two major obstacles facing institutions of higher education are rising costs and declining completions rates; the cost of education is outpacing the income levels of families and less than 50% of college students graduate within six years after enrolling (Allaire, 2018). These issues are of concern for Black males. While Black males on college campuses must rely on each other for support and to persevere to graduation, their small numbers and heterogeneous, within-group assimilations, characteristics and interactions may muddle the likelihood they will form groups of solidarity (Cuyjet, 2006). Chambers (2007) criticized Black fraternities and their over 800,000 members for doing more harm to Black communities than good, by accusing the organizations of creating and sustaining oligarchies within Black communities, by using systems of “elitism” and “snobbery” adopted from practices of White supremacy. This dissertation observed membership in Black fraternities and the factors perceived by its members that may contribute to the academic and social engagement and solidarity amongst Black males who are non-members at
Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The next section discusses the significance of this study.

**Significance of the Research**

This research is significant because it addressed the gap left between diverging proclamations in literature where group assimilation is revered as both enablers and deterrence’s to Black male solidarity in college (Cuyjet, 2006; Tinto, 1998). By treating the organization that is being assimilated into by Black males as an entity by which the sense of community experienced by non-members can be influenced, this study attempted to find solutions by which assertions from Cuyjet (2006) are minimized in post-group assimilation, into Black fraternities, for Black male undergraduate students.

According to Greer (2008), one underlying reason contributing to the dearth in literature focused on the experiences of Black male undergraduate students regarding sense of community climates at HBCUs, may be attributed to the use of such students as comparisons to their counterparts at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). When Black males attending HBCUs are compared to those attending PWIs, sense of community factors are limited to the cognitive and non-cognitive factors impacted by racial and ethnic-related elements such as: 1) safety and belonging, 2) institutional climate issues, and 3) personal accountability; and are presumed to significantly impact and exist for Black males who only attend PWIs (Parker, Puig, Johnson, & Anthony, 2016). As a result, such comparisons have contributed to the diminishment of the impetus necessary for scholars to treat HBCUs as autonomous research sites, exclusive of PWIs, and derive contextual understandings of Black male’s sense of community in those environments.
The presence of non-racial diversity amongst Black males, in addition to other features contributing to the academic and social experiences of Black males, make HBCUs interesting and complex environments worth studying. According to Shorette and Palmer (2015), because of these characteristics, most personnel at HBCUs lack access to practical and indubitable information about the experiences of Black students in their classrooms and on their campuses, and how those characteristics contribute to Black male persistence and retention. Owning a strong collection of literature to draw upon would bestow the empirical evidence imperative to better address the individual demands of Black male students about how they develop and sustain sense of community. The next section provides an overview of the study, including information on the methodology, research questions and analysis.

**Overview of Study**

This study was arranged into three phases. (1) Semi-structured interviews using membership within fraternities as community engagement mediums were conducted with eight members, representing three Black fraternities, across four Historically Black Colleges and Universities. (2) Artifacts were collected that presented cues of community engagement practices that may have impacted Black males, including fraternities' and university's mission statements, annual reports, and fraternities’ membership criteria. (3) An analysis of collected data was performed to pinpoint important, recurring themes and a thematic content analysis was conducted on the phases, and a superimposition of collected artifacts against emerging themes and the theoretical framework was explored to learn more about community engagement as a tenet of membership within Black fraternities.
Research Questions

This section details the research questions that guided this study. Eighteen research questions were developed to achieve the research goals. This study contained two primary questions, addressing participant’s overall experiences, and sixteen sub-questions focused on understanding how membership within fraternities can encourage more engagement of Black males attending HBCUs.

The primary research questions were:

1. How can undergraduate members of Black fraternities, who are currently attending Historically Black Colleges, encourage more active engagement by other Black male students on campus who are not within fraternities to promote group solidarity?

2. How did you use your membership within your fraternity to encourage more active engagement by other Black male students on campus who were not within fraternities to promote group solidarity?

The sub-questions for this study were:

(Pre and Post College Assimilation)

1) Tell me about the environment where you grew up (family composition, societal events, educational background).

2) How do you define solidarity? What is an example?
   a. Growing up, what did Black male solidarity mean to you? Why?

3) Why did you decide to attend a Historically Black College?
   a. What factors influenced your decision to attend your institution in particular?
4) Prior to attending your institution, what did you know about the solidarity among Black males on campus?

5) After arriving on campus, what did you observe about Black male solidarity on campus?
   a. What influenced the solidarity (external events, university, campus organizations, or students)?
   b. What barriers, if any, prevented interactions?

6) How did you meet and establish acquaintances/friendships with other Black males on campus?
   a. What factors contributed to your continued interactions?

7) What activities where you involved with on campus, prior to joining a fraternity?
   a. How did these actives promote solidarity?

(Fraternity-life (undergraduate))

8) How did you perceive members of your fraternity prior to joining?
   a. How did others on campus perceive the fraternity?

9) Why did you join your fraternity?
   a. What was your role within the fraternity (leadership or member)?

10) How did your fraternity encourage more active engagement by other Black male students on campus who were not within fraternities?
    a. What types of activities

11) Tell me about a time when you were able to make a decision as a member of your fraternity?
    a. How was/could these decision-making powers been used to promote solidarity
12) How did your fraternity use the membership intake process, to promote solidarity among Black males on campus?
   a. In your opinion, what were the benefits?

(Fraternity-life (current))

13) How do you perceive Black male solidarity on college campuses?
   a. Why is this your perception?

14) How do you perceive undergraduate members of your fraternity?
   a. What advice would you give to current members about the benefits of being in your fraternity?

15) What power do you believe your fraternity has, in the current climate, to promote solidarity?
   a. What about membership as a factor?

16) Do you have any thoughts or suggestions about actions fraternity members can take to promote solidarity on campuses?

McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) Sense of Community Framework provided a lens for understanding when and where to apply the accumulated knowledge from the questions, as well as setting the boundaries for interpretation and application of the solutions to the problem statement. The research questions were derived with the intent of understanding how the Black males in the study encountered sense of community at various junctions in their lives (before college, during college, and after college). Using fraternities as a source, whereby sense of community was affected by the participants, the study’s questions were aligned to the tenets of the theoretical framework that is discussed in the next sections.
Theoretical Framework

Analyzing the key assumptions associated with group cohesiveness, this section begins with a description of the theoretical framework that guided this study. Connected to research ontology, theoretical frameworks serve the purpose of ridding research of value-free, unbiased interpretations, rather than leaving phenomena interpretations open to scrutiny. Theoretical frameworks not only provide researchers perspectives for interpreting their data, but also opportunities to introduce research to academic audiences via discourse pertaining to the continuum of theory application (Kilbourn, 2006).

Would the cultural exchange of factors contributing to the success and cohesiveness of Black males who are members of Black fraternities provide solutions necessary to unite and lead to success of other Black males at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)? While popular theories such as Ladson-Billings et al.’s (1995) Critical Race Theory and Tinto’s (1988) Model of Student Retention have furnished understandings of assimilation, identity selection, and systemic oppression patterns encountered by Black males in college, they have overlooked how membership within Black fraternities may have affected overall engagement of Black males on college campuses. McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) Sense of Community Framework provides four domains for understanding and describing the innerworkings of sense of community (Figure 1.1). This study examines the framework through the sense community experiences of undergraduate Black males, in fraternities, who attended HBCUs. Essentially, the framework helps explain how membership within fraternities can contribute to more active engagement of non-members who are also Black males attending HBCUs.
Tenets of the Sense of Community Framework

Building on research that examined expansive deportments, perceptions, and affixes of communities and its members at sociological and psychological levels and magnifying the non-mutually exclusive notions of communities (territorial and relational), McMillan and Chavis (1986) constructed the Sense of Community Framework. Connected by four elements (membership, influence, integration and reinforcement of needs, and shared emotional connection), the Sense of Community Framework explains the generation and sustainability of sense of communities’ underlying experiences. McMillan and Chavis (1986) designed the framework to be “implicit” and “concrete” with identifiable parts and assumptions. One of the most obvious attributes associated with communities is the establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria.
**Membership.** Whether small or large, membership within any community pertaining to humans is built on the belief that some people belong to the group while others do not. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), inclusion and exclusion criteria, known as “boundaries”, help generate feelings of investment and acceptance by community members, as well as create social distance and barriers between members and non-members. Additionally, other components of membership (emotional safety, sense of belonging, and common symbols), in the theoretical framework make clear the physical, social, and cultural constructs of communities, as well as the mutual exchange of privileges between members and the communities.

This membership component of the theoretical framework can be applied to understand how interrelations within Black fraternities are structured. In Black fraternities, membership is governed by gender, intake processes, academic performance and social involvement (community service), and is strengthened by common symbols (colors, logos, handshakes, chants, hymns, etc.) and benefits (social capital, workforce development, community services, etc.). Critics have accused Black fraternities of mirroring White culture, creating Black oligarchies, and have linked them to practices of racial prejudice, hazing and colorism (Chambers, 2017). Nonetheless, this study focused on understanding how the positive aspects of membership can be linked to the engagement of non-members.

**Influence.** Influence within the theoretical framework is representative of conflict between strands of power (the ability of members of influence groups) and cohesiveness (the ability of groups to influence its members), where influence serves a “bidirectional” purpose of attracting groups and members to each other, as well as being a source of community strengthening. Additionally, influence within the theoretical framework assumes that there is an active balance
between group pressure on members to conform and members’ ability to self-conform. This element of the theoretical framework is built on four major proclamations:

1. Members are more attracted to a community in which they feel that they are influential.

2. There is a significant positive relationship between cohesiveness and a community’s influence on its members to conform. Thus, both conformity and community influence on members indicate the strength of the bond.

3. The pressure for conformity and uniformity comes from the needs of the individual and the community for consensual validation. Thus, conformity serves as a force for closeness as well as an indicator of cohesiveness.

4. Influence of a member on the community and influence of the community on a member operate concurrently, and one might expect to see the force of both operating simultaneously in a tightly knit community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 12).

This membership component of the theoretical framework was applied to understand how bonds within Black fraternities are formed and sustained. In this study, the ability of members to enact decision-making power and develop and conform to programs and norms, gave insight into how power and cohesiveness are exercised by the participants. The third element of the Sense of Community theoretical framework is integration and fulfilment of needs.

**Integration and fulfillment of needs.** This element of the theoretical framework, unlike its complemented elements, may better explain what initiates individual interest in Black fraternities and subsequently what, psychologically, creates and sustains group togetherness. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), individuals are attracted to groups and people who possess explicit
skills and behaviors they perceive will yield social capital (reward) and meet their emotional and intellectual needs. This assumption supports economic and psychological theory where the explicit presence of opportunity costs at the time of decisions influence real-time decisions and future evaluations and perceptions of foregone options (Greenberg & Spiller, 2016). Moreover, this element helps explain how members of Black fraternities perceive alternatives to fraternity assimilation as well as how they prioritized their emotional and intellectual needs and identified Black fraternities as solutions. Additionally, this element of the Sense of Community framework helps explain how other assimilation options (campus clubs and organizations), were not able to meet the needs of Black males attending HBCUs. So how do Black fraternities meet the emotional and intellectual needs of its members?

According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), reinforcement and fulfillment of needs, within groups, is achieved through the identification and matching of members shared values: needs, priorities, and goals. Once the matching of shared values has occurred, members are likely to meet each other’s needs, as well as those within the group, creating a sense of community. Black fraternities not only provide cohesive environments for members, built on membership, integration and fulfillment of needs, but they also embody the fourth and final element of the Sense of Community framework, shared emotional connection.

**Shared emotional connection.** This element of McMillan and Chavis (1986) Sense of Community framework assumes that community (group) power may be strengthened by the widespread belief in a set of group history, or the shared participation in events or event attributes. McMillan and Chavis (1986), posit that the emotional connection element is built on seven principles that promote or hinder group cohesiveness and attractiveness:
1. There is a positive correlation between group interaction and group solidarity. More interaction leads to greater solidarity.

2. Healthy interactions and experiences lead to greater solidarity.

3. Failure to complete or resolve duties perceived to be widely important by group members may hinder group cohesiveness (lack of need fulfillment).

4. Positive and negative events (local and societal) deemed paramount aide in group solidarity.

5. Greater commitment (time and energy) leads to greater emotional attachment.

6. The extent, and method, to which members are rewarded or punished affects group attractiveness, or lack thereof.

7. Sacred connections to the purpose of a group (e.g., religious beliefs, doctrines, rites of passages), create indescribable cultures that are observed by non-members, but only experienced by members.

This study observed the shared, emotional connection tenet of the theoretical framework in great depth. This study observed how group interaction and positive and negative events in society, and on HBCU campuses, were related to the sense of community experienced by the Black males in the study. The findings from this tenet are discussed in chapter four.

Application and Justification of Chosen Theoretical Framework

This study extended this model such that student engagement is a function of sense of community’s components, pertaining to assimilated organizations (in this case, fraternities). This dissertation, while understanding the widespread importance of the external forces contributing to student solidarity, focused on the perceptions and attitudes about group assimilation into Black
fraternities (from the lens of fraternity members) and how the sense of communities’ membership tenets may directly or indirectly influence, shape, and impact the perceptions of solidarity and Black male engagement on the four campuses for both members and non-members who are Black male undergraduate students. In this study, McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) framework, helped analyze the experiences contributing to the production, internalization, and reproduction of group solidarity perceptions and actions experienced by Black males (Pyke, 2010).

As previously stated, the primary justification for applying McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) Sense of Community framework to this study was that the model accomplished two overarching goals:

1. It provided a lens for understanding when and where to apply the accumulated knowledge gained from the study.
2. It set the boundaries for interpretation and application of the solutions to the problem statement.

Glossary of Key Terms

There are several key words, phrases and expressions mentioned on a recurring basis in this study. This section provides definitions of those items, as a guide for the reader.

**Assimilation.** The process of integrating into academic (relationships with faculty and staff) or social environments (campus activities, student organizations, and peer engagements) on college campuses.

**Black fraternities.** Social membership organizations with codes of ethics and missions that promote academic excellence and public service of their members.
**Black males.** In this study, Black males will be defined as any male having origins in Africa and based on their homogenous, dichotomized cultural and economic statuses in America-these are the generalizable attributes that set them apart from Whites in America (Hollinger, 1999). This definition is critical to this study because it generally categorizes Black males into a monolithic, functional social group, or racial identity, with assumed, shared everyday life experiences, without consideration given to their heterogeneous traits as well as the physical and non-physical characteristics that distinguish them from each other (Balibar, 1996).

**Engagement.** A term used interchangeably with the word “solidarity” to denote consensus or agreement in actions implemented or thoughts produced by fraternity members and non-members regarding their experiences with academic (relationships with faculty and staff) and social environments (campus activities, student organizations, and peer engagements) on college campuses.

**Historically Black College or University (HBCU).** A higher education institution in the United States with the primary goal of educating Black students, established prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014).

**Membership.** Used to represent direct affiliation with, and belonging to, an organization. In this study, Black fraternities were used as primary organizations for observation.

**Sense of community.** This term is adopted from its use in the Sense of Community framework and represents a feeling that members have a belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

**Social capital.** In this study, social capital refers to a set of resources, rewards, and benefits rooted in relationships (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).
The next section reviews the researcher’s positionality. The researcher will give an overview of their rationale for selecting the study. Additionally, the researcher will make known any personal information about himself that may bias the study.

**Researcher’s Positionality Statement**

As a Black male and life-long member of a Black fraternity, I have considerable understanding of how membership within fraternities are established and sustained. However, my understandings are these dynamics are limited, as I have never attended a Historically Black College or University. Therefore, my understandings of student-life, Black fraternity-life, and Sense of Communities at HBCUs are very limited. In fact, it was not until that I gained exposure to, via a well-known, fictitious film produced by Spike Lee, Black fraternity-life at HBCUs. Although the film showed inter-group conflict between members and non-members of Black fraternities, and tackled other issues impacting Black students’ sense of community at a HBCU and in society (e.g., colorism and African apartheid divestment) it was still, in my mind not real. After reading multiple studies on the importance of Black males, “sticking together” and getting involved in college to persist and graduate, I came across Cuyjet’s (2006) assertion that went against everything I had been conditioned to think about Black male college assimilation. The study essentially taught me that when Black males join groups, the groups they join are sub-groups of their larger group which based on their race, and, ultimately these sub-groups come with exclusions that may cause them to neglect or alienate others, which then leads to a lack of interaction, support, and solidarity. Due to this, Black males may less likely succeed in college.

Although I wanted to dispute Cuyjet’s (2006) claim, I knew there was truth to the assertion. Looking back on my own experience as an undergraduate student and member of a
Black fraternity, I recalled how my membership within the fraternity was a great source of solidarity and support for myself and my brothers (other members), but not necessarily for the non-members who were also Black males on campus. My fraternity had programs that were designed to create service for all, but I personally did little to engage other Black males who were not interested in joining the fraternity community. Although I played by the rules (assimilated into academic and social environments), did my personal decisions have an adverse impact on the Black male population as a whole? Or, was it possible that the very thing I joined (fraternity) could be strategically used to engage other Black males who were not members and those who may never desire to become members? Can Black fraternities co-exist as flat organizations (opposite of hierarchies) at HBCUs with non-members who are Black males?

These questions served as the primary impetus for me observing HBCUs, along with my own biases that Black males at HBCUs, aside from colorism, were probably extremely monolithic and united. Nonetheless, I decided to embark on this research because I wanted to bring awareness to what I believed was an overlooked problem by Black males and college administrators: sub-group assimilation pulls away from the group solidarity and support needed by Black males to succeed. In addition to raising awareness of the issue, I wanted to hear from the Black males who also assimilated into Black fraternities at HBCUs to gain solutions to the problem with the hopes that their stories, experiences, and solutions would resonate with others and provide discourse that would bridge the gap between competing, yet sensible theories, resulting in actionable strategies to be used by HBCU and Black fraternity leadership. Not only was I excited to study this topic, I was enlightened along the way.

Chapter 1 Summary
This chapter introduced this dissertation and the purpose of this study to reveal the extent to which the sense of community component of Black fraternities could be used to enhance undergraduate black males’ persistence to graduation, as well as their sense of belonging, purpose and support. Additionally, this chapter described the problem statement, as well as the rationale for selecting research questions and a theoretical framework to address the problem, which was developed by finding gaps in existing literature. This chapter continued with key terms that are referenced throughout this dissertation, as well as a positionality statement of the research, acknowledging potential biases that may have, if left unannounced, influenced the outcome of the study. The next chapter, the literature, highlights peer-reviewed literature to distill the sociological, psychological, organizational and cultural epistemology and applications of research pertaining to experiences of Black males.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This review is partitioned into multiple sections and adopts an additive approach that synthesizes current and previous works around Black male student success and community engagement, acknowledging that Black male college students are not a monolithic population. Instead, they are results of intricate families, cultures, ideologies, and educational environments. Because of these distinguishing characteristics, some Black males possess higher levels of self-efficacy and are better equipped to persist in college. Yet, as previously referenced, Black male post-secondary assimilation patterns into college social and academic environments, and who they surround themselves with may muddle the likelihood of solidarity and, ultimately, success (Cuyjet, 2006). An emphasis has been placed on engagement in college because unlike other uninformative attributes, prior to college enrollment, interpersonal engagement and supportive relationships between a child and their parents, peers, and teachers have been proven to affect academic outcomes of students (Kiuru, Pakarinen, Vasalampi, Silinskas, Aunola, Poikkeus, & Nurmi, 2014). In other words, engagement is the impressionable junction between students’ actions and attitudes and their educational environments.

The following questions were used to guide the review:

- What crucial studies are regarded as popular in research?
- What inferences, from multiple epistemological perspectives, can be drawn from the studies?
- What inquiries remain unresolved?
- What solidarity and community attributes (membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connections) are experienced by Black males prior to and after college matriculation?
• How is the sense of community theory enlightened by these studies?

This analysis uses peer-reviewed literature to distill the sociological, psychological, organizational and cultural epistemology and applications of research pertaining to experiences of Black males, with the intent of deriving post-secondary community engagement solutions for Black males to be used by students and college personnel. Of importance to this study is research that has observed the development, oppression and assimilation of Black males as members of numerous populations: families, cultures, ideologies, and educational environments (Ladson-Billings et al., 1995; Tajfel, 1979; Tinto, 1988). The next section is intended to provide an overview of theoretical perspectives on social identity.

**Theoretical Perspectives on Social Identity**

Tajfel’s (1979) social identity theory is the presiding sociological perspective on understanding how individual’s self-identity is shaped based on group affiliation as shown in Figure 2.1.

![Figure 2.1: Illustration of Tinto’s Social and Academic Assimilation Theory](image)
The three major tenets provide insight into how individuals develop and evaluate themselves regarding who they are and who they aspire to be: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. This theory clarifies how Black males in college perceive their own identities when comparing themselves to peers.

Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, and Flament (1971) advanced research on understanding the effects of intergroup affiliations on individual and group behavior. Tajfel et al. (1971) postulated that membership exclusion criteria (social categorizations) distinguishing between “us” and “them”, is the starting point for examining intergroup behaviors within social environments. Additionally, they proposed that once individuals relate and identify to groups, they are likely to differentiate themselves from non-members and other groups and behave in discriminatory manners that benefit other members with their same intergroup affiliations. In turn, these categorizations increase the likelihood that intergroup members, when faced with making decisions, will select harmful strategies over alternatives that represent common good. Further, the study asserted that the anticipation of future interactions between outgroups and ingroups do not predict ingroup behavior.

In a subsequent study in which teenage males were tasked with allocating money to each other based on known similarities (non-categorizations), Billig and Tajfel (1973) found that participants’ perceived similarities to each other led to favoritism behavior. Collectively, these studies manifest subtle differences in behaviors surrounding individual’s uncontrollable groupings and perceived groupings, ultimately leading to expansive areas, separate from ingroup behaviors, by which to observe ingroup bias: attitudes, perceptions, and preferences (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). Social identities are important because they help explain ingroup biases, responses to inequality, how stereotypes may aid in understanding ingroup judgment and action,
and how ingroup interactions may reduce salience of ingroup-outgroup distinctions by cross-
function interactions or reconfiguring boundaries of factors causing separation (Brown, 2000).

It is important to note that not all individuals equally value factors contributing to their
social identities, and this impact the levels of value as we well as their self-evaluations of
specific social groups (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). Race as a social identity has been the
emphasis of considerable amounts of research and has contributed to understanding the social
identity development of Black males (James, 2011; Martin, Nejad, Colmar, & Liem, 2013;
Noguera, 2003; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele, 1997; Welch, 2007; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). In
addition to race, another important social identity is gender.

The presence of social media networks has changed ways adolescents develop social
identities. A study by Pegg, O’Donnell, Lala, and Barber (2018) revealed that content valued by
or experienced by online social identities, identities developed by being a part of social networks,
influence identity and behavior. In their study, they found that alcohol consumption amongst
adolescents had a positive relationship to the presence of alcohol-related content experienced via
online social networks. This is important to observe because digital social networks are
reshaping the way individuals form social identities. The next section is intended to provide an
overview of theoretical perspectives on social identity and Black males.

Social Identity and Black Males

At micro levels, research links stereotypes about Black males to the psychological
construction of their identities and their intellectual development; and on macro-levels, to their
social positions within society as well as serving as the impetus for a fraction of the populations’
exhibited human behaviors and treatments they encounter, in social and academic settings
(James, 2011; Noguera, 2003; Steele, 1997; Welch, 2007; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Steele
(1997) theorizes that school performance is directly hampered by social stereotypes and assumes school success is directly linked to internal perceptions of “sustained achieved motivation” (p. 613). Essentially, stereotypes about oppressed individuals can lead to their unfair treatment in several forms: socioeconomic disadvantage, segregating social practices, and restrictive cultural orientations (Steele, 1997; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Moreover, the limitations placed on access to education for stereotyped individuals may present barriers to their identifications of academic success.

Perhaps the most perplexing finding of Steele’s (1997) research is the concept of “the stereotype threats”, instances in which individuals who are more confident or self-definition to oppressed opportunities are likely to become diminished vanguards to the domains. For example, two students who are stereotyped by their teachers based on socioeconomic status or perceived academic ability: one who is high achieving; and one who is underperforming, may react differently to systemic limitations imposed on their success. When considering the stereotype threats, the high achieving student will more likely suffer the greater impact from loss of opportunities and, as a result, most likely further identify with the stereotypes.

While most research on stereotypes focus on the treatment of individuals, several researchers build on existing literature to advance knowledge pertaining to stereotypes explaining how they contribute to individuals’ adaptability, self-identification patterns and influence regarding everyday occurrences (Martin, Nejad, Colmar, & Liem, 2013; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). While negative stereotypes about Black males exist, counterarguments show that most Black males are not imprisoned and have not contracted HIV/AIDS (Noguera, 2003). Understanding early stereotypes of Black males may help shape an understanding of how they develop social identities.
Early stereotypes painted Black men as witches, rapists, and fearful beings. These labels were aimed to sustain slavery practices; subsequent stereotypes, post-slavery abolition and used different tactics of disenfranchisement and Jim Crow laws, substituting slavery with racial segregation (Helg, 2000). Between 1889 and 1931, there more than 3,200 of Blacks in America were the victims of lynching. Stereotypes were used to generate social approval and conformity around the killings, which resulted in increased White dominant political hegemony (Helg, 2000; Tolnay, Beck & Massey, 1989).

Lynching involving individuals suspected of murder and rape, drew large crowds (a public spectacle), since those crimes were amongst the vilest (Helg, 2000). However, undeniable was not just the existence of the lynching, but what was behind the invoking of such acts. As a result, Blalock (1967) hypothesized that racial segregation against minorities were motivated by two forces: 1) economic competition, and (2) political power. Results of Blalock’s (1967) Power Threat Hypothesis found that in one Mississippi county, threats against White dominance (political power) were positively correlated to increases in Black population and the invoking of racially segregated acts against minorities (as Black populations increased so did lynching).

Building on Blalock’s (1967) Power Threat Hypothesis, several scholars sought to test such a theory and determine, if possible, predictors in the frequency of the lynching. (Reed, 1972, Corzine et al., 1983; Hagen, Makovi, & Bearman, 2013). Moving beyond understanding attributes leading to a lynching in the Southern United States, Hagen, Makovi and Bearman’s (2013) research posited an argument for understanding how and when lynching mobs (groups of three or more White individuals) were likely to lynch an individual. In addition, there was the search for a better understanding of instances in which such crimes were likely to be averted by law enforcement agencies. Research indicated that lynching events were highest in southern
states when political discourse created environments conducive to racial violence. The likelihood of mob formation, averted lynching events, and actual lynching events decreased by 28% when political power resided within the Republican Party. Contemporary, negative, prolonged depictions of Black males, once internalized, may influence their success in and out of school environments (Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012). The next section is intended to provide an overview of theoretical perspectives on barriers facing Black males in college.

Black males and barriers in college

Due to student population diversification, Black males on college and university campuses face several challenges. Internalized racism occurs when publicly condemned groups (e.g., Black males) adopt and proliferate oppressed, cynical perceptions pertaining to their capacity, aptness, and place in society, which leads to self-reduction and the belittling of others within the group (Essed, 1991; Jones, 2000; Lipsky, 1987; Pheterson, 1990; Pyke & Dang, 2003). Baker (1983) postulated that ill-treated groups subscribe to negative inferiorities at both individual and communal levels. A direct result of such adoption is members, within-groups, unbeknownst to themselves; support the views of the oppressed through the introduction of negative and contentious messaging during interactions with peers in their same groups. Eventually, Black males socialize into negative environments and adopt negative perceptions as their norms, adjusting their behaviors according to the oppressed racial norms. Lipsky (1987) asserted that the reciprocal mistreatment of Black males across-groups is not a source of racism but instead an inner response to outwardly inflicted oppression. Additionally, she posited the internalized oppressions harbored by Black males causes them to denounce, reject, and set unreasonable demands of members who try to progressively move the group out of oppressions, yielding in exhaustion among Black male leaders. A qualitative study conducted by Boyd and
Mitchell (2018) focused on understanding how Black males in college internalized and combated stereotypes and persisted. The study found that the Blacks in the study evaluated their own social identities against the prejudices of their White peers and faculty. Additionally, the study found that hostile environments were created because the Black males were self-consciously under a lot of pressure to not conform to the prejudices of others. Ultimately, the Black males in the study were able to come together, share experiences, and develop strategies to combat stereotypes and microaggressions. In this example, the Black males in the study found comfort in relating to other Black males who endured similar problems. Recommendations of practice from this study included bystander intervention trainings and courses offered by the university around cultural awareness and sensitivity.

The next section is intended to provide an overview of Critical Race Theory.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) holds the view that racism is permanent, widespread, and continuous. In the United States and, globally, stories of oppressed individuals, accompanied by the belief that racism is normal and natural, should drive research to unearth the benefits of being White (Hernandez, 1990; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Additionally, CRT holds the belief that scales of justice are imbalanced and that society is not color-blind (Hernandez, 1990). Furthermore, CRT authenticates the voices of those who are victims of subordination (Hernandez, 1990). The use of CRT will help better understand how social structures (in this case, Black fraternities) sustain actions and habitats that support existing conditions and consequently, the subordination and alienation of racial groups.

By the end of 1951, the number documented instances of Blacks lynched in America (between the 1880’s and 1951) exceeded 5,000 (Tolnay, Beck & Massey, 1989). The 1960’s saw
the formation of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), a social movement aimed at reducing racial discrimination of Blacks via increases in their political and economic rights (Hall, 2005). By the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, lynching practices were no longer the preferred choice of racial violence by mobs. However, other, overt forms of discrimination and social control emerged (public beatings, wrongful imprisonments, home evictions, employment terminations). Portrayed by the media, social imagery of Blacks meticulously focused on airing news stories that pitted non-violent Black demonstrators, seeking to balance social power imbalances, against villain-like terrorists (Fleming & Morris, 2015; Hall, 2005). During the 1960’s, media and technology not only made it possible to expose racism at the national level (newscasts increased in lengths and frequencies), but the world as well. (Hall, 2005; Roberts & Klibanoff, 2006). Increases in media attention also meant increases in individual interpretations of media content.

A study by Adams-Bass, Stevenson and Kotzin (2014) aimed to build on studies that explored relationships between message transfers of information from family to youth and their subsequent racial identity development. The focus was on the relationships between age, gender, and television viewing frequency to determine if any factors directly impacted Black and White adolescent perceptions of Blacks. The study examined how Black youth internalized the content as well as the message transfer from media to youth. The following questions guided their study: (a) Is it possible to develop a valid and reliable measure of adolescent perceptions of positive and negative Black media images for television and magazines? and, (b) If developed, what relationship would these perceptions of Black media images have to other aspects of youth identity development including racial identity maturity, body image, self-esteem, and Black history knowledge scores?
Results from the study found that high volumes of prime-time degrading imagery exposure via media had negative impacts on Black adolescent racial identity development. According to the study, adolescents, when presented with negative and positive images of Blacks, were able to better distinguish between the two and construct their own identities. Nevertheless, when presented with only negative images, adolescents are likely to identify with those images. Understanding how individuals develop is essential to understanding how groups form.

In a recent study, Smang (2016) applied a “symbolic and social group formation” framework to explore the connection between intergroup violence and the formation of “racialized” group boundaries and identities. Building on Helg’s (2000) assertion that lynching mobs were formed based on the socioeconomic statuses and races of alleged victims; Smang’s (2016) framework implies that there are two elements that comprise the symbolic boundaries of social group formation: 1) categorical boundaries (factors separating in-groups from out-groups) and 2) normative boundaries (factors authorizing and prohibiting intragroup and intergroup relations and practices). Essentially, Smang (2016) argues that from symbolic boundaries, groups with perceived homogeneous characteristics emerge with hierarchies and inclusive structures. Additionally, Smang’s (2016) distinguishes intergroup violence that is a result of collective-identity (groups fighting against political or economic oppression) versus intergroup violence that is a result of social-identity (violence committed by in-group members to please other members). Ultimately both attributed to the violence and lynching practices in the southern United States.

Criminal Disenfranchisement
While the disenfranchisement of ex-felons, as it relates to voting rights, applies to individuals of all races, the number of ex-offenders who are Black and disenfranchised is significantly higher than other races. In 1990, Blacks accounted for 47% of the total US convicted felon prison population, and 48% of total violent crimes committed by convicted felons (Harvey, 1994). According to Cammett (2012), modern disenfranchisement of ex-offenders, in addition to insurmountable prison penalties, presented three major barriers to ex-felons:“(1) class and race stigma and the disproportional burden of incarceration; (2) civil collateral consequences of criminal convictions; (3) onerous re-enfranchisement processes that discourage voter restoration; and (4) the emergence of debilitating “carceral” debts, including criminal justice legal financial obligations (LFOs) and child support debt incurred during incarceration” (p. 356).

Race Relations on Campus

This section reviews how race relations on campus have shaped the Black male college experience. Additionally, this section reviews literature that has focused on Black males on predominantly White campuses. Boyd and Mitchell’s (2018) research provided strategies for post-secondary institutions to combat hostile environments experienced by Black male students from fellow peers, faculty and staff members. Black students attending PWIs have reported experiences with micro-aggressions, which have led to internal feelings of inferiority, negative interactions with faculty members, and experiences with segregation from White peers (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Bonilla-Silva’s (2009) framework, “Color-Blind Racism”, omits race as a factor in negative interactions among members of different races. He uses ideology to analyze perceptions of race relations and explain grouping of (within and across) different races. Bonilla-Silva’s (2009) Color-Blind Ideological Analysis (2009) posited that
Whites use color-blind ideologies to remove responsibility and blame for social, educational, and political outcome experiences by non-Whites. For example, the underachievement of Black college males attending higher education institutions may be explained by factors omitting stereotypes and incidents of racism experienced by the students. According to Bonilla-Silva (2009), there are four frames for analyzing Color-Blind Racism and understanding its impacts on race relations and climates:

1. **Abstract Liberalism** involves using ideas associated with political liberalism (e.g., “equal opportunity,” the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (e.g., choice and individualism) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters.

2. **Naturalization** allows Whites to explain racial phenomena by suggesting that they are natural occurrences.

3. **Cultural Racism** relies on culturally based arguments such as, “Mexicans do not put much emphasis on education” or “Blacks have too many babies” to explain the [status] of minorities in society.


According to Hurtado et al. (1998), higher education racial/ethnic climates and learning environments are shaped by a non-discrete, two-part framework (See Fig. 1.1), with subsections, taking into consideration institutional forces (internal and external).
External forces impacting campus racial/ethnic climates

Essentially, Hurtado et al.’s (1998) idea for heterogeneity is the notion that college enrollees are instructed in visible racial settings. External forces impacting campus/racial ethnic climates, within the theoretical framework, are impacted via two elements:

1. Government policies, programs, initiatives
2. Larger, popular events or social issues

Programs and policies around financial aid, affirmative action, desegregation of higher education court decisions, and differentials in implementation strategies across state systems of higher education, provide examples of how government policies, programs, and initiatives externally impact campus/racial and ethnic climates (Hurtado et al., 1998). An example of external impacts to campus racial/ethnic climates via larger, popular events or socials that have influenced campus racial/ethnic climates include Hurricane Katrina, which led to the humanizing of victims (outgroups) by society and college campuses. As a result, the intent to help victims
was driven by human emotion in relation to group (within and out-group) statuses; individuals who felt emotionally connected (e.g., anguish, mourning, remorse) were more likely to help the victims than those who felt removed from the within group (Cuddy, Rock, & Norton, 2007).

Another example of social events impacting campus racial climates was the non- indictment of officers causing the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Gardner. In response to the non-indictments, racism and violence experienced by communities of color, medical students attending the University of California San Francisco, School of Medicine, the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, and the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, organized regional and national acts of resentment, including die-ins, on campus conversations about race relations, and open-letters to campus administrators calling for action: the condemnation of the officer’s actions (Charles, Himmelstein, Keenan, Barcelo, & White Coats for Black lives National Working Group, 2015). The examples provided only comprise, which is the first component of Hurtado et al.’s (1998) Racial Climate Model.

**Internal Forces Impacting Campus Racial/Ethnic Climates**

The second component comprising Hurtado et al.’s (1998) Racial Climate Model, are the internal impacts to campus racial/ethnic climates. The internal impacts are broken into four categories:

1. The institution’s historical record of diversity and inclusion of various racial/ethnic groups
2. The institution’s numerical representation of racial/ethnic groups
3. The perception and attitudes between and among groups
4. The behavioral climate dimension (intergroup relations on campus).
An institution’s (college administration and students) historical record of having segregated environments and its’ inability to empathize with or rapidly condemn segregating behaviors can lead to both the further anguish of affected parties and the sustainment of segregated environments (Malik, 2016). In addition to historical records of diversity and inclusion, college campuses’ racial and ethnic climates are impacted by their numerical representation of racial and ethnic groups. For example, the National Collegiate Athletic Association underwent scrutiny for trying to implement policies (increasing GPA requirements of student athletes) that would alienate Black athletes attending HBCUs and PWIs, causing for the 50% reduction of eligible Black male athletes in institutions Division I, II, and III programs (Nwadike, et al., 2016). Hurtado et al. (1998) postulated the perceptions, attitudes, and interactions between and across groups can be reduced to the psychological perceptions of group members; specifically, the perceptions of member’s positions in society and their perceived power. This will dictate if and how they choose to interact within and across their groups, as well as the outcomes of those interactions. The final component to Hurtado et al.’s (1998) framework is the behavioral climate dimension, which argues that campus race relations are correlated to social interactions (when social interactions are low, campus race climates are defective). Additionally, the behavior dimensions posit that while group and student organizations contribute to the segregating nature of climates (they exclude non-members), they are great for the identity enhancement of members (Hurtado et al., 2008). The next section is intended to provide an overview of theoretical perspectives student retention and persistence models.

**Student Retention and Persistence Models**

Tinto (1975) initially profiled his framework, bringing attention to factors contributing to undergraduate attrition rates. While the model has progressed over the last few decades, its
assumptions and theoretical underpinnings have prevailed as ubiquitous influencers in discourse around post-secondary student success (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013; Brooms, 2018; Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015; Kahu, 2013). To a significant degree, the Tinto framework garnered authoritative stature in academia and has dually ignited sharp attention advanced fieldwork analysis and post-secondary intervention strategies around combating student attrition (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013).

Essentially, Tinto’s (1975) research manifested positive relationships existing between student’s abilities to assimilate socially on college campuses and their persistence patterns. Furthermore, it was suggested that students who get involved on campus are more likely to escape attrition trends, whereas students who choose not to assimilate are more likely to comprise attrition populations. Though assimilation is deemed important in the context of establishing persistence patterns for undergraduate students, there are barriers impeding its effectiveness. Wilkins (2014) determined that first-generation Black males attending predominantly White campuses who had been previously been exposed to majority White student populations while attending high school were surprised by the lack of acceptance of both Black and White students. For the first time, many of the Black males faced hostility and rejection because they did not meet the masculine, Black expectations of their peers. Moreover, these students were unable to transfer the pre-college behaviors to college that led to augmented social capital and ease of assimilation during their high school years.

Failure to understand and meet faculty expectations plague college freshmen, which is why scholars have specifically built on Tinto’s inquiries by seeking to understand student retention based on intersections of student’s abilities (academic skills and accumulated cultural capital) and their performance (demonstrated and actual capacity) (Collier & Morgan, 2008).
Tinto (1975) relies on scores from tests and exams to identify the presence of student’s abilities and performance, and he relies on their ability to assimilate into academic environments to assess their capacity to assimilate into the scholastic and communal domains of college. He postulated student grades and assimilation patterns are perhaps the greatest acknowledged determinants, from students and institutional perspectives, of student persistence.

Tinto (2007) later built on his previous model, bringing attention to some of its constraints, particularly, the exclusion of commuter campuses as well as diverse populations and important factors (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.), calling for empirical investigations leading to the augmentation of administrative (university) and communal solutions and interventions geared towards addressing student attrition. Using Tinto’s expanded model of student retention and assimilation, removing constraints associated with campus type and majority status, Wood, Newman, and Harris (2015) observed factors contributing to the retention and self-efficacy of Black males attending community colleges, from an academic integration perspective; finding that Black males who exhibited self-efficacy patterns (meeting with academic advisors, studying in the library, and properly navigating the internet for course content), were more successful in coursework than Black males who did not regularly display the same self-efficacy patterns. Additionally, the study found that success in mathematics courses was also a leading determinant of academic integration and persistence for Black males in community college.

Higher education challenges facing Black males begin prior to their matriculation as students at institutions of higher education. Several studies (Hilton & Bonner, 2017; Morgan, Gelbgiser & Weeden, 2013; Wood & Harris, 2015) highlight troubles faced by Black males during the college decision-making process and empirically imply that such troubles predicate
impetus for college selection among Black males, not individual choice. According to Morgan, Gelbgiser and Weeden (2013), the impact of creating occupational career plans for males during post-secondary education and its ability to predict college major selection and retention rates for males is often neglected from discourse surrounding pre-college selection; this type of research indicates that Black males who have created career plans prior to enrolling in college have higher chances of persistence than those who do not have career plans. Moreover, Wood and Harris (2015) found that college selection factors such as availability of financial aid, attending the same college as one parent, and the size and type of institution are positively correlated to Black male retention and persistence in college. Additionally, the same study found that when Black males selected colleges based on athletics, they were less likely to persist.

Wilkins (2014) depicts a different picture of the pre-college years of Black males. According to Wilkins (2014), Black males begin their quests for upward mobility in high school by developing social capital and finding ways to assimilate amongst their peers while in high school, thus, prioritizing the ability to self-advocate for their own success over other pre-college lures, such as athletics and being perceived as popular. These studies provide preliminary lenses for understanding how selection factors can drive academic success for Black males in college.

Concentrating on Tinto’s (2007) call for inclusionary research in student retention and persistence, Palmer, Wood and Arroyo (2015), produced a three-part model which specifically focuses on persistence and retention patterns of Black males attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Palmer et al.’s (2015) theoretical framework for retention and persistence focuses on three key moments in the lives of Black males attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Pre-Entry, Enrollment and Persistence, and Optimizing Student
Success), and process improvement mechanisms for college personnel to adopt postulated recommendations of the framework.

Similarly, Arroyo and Gasman (2014) posited that some Historically Black Colleges and Universities actively seek-out and accept applicants who are less than prepared, by admissions indicators, to matriculate at their universities with the intent of diversifying the types of learners on campus and educating them alongside each other. This diversification is based on several factors, including being first-generation students. The next section reviews literature on first-generation students.

First-Generation Student Status

Researchers have generally associated an individual’s success to the expected benefit of their educational attainment level. For most, this is determined by an individual’s acquired knowledge in college. A general perception is that college access and persistence is readily available and achievable by all individuals who seek to enroll. Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) suggested that an individual’s decision to attend college is largely influenced by whether their parents attended college; individuals are more likely to attend college if their parents attended college. However, it is common knowledge that some individuals attending college come from homes in which their parents did not attend college. Billson and Terry (1982) defined students who attend college, and whose parents never attended college, as first-generation college students.

According to a longitudinal report produced by the National Center for Education Statistics (Chen, 2005), 22% of students who enrolled in post-secondary institutions between 1992 and 2000 were first-generation college students. Additionally, these same students, during that period, were twice as likely to drop out and graduated at a rate 44% lower than their non-
first-generation classmates. Studies have been conducted to examine how students adapt and succeed in college environments (Deboer, 1985; Johnson & Butts, 1983; Tajfel, 1979). However, Engle and Tinto (2008) suggested there are barriers in existence that prevent the success of first-generation students once they are enrolled in college; one such barrier is socioeconomic class. Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernandez (2013) posited that a non-normative approach be taken when observing the barriers hindering family involvement of first-generation college students. They believed issues surrounding race, class, and income must be considered when understanding achievement gaps and academic performance of the population. Others have adopted the same logic and referred to family involvement as the process of providing financial, emotional and valued-time to students that leads to enhancements in both student learning and achievement (Soucy & Larose, 2000; Strage & Swanson Brandt, 1999). Additional areas linked to the success of first-generation college students include: (1) race, income and socioeconomic status (2) self-efficacy and motivation and, (3) parental involvement and support.

To assist Black males with college persistence, institutions may want to consider creating programs directed toward Black male success. For example, a qualitative study by Brooms (2018) detailed how a Black male mentoring program contributed positively to the academic and social experiences of participants. Benefits to the Black male initiative included “(a) sense of belonging – comprised of statements of mattering and feeling connected on campus; (b) gaining access – comprised of statements where students expressed the importance of increased access to sociocultural capital; (c) academic motivation – comprised of statements positing the efforts of BMI to support and enhance students’ academic and educational performances; and (d) heightened sense of self, or feeling connected to a collective identity and consciousness among BMI staff and peer BMI members” (Brooms, 2018, p. 146). This study gives an example of how
targeted initiatives assisted Black males with college persistence and success. The next section is intended to provide an overview of theoretical perspectives on race, income, and socioeconomic status regarding higher education selection and enrollment.

Race, income and socioeconomic status

When deciding to embark upon higher education studies, students and families undergo processes involving college search, college match, college application, and college funding. For the majority of students, the latter is the primary determinant of matriculation. Funding a post-secondary education presents grand concerns to parents of first generation college students. One concern of students that impacts the development of Black males has been experiences with microaggressions and microinvalidations from peers and college faculty. In a study by Ellis, Powell, Demetrious, Huerta-Bapat, and Panter (2018), Black males attending a Predominantly White Institution explained they were targeted by faculty and peers to share the education educational background of their parents’. This, according to participants, created feelings of being inferior to their peers.

Additional concerns of students and families may range from the inability to afford college to the lack of awareness surrounding the financial aid process, to who bears the burden of paying for college (McCabe and Jackson, 2016; Smith, 2009; Steelman & Powell, 1993; Yingyi, 2009). These concerns are not exclusive to certain races or socioeconomic classes and have been at the center of considerable research. When delving into this issue, Steelman and Powell (1993) sought to understand the roles race and income played in determining who (the government, parents, students) was responsible for the funding of a student’s college education. Their research found that minority parents, unlike non-minority parents, were more likely to place the responsibility of funding their student’s college education on themselves and the government,
rather than on the students. Additionally, they indicated that families of lower socioeconomic classes, unlike those from wealthier classes, were more likely to get involved in their student’s college experience. According to Steelman and Powell (1993), this occurs because white families have more advantageous economic opportunities than minority families and as a result, do not view college graduation as a large benchmark in the success of their children as minority parents do. This, perhaps, could be attributed to the upward mobility options afforded to families of lower economic classes; the attainment of a degree could move a family upward to another socioeconomic class. The ability to fund a post-secondary education not only has a presence in the decision to matriculate, but in the academic decisions of students once they are on campus.

Adding variables to this issue, Yingyi (2009) observed the influences of family involvement, income, race, and ethnicity in the selection of majors for first generation college students. Regarding income, findings indicated that students’ major selections are more influenced by their socioeconomic statuses than by family involvement. Students who are extremely poor are more likely to major in less lucrative majors; this occurs because they are avoiding the risk of dropping out and remaining poor. In this study, parent involvement was not cited as a determinant of major selection amongst first generation college students. These findings showed that family involvement was not a determinant because it is not always present; the author indicated that families only initiate involvement when their expertise and skills align with specific domains. For example, a parent who is not good in math will probably not get involved and help their student with math, but that same parent who is good in English will likely assist with writing a paper.

Even when funding is not presented as a barrier, the ability and responsibility of connecting parents of low-socioeconomic backgrounds to their children’s education is important.
Smith (2009) examined ways in which institutions could enlist the help of parents of low-
socioeconomic college students in the post-secondary education processes of their students. 
Smith did not credit a parent’s lack of involvement to the college process of their children, to 
them being uninvolved. In fact, Smith suggested that those parents may have “other” post-
secondary goals in mind for their children. Smith asserted adequate parent involvement should 
start at the secondary level by teachers and administration engaging parents and providing them 
with guidance to help them guide their students. These levels of support should occur in three 
areas: (1) setting aspirations (2) providing encouragement to their children and (3) providing tangible support to their children.

A qualitative case study with 67 participants conducted by McCabe and Jackson (2016), 
revealed that unlike their White counterparts, who rely on parent’s social capital and resources to 
fund their educations, Black students had to work alongside their parents, counselors, and other 
networks of social capital to generate funding for college. In other instances, particularly for 
Black students, students secured part-time employment to offset educational costs. This study 
examined the relationship between student’s race and access to social capital.

When correlating race and gender to student persistence, the race and gender of students 
and their families are not always the only salient variables. Price (2010) investigated the effects 
that the race and gender of college professors had on student persistence. Prior to the 
investigation, he found that minority students and female students were least likely to persist in 
STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) majors. The findings from the study revealed 
that race had more influence on student persistence than gender; black students persisted at 
higher rates when they were taught by black faculty. However, female students did not increase 
their levels of persistence after being taught by female professors.
Conversely, other studies found race and socioeconomic class to have little influence on college persistence (Young, Johnson, Hawthorne & Pugh 2011). Their study examined the roles race and socioeconomic statuses had as predictors of academic success, persistence and motivation for Black, Hispanic, and White college students. It was revealed that race and socioeconomic status did not influence motivation amongst White and Hispanic students; therefore, not serving as an indicator of academic success or persistence. However, the study revealed that race and socioeconomic status were indicators of motivation for Black students, thus, serving as predictors of academic success and persistence. Additional studies, from a student’s perspective, examined relationships between income and student persistence.

The augmentation of student’s income via financial aid proved, hypothetically, to improve persistence amongst first generation college students (Alon, 2011). This study examined, via a simulation, the effects that need-based financial aid had on the persistence of college students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Compared to their wealthier classmates, the researcher wanted to investigate the impact that the redistribution of financial aid had on persistence and the inequality gap of these students. The researcher contrasted the amount of financial aid that was given to the wealthy students and their poorer classmates. The simulation generated data that showed the effects of increasing aid for poorer and middle-class students by 4-8%, and its effects on closing inequalities within persistence. The findings from the simulation suggested a redistribution of resources (money) closed the gap in the persistence rates of students from numerous economic backgrounds. Similar to money, academic performance had a great influence on college persistence (Nakajima et al., 2012). The researchers examined factors that were likely to contribute to the attrition of community college students. Factors such as race, grades, course load, finances, and academic integration were examined. They found that
grades (GPA’s) were the greatest determinant of attrition or persistence amongst the students. Additionally, it was found that course load was another determinant of attrition. When grouped together, race, finances and academic integration had little influence over persistence. Building on findings of Nakajima et al (2012), additional studies focus on college persistence in transfer, first-year and multi-cultural student populations (Davis, 2014; Klein, 2013; Romba, 2013).

A study by Diemer and Cheng-Hsien (2012), examined how contextual support impacts the persistence of low-income, first-generation college students. The study showed that academic achievement, parental expectations and parental-efficacy did not directly impact persistence. However, these factors were major influences in the establishment of student self-motivation. This, along with self-efficacy, is credited for being a major influence of persistence for low-income, first-generation college students. The next section reviews literature on motivation and self-efficacy as determinants of college persistence and success.

Motivation and self-efficacy

When looking at the issue of student persistence, one cannot neglect the role of the student, their personal ambitions, and their desires to succeed. Bank, Biddle and Slavings (1992) examined the wants of students to determine if they had any bearing on the student’s decisions to persist in college. The researchers surveyed and examined the personal, social, academic hopes, positional, and financial hopes of students. Surprisingly, the only category that lead to the persistence of students was their personal hopes. Building on this study, Hajrasouliha and Ewing (2016) discovered that the presence of on-campus housing led to higher retention rates for students. These findings are consistent with the notion that students succeed in supportive environments; a characteristic that drives enrollment at HBCUs for Black males. Thus, the study recommended the university in the study provide more on-campus housing for students.
The perception of good grades has a higher influence on the aspirations of first-generation and non-first-generation students than the involvement of their parents (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). In this study, the influence of parental involvement on the educational aspirations of first-generation and non-first-generation students was examined. Additionally, the study examined educational aspirations compared to educational attainment levels for first-generation students. Variations in educational attainment for first-generation students were explored based on race, gender and socioeconomic status. Findings indicated that the perception of good grades had a higher influence on the aspirations of first-generation and non-first-generation students than the involvement of their parents. Gender displayed similar findings in the results. The educational attainment levels of first-generation male college students accounted for more bachelor’s degrees attained, while females accounted for more masters and Ph.D.’s attained. Regarding race/ethnicity of first-generation students, the study showed that less than 60% of Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics attained less than their bachelor’s degrees. Contrastingly, first-generation students of Asian descent were near 42% in degree attainment.

Intrinsic and extrinsic factors also play a key role in student persistence. Próspero and Vohra-Gupta (2007) examined the integration dimensions and motivation that influence the academic achievement of first-generation college students and compared that to non-first-generation college students. The participants were all community college attendees. The findings revealed that the level of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors was the same for both first-generation and non-first-generation students. However, those factors contributed largely to the academic performance and social integration of first-generation students; academic motivation yielded higher grades and extrinsic motivation contributed to lower grades. For non-first-generation students, the motivating factors were not shown to produce salient outcomes.
Allen, Robbins, Casillas and Oh (2008) conducted two studies examining the role of motivation and its relation to first-generation college students. In their first study, Allen et al. (2008) tested the effects that motivation had on persistence beyond the first year of college, its effects on academic performance, and if its effects were different for students in transfer and retention categories. The sample included 6,872 students attending 23 different colleges and universities. The investigation revealed that self-motivation did not affect the first-year academic performance of students, suggesting that other predictors may have had an effect. Additionally, academic performance, not motivation, was the key determinant in students deciding to remain at their institutions, transfer or drop out; students with poor academic performance, no matter their levels of motivation, were more likely to drop out of school based on their academic performance. In their second study, Allen et al. (2012), examined motivation dimensions (intrinsic, extrinsic and motivation) from a racial perspective, using first-generation Hispanic and non-first-generation Hispanic students as their subjects. They examined motivation and its relation to the subject’s age, its ability to predict academic success, and if it differed in first-generation and non-first-generation Hispanic secondary and college students. With a negative correlation to age, the secondary students reported higher extrinsic and intrinsic motivation compared to the college students. They reported that all three dimensions were predictors of academic success amongst their population. Moreover, they revealed that the levels of intrinsic motivation were higher in first-generation Hispanic students than in non-first-generation Hispanic students. Grounded-theories and cognitive approaches can also be considered when examining self-efficacy amongst first-generation college students. Building on findings of Allen et al. (2012), additional studies focus on the impact that virtual learning offerings, dual
enrollment course matriculation, and college persistence beyond the first year have on degree attainment in first generation student populations (An, 2012; Nora et al., 2005; Yu, 2010).

S. Joseph (2002) examined self-efficacy from a cognitive stance. Prior research studied it from a behavior stance, only examining its impact where behaviors were present. Cognitively, the researcher examined the effects of self-efficacy (social, college and general) on college student satisfaction. The researcher unveiled that self-efficacy could positively influence the cognitive variable (satisfaction). Blackwell and Pinder (2014) conducted a grounded-theory study to investigate the self-efficacy motivational factors that lead to the enrollment and persistence of first-generation minority college students whose siblings did not attend college. They found three causal factors contributed to the participant’s motivation: (1) a love of reading at an early age, (2) they each felt different from their siblings from an early age, and (3) they all wanted a better life for themselves. Liao, Edlin and Ferdenzi (2014) examined how motivation and self-efficacy affected student persistence at an urban community college. The researchers issued a survey to examine the following variables: (a) self-efficacy for self-regulated learning and (b) self-efficacy for academic achievement, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and college persistence or re-enrollment. The outcome of their research uncovered that self-efficacy for self-regulated learning and extrinsic motivation gave influence on persistence, but self-efficacy for academic achievement did not yield the same results. The next section provides an overview of theoretical perspectives on parent involvement and support in education.

Parental involvement and support

Regarding the issue of parent involvement and support, Daniel, Evans, and Scott (2001) posited that both the structure of universities and families are changing. Families are no longer the traditional two-parent households, and college campuses are no longer restricted places full
of curfews, bed-checks, and brick and mortar classes. Not all families are no longer traditional two-parent households, Padilla-Walker, Day, Dyer and Black (2013) posited that, according to their findings, authoritative fathers have greater influences on the persistence of students than other family members. Additionally, families are starting to find themselves more involved in the college-lives of their students. Thus, there must be action taken from universities to handle such an increase in family involvement. The researchers suggested universities must solidify open-communication with the families of their students. This may prove to be beneficial for colleges and universities because of the potential social capital gained from including families of students.

According to Freeman (2004), Livingstone College (a historically black college in North Carolina) engaged the parents of its students and non-students. By focusing on parent, teacher and community outreach, the institution has been able to generate a positive image amongst students, their families, and the community at-large. This example shows an institution that decided to invest in and highlight the involvement of their student’s parents. As a result, Livingstone College noticed an increase in student persistence, an increase in community collaboration, and a positive reputation of the institution from members of the surrounding community.

The initiation of parental involvement in pre-college years is a growing trend. As evidenced in Venezia and Kirst (2005), students, teachers and parents are struggling to keep up with policies and laws pertaining to college access and admissions. Their study revealed that honor students and students whose parents are from higher education attainment levels, are more likely to seek help with the college planning process. This information is critical, because their research also mentioned that parents in low-socioeconomic classes are not engaged by staff and faculty at their children’s schools. In the study, it was found that those parents received college
planning materials at less than half the rate of parents of honor students or those with higher education attainment levels. This research suggests that the initiation of parental involvement is key in aiding in the matriculation and persistence of college students, and that colleges and universities can play a role in the establishment of these relationships, which often leads to college persistence. However, it must be noted that, not all research positively correlates family involvement to student persistence.

Such is the case in research conducted by Ratelle, Larose, Guay, and Senécal (2005). In their phenomenological research, the impact of parental involvement on student persistence in science majors was observed. They found that parental involvement did not directly correlate to student persistence, but the perceived presence of parent involvement is crucial in the establishment of student autonomy, which, according to the researchers, is what allows students to feel connected to college and, thus, persist. Contrastingly, Rood (2009) conducted a phenomenological study that examined upper-class, first-generation college students attending a predominantly white Christian liberal arts college. The study examined the factors that gave impetus to the students’ college selection and persistence. Family involvement was determined to be a key factor in the student’s decision to attend and persist in college. One student referenced his parents and their refusal to complete a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) as a deterrence for college matriculation. To better understand the influence of parents on college persistence, phenomenological studies assessing parental perceptions and their perceived roles were conducted. Subsequent studies have built on Rood’s research, positing that students’ levels of college readiness, college major selection and levels of engagement serve as predictors to levels of family support they will receive while in college (Cerrone, 2012; Miller, 2012; Schackmuth, 2012).
Vianden, J., and Ruder, J. T. (2012) explored the mentality of parents during the time of their student’s transition to college. Parents of first-time college students were surveyed during student check-in at the dorms. The study found that parents perceived that they and their students would have an emotional-loss for each other. Also, they found that the parents did not exhibit much concern over the academic abilities of their students; the researchers thought they would see more helicopter parents (parents who overwhelmingly complete tasks for their students) emerge, but the social concerns outweighed academic concerns. Parents did not perceive their role in the academic intervention of their students to be enhanced. Finally, they found that parents perceived that their levels of involvement would be as encouragers to their students. Additionally, Black males have learned to self-advocate and use extracurricular activities to drive their own success. The next section provides an overview of theoretical perspectives on extracurricular involvement on campus as a means of persistence and success.

**Extracurricular Involvement on Campus**

After studying relationships between first-year, undergraduate student involvement in fraternities across 17 higher education institutions, DeBard and Sack (2011) concluded that membership in fraternities led to higher GPAs and levels of retention compared to non-members. These numbers were greater for members who joined fraternities in Spring semesters, thus, creating impetus for the researchers to posit that institutions adopt policies that require fraternities to defer enrollment of new members who are first-year students until the student’s Spring semesters. The timing of when an undergraduate student joins a fraternity may have less of an impact on academic performance than the amount of time they spent engaged within the organization.
Research from Zacherman and Foubert (2014) revealed that cocurricular activities such as fraternities have positive relationships on the academic performance of undergraduate college males, if the time committed to the cocurricular activities does not exceed 30 hours per week. As a result, researchers suggested that student affairs departments at higher education institutions create messages explaining the detrimental academic impacts of cocurricular involvement that exceeds 30 hours per week. Those suggestions may not have painted a realistic depiction of the time commitment given by students, particularly males.

For example, results of a survey given to 2,973 undergraduate students across 13 colleges revealed that on average, most students have interactions with cocurricular activities 8-10 hours per week. Students (975) indicated that interactions with peers positively contributed to their social, academic, and emotional success (Vetter, Schreiner, McIntosh, & Learning, 2019). Essentially, this study concluded that the quality of student interactions and student involvement has greater impacts on student success than the quantity of such interactions.

**Chapter 2 Summary**

This chapter described influential literature that helped shaped and build on the sense of community framework’s properties. Perhaps the easiest way to understand sense of community is from a definition by which sense of community has two different uses, territorial and relational. “The territorial notion of sense of community refers to, the geographical notion of community- neighborhood, town, city, etc., and the second use of community if relational and concerned with the quality of character of human relationships, without reference to location” (McMillan and Chavis, 1986, pg.8). The strands of literature in this section highlighted how relationships, interactions, and feelings of belonging (all attributes of sense of community), have, overtly and subtly, shaped the experiences of college students and Black males. From images in
the media that sparked feelings of empathy (relational) to situations where students gained confidence and self-efficacy via on-campus housing (territorial), the presence of sense of community is evident. The next chapter will describe steps taken by the researcher in conducting the study.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter outlines the design of the study, as well as the guiding research methodology, an instrumental multi-site case study. Specifically, this chapter provides a holistic explanation of the research study, from inception to completion. This chapter discusses the philosophical underpinnings of the research methodology, as well as the study’s sites, participants, data collection process and instruments, data analysis, data coding process, data reporting process, data storage process, the protection of participants and research triangulation.

The goal of this study was to examine the contributing factors that enabled solidarity within Black fraternities at Historically Black Colleges, from alumni perspectives, and how those factors can be extended to promote solidarity among undergraduate, non-fraternity Black males. Using participant’s lived experiences, as well as implied social cues produced by college campuses, this study investigated and analyzed data (participant interviews and campus artifacts) qualitatively. The next section provides an overview of the research questions that guided the study.

Primary Research Questions and Sub-Questions

In addition to campus artifacts, eighteen research questions were developed to achieve the research goals. Two primary questions, addressing participant’s overall experiences, and sixteen sub-questions focused on understanding how membership within fraternities can encourage more engagement of Black males attending HBCUs. The primary research questions were:
1. How did you use your membership within your fraternity to encourage more active engagement by other Black male students on campus who were not within fraternities to promote group solidarity?

2. How can undergraduate members of Black fraternities, who are currently attending Historically Black Colleges, encourage more active engagement by other Black male students on campus who are not within fraternities to promote group solidarity?

**Methodology**

**Research approach.** This study took the design of a qualitative research study. Qualitative interviewing is fundamentally constructed around systemic methods, empirical skills and dependability to a somewhat routine cluster of rules of examination methodologies (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In qualitative research, several rules of examination methodologies (case study, narrative research, phenomenology, IPA, etc.) may be taken to conduct research (Creswell & Tashakorri, 2007). While each methodology is similar in the sense they speak to the same research goals, explaining a research problem to an intended audience, they are different in their philosophical underpinnings and analytic methods, data collection processes, and strategies to present research findings (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). An instrumental multi-site case study research approach served as the guiding methodology for investigating this research study.

Described as a turn from positivism research where sensory interpretation of behaviors and events are standard, multi-site case studies place humans in positions of narrators, purveyors of knowledge and seek to interpret, analyze, and validate their experiences via consistency with consideration to bounded systems and contextual differentiations (Lewis, 2015; Lodi-Smith, 2015; Sandelowski, 1991). Case studies, a qualitative research approach, can combine archives, interviews, questionnaires and observations to relay information pertaining to a specific setting
(Eisenhardt, 1989). Instrumental case studies, specifically, are designed to understand something outside of what is initially observed (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For example, in this study, Black fraternities were observed to better understand the perceptions of sense of community experienced by members not associated with Black fraternities. In this study, the secondary piece of information being studied is the perceptions of sense of community by non-members. Therefore, an instrumental case study was selected.

Building on Eisenhart’s (1989) theory-making strategies in which case studies rely on the convergence of data analysis and collection processes, Yin (1994) postulated a specific use of case studies: to compare contemporary events. This is important because the differentials (different college campuses and artifacts observed) and replication (themes) found within participant’s answers helped validate the study. The rationale for selecting an instrumental multi-site case study is rooted in its flexibility in the use of different data instruments to understand the research problem from the perspectives of the Black males in the study. The goal is to fit their stories and experiences into the context of the sites in which they lived (HBCUs) during the time of the phenomena (Babbie & Mouton, 1998; Lewis, 2015; Palmer, Larkin, de Visser, & Fadden, 2010). To appreciate case study as a research methodology, an understanding of its philosophical underpinnings and methodological overview must be established.

**Philosophical Underpinnings and Overview**

This section describes the philosophical underpinnings of case study methods: ontology (the nature of reality and being), epistemology (the accumulation and study of knowledge), axiology (the function and position of values within the research process) and methodology (the process and procedures of research) (Ponterotto, 2005). Case study research, a methodology with origins traceable to recorded history most notably associated with the academic disciplines of
anthropology and psychology, is grounded on the belief that experiences and artifacts (epistemology) may help explain phenomena through comparisons in participant stories that are derived from internal happenings (ontology), and the validation of knowledge rests within the ability to reach research saturation (replication of answers) (Lewis, 2015). While this study employed an instrumental, multi-site, case study approach, researchers have noted the underlying assumptions and differences amongst other qualitative methods, their ontologies and epistemologies. The next section provides an overview of other research methodologies.

Other Research Methodologies

According to Scotland (2012) and Ponterotto (2005), post-positivism approaches to data subscribe to the reality of there being one objective reality. This assertion, as countered in Ponterotto (2005) and Larkin et al. (2006), is the basis for the establishment of critical-interpretivist methods in which reality is comprised of multiple, subjective truths. Moving beyond this, critical-ideologist postulate a paradigm that examines social oppression as a philosophical underpinning (Ponterotto, 2005).

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006) used a two-fold process to understanding Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, separating its assumptions into categories: 1. Giving voice and, 2. Making sense. Building on Heidegger’s (1996) assumptions of “being”, in which ontology is revered as a presumption and not a concept, and research analysis of responses solely correlates to topics of interest. Larkin et al. (2006) delve deeper into the research analysis, seeking to, raise the voice of the participants by accessing participants for “objects of concern” and “experiential claims” (p. 111). These examples provide a clear understanding of how the ontological (assumptions of being), epistemological (determination of knowledge), and axiology (validation of knowledge) in IPA is
distinguished. Given this information, IPA resides within the interpretivist paradigm in which knowledge is subjective and participants are not expected to arrive at the same conclusions (Scotland, 2012).

Narrative Inquiry. Narrative inquiry, another research methodology, assigns a chronological structure (beginning, middle, and end) to events or actions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). A unique characteristic of narrative research is the flexibility given to the research during the reporting phase. Constructing, co-constructing, and re-storying information to an audience, based on information gathered during an interview, is a component of narrative research (Hert, 1995). According to Larkin et al. (2006), co-constructing and re-storying possess a wide “interpretive range” that allows the researcher to introduce their own positionality against participant perspectives and, from that, co-structure meaning. The goal of narrative inquiry is to better understand how individuals make sense of actions or events. Since the aim of this study was to understand the experiences of participants across multiple sites, the researcher used multiple instruments (interviews and artifact review) making a case study approach the preferred methodology of the researcher.

The Researcher

The researcher worked in educational settings for nine years and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and a Master’s of Public Affairs. The researcher had no pre-existing relationships with any of the participants. Therefore, there were no conflicts of interest that would have fostered bias in the study. Prior to conducting the study, the researcher successfully completed a Web-based training course offered by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Office of Extramural Research, and was certified to conduct research involving human participants (Appendix A). Through interdisciplinary studies at Northeastern University, which
included three research courses, the researcher gained knowledge around data collection, analysis, coding, and presentations. The next section reviews the criteria used to select participants in the study.

**Participant Criteria**

A purposive sampling technique guided this study. Purposive sampling, a non-random technique for selecting participants, implies that researchers can select participants for studies based on their knowledge, experience, or other characteristics that may help explain phenomena (Tongco, 2007). For this study, the researcher looked for 8-15 participants. This number was determined to help the study reach saturation, regarding the case study methodology. According to Mason (2010), saturation within research is when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation and most knowledge pertaining to the topic has been uncovered. Although sample sizes may vary by research methodology, it is ultimately up to the researcher to utilize the purpose of the study to determine the appropriate sample size.

The researcher applied for and received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Northeastern University's Human Research Protection department. The IRB committee approved the researcher to conduct the study and find participants using the following criteria:

1. Black males who were members of National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc. (NPHC) recognized fraternities.
2. Black males who were between 21 and 35 years of age.
3. Graduated with an undergraduate degree from a Historically Black College within five years of the interview date.

The researcher used these criteria to ensure the experiences of the participants were recent enough to generate solutions that could answer the primary research questions.
After receiving institutional approval to recruit participants, the researcher used a recruitment flyer (Appendix B) that was posted at numerous HBCUs within proximity to the researcher’s home as well as on the Internet (Facebook.com) in social groups that contained prospective Black males who were in fraternities and met the participation criteria. Additionally, the researcher solicited help via social media (Facebook.com) from the fraternities’ advisory boards and alumni chapters that governed the judiciary and operational practices of the undergraduate chapters, by sending flyers to known members.

In total, three participants responded to recruitment flyers posted on Facebook.com and others who partook in the study referred five additional participants to the researcher. After the participants responded or were referred to the study, a recruitment email (Appendix C), explaining the search criteria, purpose of the study, and information pertaining to participant’s preferred method of interview, as well as convenient times to conduct interviews were sent to the participants. Once this information was collected, the researcher scheduled the interviews. For participants who expressed interest and did not respond to the initial email, a second email (Appendix D) was sent, following-up on correspondence from the initial email, capturing prospective participants names, contact information, preferred interview method and time. After the participants and researcher agreed on interview dates and times, the semi-structured interviews were scheduled.

Using semi-structured interviews, two interviews were conducted in-person and six were conducted via telephone. Each participant completed one interview that ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in duration. There was no remuneration provided to participants for their participation in the study.
Data collection instruments

This section provides information on the data collection instruments used in the study. Due to its ability to combat poor responses, semi-structured interviewing helps introduce participant’s values and beliefs and compares validity across participants, and participant assistance (unlike surveys) served as the instrument for collecting data in this study (Barriball & While, 1994). In semi-structured interviews, the researcher ensures that the wording and sequence of questions are the same for all participants and reserves the right to amend words within the questions, but not the meaning of the questions themselves (Barriball & While, 1994). Semi-structured interviewing was selected because it allowed the researcher to probe participant’s answers that were vague or ambiguous (Kunkel, Funk, & King, 2014). During the interviews, an audio recorder was used to capture participant’s responses to the research questions. Additionally, artifacts were observed from four primary sources: the four Historically Black Colleges and Universities within the study. The next sections will give an overview of the interviews and protocol that was used in each of the interviews.

Interview sites and protocol

In-person interviews. There were two interviews conducted in-person. Both participants responded to the study’s social media recruitment flyer. Prior to each interview, the participants had the option to select the interview sites, dates and times. The researcher met the participants at their desired locations. Upon arrival, the interviewer thanked the participants for their participation in the study and read aloud a Signed Informed Consent Form (Appendix E), which outlined the study’s purpose, associated risks, benefits, participant’s role, and contained contact
Following, the participants were asked to sign the consent form, giving permission to proceed with the study and be recorded. After consent was given, the participants selected pseudonyms to protect their identities. The first interview was conducted at the participant’s home. The second interview was conducted at a university (non-HBCU) where the participant was attending graduate school. There were slight variations in the process and the researcher’s experience while conducting participant interviews via phone.

**Phone interviews.** There were six interviews conducted via telephone. One of the participants responded to the study’s social media recruitment flyer. Other participants in the study referred the other five participants. Similar to the in-person interviews, before the phone interviews, each participant had the option to select the interview dates and times. At the beginning of each call, the interviewer thanked the participants for their participation in the study and read aloud an Unsigned Informed Consent Form (Appendix F), which defined the study’s purpose, associated risks, benefits, participant’s role, and contained contact information for the study’s Principal Investigator, Student Researcher and the Northeastern University’s Director of Human Subject Research Protection. The Unsigned Informed Consent Form was used to capture verbal consent, given differences in the physical location of the participants.

After verbal consent was given, the participants were informed that a copy of the Unsigned Informed Consent Form would be emailed to them following their interviews. From there, the telephone participants just like the in-person participants selected pseudonyms to protect their identities. In alphabetical order, not with alignment to the actual order in which the
interviews were conducted, the participants selected the following pseudonyms for the study: Gee; Grant; Mike; Richard Allen; Sampson Parks; and Thomas.

**Participant Profiles**

This section presents information pertaining to the personal backgrounds of the study’s participants. Table 3.1 displays a demographic profile of the study’s participants: names (pseudonyms), ages, educational undergraduate college/university, undergraduate major, and fraternity affiliations (pseudonyms). The table is arranged in alphabetical order by participant’s names.
Table 3.1. *Demographic information of study participants.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>College/University</th>
<th>Undergraduate Major</th>
<th>Fraternity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abraham</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Ruthie Mae College</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
<td>Fraternity Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gee</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Aus University</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Fraternity X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Aus University</td>
<td>Communication Studies</td>
<td>Fraternity Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Aus University</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Fraternity Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Allen</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Derf College</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Fraternity X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampson Parks</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Derf College</td>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>Fraternity X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Derf College</td>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>Fraternity X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wakanda</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Sister Mary University</td>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>Fraternity Z</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Participants**

Three participants responded to recruitment flyers posted on Facebook.com and others who partook in the study referred five to the researcher. Two interviews were conducted in-person and six were conducted via telephone. At the time of the interviews, all participants were alumni of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, with the youngest participant being 22 years of age and 35 the eldest. Collectively, the participants represented membership in three out of five National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) historically recognized fraternities.
**HBCUs Represented.** Additionally, the participants attended four Historically Black Colleges and Universities, two private institutions and two public institutions, with one institution being a commuter campus. The sizes of the colleges varied, one school had less than 1,000 students enrolled, while the other three each had enrollments exceeding 5,000 students. Additionally, one of the schools was in a small town in a rural area (population under 10,000 resident), whereas the other three institutions were in larger areas with populations exceeding 70,000 residents. The next section provides an overview of the data transcription, analysis and coding processes used in this study.

**Interview Transcription, Analysis and Coding**

**Interview Transcription and Analysis.** After the participant interviews were recorded, the researcher utilized a transcription service to transcribe the interviews verbatim. Rev.com was the company used to transcribe the audio data collected from the interviews. After the transcription of the study’s data occurred, the data was analyzed using a conventional content analysis approach.

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), a conventional content analysis approach is distinguishable from other data analysis approaches where data analysis either begins with an existing theory or by counting or comparing content, in the sense it’s coding categories are generated directly from the collected text. This was the primary reason the researcher used this method for analyzing the interview data. Specifically, “qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 2).
Next, using a conventional content analysis, the researcher took the following steps to analyze, code, and present interview data:

1. Data was sorted based on question-type into a Microsoft Excel document.

2. After sorting the data, two rounds of open-coding were performed, where data was read, and short phrases and words were annotated to give meaning to what was conveyed by participants.

3. After open-coding occurred, the list of emerged words and phrases were scanned for duplicates and those were removed, leaving a shorter list.

4. Once the shorter list was generated, the words and phrases from the list were grouped together based on similarity in context and theme.

Using this process, the researcher was able to identify the themes and findings that emerged from the interview data. These themes are discussed in Chapter 4, along with a summative analysis of the study’s artifacts.

**Artifact Transcription and Analysis.** Artifacts were collected from seven primary sources: the three fraternities and the four Historically Black Colleges and Universities within the study. The purpose of the artifact analysis was to observe what, if any cues, were subtly or overtly inferred by the organizations that may contribute to the sense of community of college students on campus (members and non-members). The artifacts (i.e., university mission statements, vision statements and website) in the study were analyzed using a summative content analysis approach.

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), summative content analysis is used to explore latent meaning with respect words and is an attempt not to infer meaning but rather to explore usage. This method was used to guide the analysis of the artifacts because they may present cues
that can influence the experiences of participants in the study. Unlike the interview data where a transcription company was used, data collected for the summative content analysis was subjective. Therefore, the following questions which were aligned to the goal of the study, guided the researcher’s analysis of artifacts:

1. What sense of community artifacts were present?
2. What cues, if any, did the artifact convey to students and prospective students?
3. What could these cues infer about the institution's commitment to sense of community?

The artifacts collected from the fraternities include both university and fraternity’s mission and vision statements, and membership criteria. The artifacts from the university were comprised of campus mission and vision statements as well as institutional and student affairs homepages. The artifacts from the fraternities included their mission and vision statements. Collectively, these artifacts help identify cues that may suggest to the researcher any sense of community practices. After observing the artifacts, the researcher used a similar approach to coding interview data while summarizing artifact data. The following steps were taken in the summative content analysis:

1. Data observations were sorted based on artifact-type into a Microsoft Excel document.
2. After sorting the data, two rounds of open-coding were performed, where data was read, and short phrases and words were annotated to give meaning to what was conveyed by participants.
3. After open-coding occurred, the list of emerged words and phrases were scanned for duplicates and those were removed, leaving a shorter list.
4. Once the shorter list was generated, the words and phrases from the list were grouped together based on similarity in context and theme.
The findings of the summative content analysis will be presented in Chapter 4.

**Research Triangulation**

Whether or not the data collected accurately described the phenomenon in question (validity) and matched reality (authenticity), the ability to derive the same results during a similar, repeated study (reliability), and the ability to derive themes about the same phenomenon in question from different sources (triangulation), were considerations and responsibilities of the researcher (Bush, 2007). Due to the nature of qualitative research, reliability is typically associated with quantitative studies, and is usually proven via replications in research methodologies (Golafshani, 2003).

Triangulation, was not reached in this study due to reliability being associated with research replication. However, the documentation of the research design and methodology assisted the researcher and intended audience with understanding the steps taken to conduct the research; the purpose of Chapter 3. Authenticity in this study was reached because the conventional content analysis of participant answers and the summative content analysis of the study’s artifacts both yielded them. In this study, validity was established prior to the research proposal process where the researcher provided the Principal Investigator with a list of research questions for pre-screening purposes, ensuring they would match the phenomenon in question.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

This section reviews the steps taken by the research to ensure no participants were harmed because of this study. Participation in this study was completely voluntary, and all participants received copies of the study’s Signed or Unsigned Informed Consent Forms, depending on their interview format. During this study, there were no medical procedures or
harmful activities performed that compromised the physical well-being or health of participants. The identities of the participants remained confidential, as they were assigned pseudonyms. All data collected during the study is on file and will remain on file at the home of the researcher for five years following the completion of this study; after which, the data will be destroyed. Northeastern University’s Director of Human Subject Research Protection and the Principal Investigator for the study contact information were provided to all participants. Additionally, the researcher made himself available to participants for up to one year following the survey to ensure no harm was encountered.

**Limitations**

This section discusses the limitations of this study. Although the researcher still believes a qualitative research methodology was most appropriate for this study, qualitative tools such as semi-structured interviews are not designed to produce research triangulation. Research reliability is typically associated with quantitative studies and is usually proven via replications in research methodologies (Golafshani, 2003). Therefore, more trustworthiness could be given to this study if conducted using quantitative methodologies and tools (e.g., a survey evaluated using statistical analysis).

Another limitation of this study was the population used. The perspectives shared were from alumni of HBCUs, who graduated within five years of the interview date, not current students. Therefore, the findings may not apply to the HBCUs in their current climates. While the interview sought to find solutions by which non-members of fraternities could be engaged, the population used did not include non-members of the fraternity. The study was conducted from the perspectives of Black males in fraternities. Each fraternity in the study had members who were not Black, who also attended HBCUs. Therefore, understanding their perspective may
provide further insight into the sense of community experienced on the campuses. Another demographic limitation of this study was gender. Since membership within fraternities are restricted to males, this study only observed the role membership within fraternities had on the perceptions of sense of community from male perspectives. As a result, another limitation was the lack of female participants.

Another limitation from the study was the number of HBCUs and fraternities represented. Today, there are 101 HBCUs in operation, and five primary Black fraternities. The participants from the study represented four HBCUs and three fraternities. Although each participant was interviewed once, this represented a small population of HBCUs and Black fraternity members.

Chapter 3 Summary

This chapter outlined the steps the researcher utilized to get permission to conduct the study, as well as the steps taken to recruit participants, schedule interviews, protect identities and ensure the research reached saturation and triangulation. Additionally, this chapter described the research and analysis techniques used in this study and the rationale for their uses. The next chapter presents the findings from the research.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the data collected pertaining to how membership within Black fraternities can influence community engagement practices of non-members, who are Black males, at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The types of data that inform the findings are campus artifacts from four Historically Black Colleges and Universities, artifacts from three Historically Black Fraternities, and eight interviews from Black male alumni who are within the studies’ three fraternities and alumni of the studies’ four Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The interviews were analyzed through conventional content analysis and the campus and fraternity artifacts were analyzed via summative analysis methods. The findings are group into deductive themes. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) explained deductive themes as a critical step in the coding process as it is essentially the relationships between variables that lead to their coding and relations between those codes (p. 1281).

This chapter contains synthesized data from artifacts as well as first hand quotes from participants. The chapter will commence with a presentation of participant profiles, deductive themes formed from participant interviews, followed by the researcher’s summative content of collected artifacts and a summary.

Contextual Analysis

This section is intended to provide context information about HBCUs and Black male undergraduate students (e.g., percentage of males overall in fraternities in the United States across all colleges; percentage of males in Black fraternities; graduation rates of black males overall and in comparison, to other groups; other types of groups besides fraternities at HBCUs – band, sports, clubs, etc.). In 2018, there were an estimated 19.9 million undergraduate students
enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States (NCES, 2018). Of those, males represented 39% of those enrolled, or 8.8 million individuals. In the 2015-2016 collegiate academic year, across the United States, there were 384,193 active members of undergraduate North American Interfraternity Council recognized fraternities (‘Fraternity Stats at-a-glance,’ 2019). Additionally, the website revealed these members represent 6,233 fraternity chapters on 800 college campuses. These numbers show that about 4.3% of all undergraduate male students, attending colleges and universities in the United States are enrolled in North American Interfraternity Council fraternities.

While exact numbers pertaining to extracurricular activities aside from fraternities are scarce, pre-college data on student involvement may give insight into potential campus involvement activities selected by undergraduate students. This is important because students who participate in at least one campus activity will report greater satisfaction with college and will most likely graduate (Scibilia, 2019). While research shows that members of fraternities’ graduate at higher rates than non-members and have greater levels of satisfaction with campus social life than non-members, there is dearth in literature pertaining to the distribution of campus activity participation by undergraduate male students (DeBard & Sacks, 2011; Harris III & Harper, 2014; Kimbrough, 1995).

In a longitudinal study of extracurricular activities of college seniors, the U.S. Department of Education National Statistics (1995) found the following levels of extracurricular involvement of students across American high schools: (a) any activity (79.9%), (b) sports (42.4%), (c) performing arts (27.5%), (d) academic clubs (26.2%), (e) vocational/professional clubs (20.8%), (f) honor societies (18.1%), (g) publications (17%), (h) student government (15.5%), (i) service clubs (15.2), and (j) hobby clubs (8.5%). This data does not report unique
percentages of activity involvement and there may be overlaps with participation. However, if this data were to accurately predict campus involvement of undergraduate college males, then fraternities as well as other organizations, because they are service organizations, would represent 15.2% of undergraduate students. Another missing piece of information in the data is a breakdown of activity types by activities. Additionally, this data is not broken down by gender preference of club involvement. Nonetheless, the trend in data shows that service clubs and hobby clubs, in high school, have the lowest levels of participation in the study. If this data holds true, it could be inferred that fraternities, because they are service organizations, are probably not as preferred options of student activities in college than other activities (e.g., sports, performing arts, academic clubs, etc.). The next sections will contain brief biographies of the participants in this study.

Abraham’s (The Executor) Profile

Abraham, a member of Fraternity Z, is a business-minded, project management professional with years of community and relationship building leadership; hence the researcher’s nickname of “The Executor”, learned about the study via from social media post. He is a 35-year old, first-generation graduate of Ruthie Mae College, where in 2015 he obtained a bachelor’s degree in Business. At the time of the interview, Abraham was working towards a graduate degree in Business Administration. He defined solidarity as, “unity amongst people with a common goal.”

Gee’s (The Future PhD) Profile

Gee, a member of Fraternity X, has experience as a campus tutor and a graduate teacher’s assistant, learned about the study from another participant. He is a 24-year, college graduate of Aus University, where in 2016, he obtained a bachelor’s degree in Psychology. He was raised in
suburban area by his parents. At the time of his interview, he was in the process of completing graduate school and seeking admissions into a PhD program to study psychology.

**Grant’s (Digital Media Lover) Profile**

Grant, a member of fraternity Z, has experience working in television and radio production, learned about the study from another participant. He is a 23-year old, first-generation graduate of Aus University, where, in 2017, he obtained a bachelor’s degree in Communication Studies. He was raised, as an only child, by his grandparents in a self-described, suburban, “middle-class” neighborhood.

**Mike’s (The Two-Sport Athlete) Profile**

Mike, a member of Fraternity Y, is a 22-year old, two-sport athlete who received an athletic scholarship to attend Aus University, where he graduated with a degree in Finance in 2017. Mike, a product of a large urban city, is the youngest child (he has two older brothers), described his participation in sports as an alternative to joining a gang. Mike’s career ambitions include working sports management and youth development.

**Richard Allen’s (Clergyman) Profile**

Richard Allen, a member of Fraternity X, is a 25-year old, graduate of Derf College, where he received a bachelor’s degree in History in 2015. Richard was referred to the study by another participant. Richard has a passion for studying genealogy and promoting community engagement amongst Blacks. He has held many leadership roles in his church, on his college campus, and in his fraternity.
Sampson Parks’ (Volleyball Man) Profile

Sampson Parks, a member of Fraternity X, is a 25-year old graduate of Derf College, where in 2015 he received his bachelor’s degree in Journalism. Sampson was referred to the study by another participant. He was raised in a large household, in an area that didn’t have a lot of Black people, with two parents and six siblings. He described his family as being close knitted in character and low-income in socioeconomic status. Sampson, because of his athletic prowess, was contacted by volleyball coaches at Derf College, where he excelled both academically and athletically.

Thomas’ (The Political Correspondent) Profile

Thomas, a member of Fraternity X, is a 24-year old graduate of Derf College, where in 2016 he received his bachelor’s degree in Journalism. Thomas responded to a social media recruitment flyer to participate in the study. He has experience working as a news correspondent at Derf’s local news station. Additionally, he comes from a politically involved household. His father is an elected official in a small-town. Thomas at the time of the interview, had completed a master’s degree in Journalism and was working a job at a large, American multinational news corporation.

Wakanda’s (The Dancing Machine) Profile

Wakanda, a member of Fraternity Z, is a 27-year old graduate of Sister Mary University, where in 2017 he received a bachelor’s degree in Dance. Wakanda responded to an online recruitment email to participate in the study. Professionally, he has experience dancing with multiple dance companies and has been featured in numerous theater productions. At the time of
the interview, Wakanda was working as an educator and considering enrollment into a graduate program to further his studies in dance.

**Deductive Themes**

This section discusses the deductive themes that derived from the analysis of data collected from participant interviews in this study. Results from the conventional content analysis produced seven deductive themes, addressing the purpose of the research and the primary research question, *how can undergraduate members of Black fraternities, who are currently attending Historically Black Colleges, encourage more active engagement by other Black male students on campus who are not within fraternities to promote group solidarity?* Table 4.1 illustrates the deductive themes produced from the study. Along with deductive themes, the table contains descriptions of the themes.
Table 4.1 Deductive themes from participant interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upbringing and College Selection</td>
<td>College matriculation was shaped by participant’s community involvement, family structures, and exposure to diverse cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enablement and Prevention</td>
<td>Participants cited common interests with peers as both encouragers and deterrents of Black male bonding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Campus Programming</td>
<td>Based on interviews, it was implied that college administrations did not provide enough opportunities and programs to foster community building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal Impacts</td>
<td>Societal events on and off campus influenced cognizance of sense of community on the campuses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions and Observations</td>
<td>Images portrayed by fraternity members, types of programs and types of interactions influenced non-members impressions of the members and organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Benefits</td>
<td>Fraternity members took on leadership roles within their organizations and reaped, via social capital, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths and Opportunities</td>
<td>Participants outlined positive attributes of their fraternities as well as tracts for community building.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The conventional content analysis generated seven deductive themes. These themes are presented in this chapter. The first theme, “upbringing and college selection”, focuses on participant’s family structures, community involvement, exposure to diversity and how those impacted their decisions to attend college. The second, “enablement and prevention”, centers on how personal interests both forged and averted friendships with peers in college. The third, “lack of campus programming”, applies to how participants perceived the level of college administration’s involvement and support of community building. The fourth, “societal impacts”, highlights the political, ideological, and social justice impacts on campus’ sense of
community perceptions by students. The fifth, “perceptions and observations”, focuses on how the imagery and perceptions of fraternities shaped membership preferences. The sixth, “membership benefits”, centers on how participants believe they benefit from fraternity membership. The last, “strengths and opportunities”, concentrates on what participants believe are their fraternities’ positive attributes associated with engaging non-members as well as areas for improvement and expansion. Verbatim reflections of participant experiences are used throughout this chapter to explain these themes.

**Upbringing and College Selection.** As previously stated, the years leading-up to college enrollment are critical for Black males attending college. In those years, Black males are usually developing social capital and awareness of themselves, from their interactions with others, as well as learning skills of self-advocacy needed for survival on college campuses (Wilson, 2014). Despite their knowledge of how U.S. institutions of higher education have traditionally disenfranchised Black males and their negative experiences with being surrounded by peers who didn’t share the same racial compositions, most participants in this study embraced a belief, prior to matriculating, that HBCUs would promote environments of equality for Black males.

Wakanda, a graduate of Sister Mary University, described how his experience of being educated in a high school where he was surrounded by other Black students provided him with self-efficacy. “I went to a regular high school that historically was 50% black, 50% white. There, the people made me feel like I could do this [dance], they would vouch for me, they would believe in me.” On the other hand, when educated in an environment where he wasn’t surrounded by mostly Black students, he detailed an entirely different experience:

But then I would leave [high school] to go to performing arts school, which had predominantly white performers. When I got there, I saw a lot of people doing things that
were... it's not honoring their craft, they had to sell themselves just to get recognition or, you know, like kiss up to the teacher, stuff like that that made me realize I'm not that type of person. So, I hated it there. I got out and then when I decided ... I was like when I go to college, I want to go to a school where I'm supported by my black community.

Like several others in the study, he knew that adverse perceptions generated about White peers, after interactions, left him with a desire to be around other Black students in college. A similar account was shared by Grant, a graduate of Aus University:

I attended a predominantly black elementary school and middle school. During high school, my high school was about 50% white and 50% black, so when I got there I had some interactions with the white population and it just was different, it just wasn't as genuine as the black ... What am I trying to say? As dealing with other black people. It just wasn't the same connection. So, I felt as though I wanted to get back to that [college selection], what I was used to, it would be a good experience for myself. I just knew that, when I got there [college], everybody else would look like me [race].

Others also recalled how the presence of community activities and programs, while living in low income housing, may have prevented them from turning to delinquent behavior, thus, shaping their desires to attend college and being educated around other Blacks. Abraham, graduate of Ruthie Mae College, shared the following:

My parents struggled, we lived in low income housing. I had a father that worked from 4am to 9pm The only time I saw him was when I used to fall asleep on the sofa, he would pick me up and carry me to bed or on the weekend and that was far, few, and in between. That was pretty much the foundation of what I knew. We had other organizations from the outside that came to the community to make sure we didn't fall into the wrong side of
society. I was motivated my brother [college selection], the one that went to college [a HBCU] in North Carolina. Seeing what they [the students] did on campus and seeing people like me made me want to go to HBCU.

Mike, graduate of Aus University, also shared a similar story of not seeing his father much. “I grew up in New York City, in the Bronx with two older brothers and a mom. That's who I lived with ... My Pops didn't stay with us. It was pretty ghetto.” He, just like Abraham, referenced the role community organizations played in preventing negative behavior and his desire to attend a school with other Black students. This is what Abraham shared:

I grew up in like a section 8 building, like the Projects. There was a lot of violence and everything, but I wasn't involved in that at all. I grew up in a lot of programs, sports programs. Honestly, I didn't want to go to a white school [college]. I wanted to be around people who were like myself.

In addition to family-upbringing, participants referenced campus cues and interactions with staff, athletic personnel, that influenced their decisions to attend HBCUs:

It was a small school and when I looked at the school I just felt like it would be the environment for me. It looked, from the pictures and everything, it looked like it had a very small family-like environment and that kind of sold me on it. (Richard Allen)

I knew nothing about the school. I was contacted by the volleyball coach to come to play there. I did know that I wanted to attend an HBCU, but I didn't know that it was going to be that one. (Sampson Parks)
In high school I used to play basketball so... I was being recruited by schools that was in the city, like in New York City, but I wanted to leave New York. I had an aunt and an uncle down there [out-of-state]. My uncle was a referee with NCAA. So, he knew the coach at the HBCU and he talked to him ... I met the coach a couple times. And, I thought everything would be all good. (Mike)

Understanding factors driving the need for Black male students to attend HBCUs is critical in understanding their experiences with sense of community prior to enrollment at the HBCUs.

**Enablement and Prevention.** Studies have shown that when students first arrive on college campus concerns of assimilation and friendship building are present, both having influence on the other; the types of environments students assimilate into will oftentimes yield friends with similar interests, and in cases where friendships are established prior to assimilation, then those friendships may drive shared assimilation into groups (Zorn & Gregory, 2005). For most participants in the study, one of the first things they observed was students largely creating friendships based on common interests or being in shared spaces. Here are reflections of participant observations of how other students assimilated and formed friendships:

You had some people ... I mean, it's anywhere you go you have like cliques or something like that, like certain people will hang out with others and just because of interest they would hang out together. (Grant)

It was all based off interests [student bonding]. Kind of one of those situations to where you get in where you fit in. When walking on my campus, you kind of see, like the stoners, they all come together, all the gay guys are usually together. You just have, like all the basketball players are usually together, so I learned that it was usually based on,
like those things that you have in common with people. You typically see those people hanging out together. Otherwise, you really wouldn't see people hanging out unless they were from the same city or the same high school. (Sampson Parks)

The fact that the school was so small [influenced sense of community], it really wasn't like you could not interact with somebody or meet somebody and not meet them again for a week. The campus was so small, everybody knew everybody, everybody interacted with everybody, everybody had class together at the cafeteria, and it kind of forced you to have a relationship with one another. (Richard Allen)

When I first showed up to camps, I think that first I didn't ... let me not say that. I saw people clicking together in such a way that I think is typical of people to do. They clicked together based on shared interests, based on people who come from, maybe, their same area. Because a lot of people from my institution, most of them, maybe, went to school together. I saw people more so gravitating toward each other based on that. (Thomas)

Actually, by the gym [shared space]. Like during open gym. I was just meeting different people. That's really how I met a lot of people. (Gee)

While the participants noticed common interests united their peers, they also observed instances in which common interests contributed to divisive environments, from both peers and members of Black fraternities:

When people tend to break off into clicks, or groups or however you want to define that, I think that I can become very easy to think that, oh, this is this type of individuals or this
group of people are this type of group, whatever, and I might not want to associate with them. When I say that, just to give you an idea of what's going through my head, some people break off into groups simply because like, hey, they love playing basketball. This school, people made clicks together because hey they love smoking weed or this group of people because they just all shared various interests. It can kind of makes you feel as if you're not welcome in certain groups. I think that because of that, people can kind of get the thought process of, "Hey, I have nothing in common with this person. Hey, I don't belong in this crowd." I guess it's just a natural human thing for people to, kind of, shun others. So, I would say just so with that, going forward with that idea, I think that that can make it a little hard for people to kind of come together. (Thomas)

Fraternity members would say, “you can't talk to us because you're a GDI (God damned individual).” You know, I think that alone, that put such a huge barrier between fraternities and the student body. (Wakanda)

Although commonalities positively and negatively impacted perceptions of sense of community on campus, participants also noted the role in which campus’ administrations contributed to the sense of community on college campuses.

3. Lack of Campus Programming. A recurring deductive theme appearing in the data was that the Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the study offered little to no programs geared towards building a sense of community amongst their student body. Campus programming such as cultural clubs, ethnic-themed housing, and orientation programs have all been proven, because of their ability to provide spaces for students to interact, as drivers of
success and solidarity for Black males (Gurin & Nagda, 2006). However, in some instances, Black males supported community building events produced by Black fraternities:

People, again, would just come to class and go home because there was nothing to do. (Abraham)

Really nothing [how campus administration promoted sense of community] besides maybe once a year, they would have an assembly where they would divide the men and the women. They would have black males come in and talk to the black men about black empowerment, and community building, things like that, but I can’t really think of anything else. (Richard Allen)

We used to have these seminars, Fraternity X used to host these seminars called (omitted), and it was just seminars that taught us how to carry ourselves, to just kind of provided an outlet for students who didn’t really have anyone to talk to, didn’t really have any outlets or anything like that. It was just a way for us to come together. In terms of the school hosting things like that, I don’t really recall, there haven’t been any of these events or things like that that they created. (Sampson Parks)

I feel like the school really didn’t have anything to do with it [building a sense of community]. But, the school did throw events (e.g., parties, cookouts, talent shows, etc.) that the students would attend. So, I guess, that played a role. (Mike)
One participant, attending Sister Mary University, detailed how a change in campus administration led to significant altering in the sense of community perceived by students on the campus as well as its implications on student enrollment:

He [new campus president] took away ... he gave away a lot of buildings, like we were the last to actually have our own bookstore, they sold it to (company omitted). And also, he took away a lot of programs on campus. We don't have what you call a really, like a Yardfest where we, I don't know if you remember where we, two or three years ago we had (performers name removed) and it was the biggest thing over there. We used to be considered close knit, but when he came over, it went from that to not having nothing. We don't have no gospel concerts, don't have nothing. We don't have a lot of actual on campus support neither, as far as what we want to try to do as students, and outreach communities ... he just, it just really went left, to a point where like, oh, I'm ready to leave now. With the old administration, for us, it was good, in the sense of embodying the student life on an HBCU such as Sister Mary University. But on the administration side, there was a lot of stuff that was going on that was very, very wrong. And so, I don't know if that's why he stepped down, or whatever the case may be, but there was stuff that wasn't right. But as far as the students, we were ... you know, he did great in the sense of making sure that we got what we needed. He opened it up for us, we were able to have a lot of fun, we had a lot of events, we drew more people in. And also, too that was the higher intake statistics of black men, because it was so much fun. Now, it's not like they just admitted their smallest class ever. (Wakanda)
4. **Societal Impacts.** In this study societal events pertaining to police brutality against Black males, political ideology, and played roles in shaping and oftentimes dictating the perceived sense of community experienced by the participants. At Aus University, the sense of community was impacted by an on-campus act of hatred:

> There was a time where somebody had spray painted a swastika on one of the buildings on campus. It brought a lot of attention from everybody. It brought a lot of people together. Like the news came out, it was crazy. (Gee)

Similarly, at Sister Mary University an on-campus incident was successful in uniting students, but not necessarily males on campus:

> But there was an issue where I think there was a teacher messing with a student, allegedly, and he was forcing his way in, like messing with her, against her will. And it impacted the women on my campus. The women stepped out and they really were like "No, this is unacceptable." They led a march. The males, unfortunately, the guys didn't really react to it like you would expect them to. It's sad, but it's the same. Unless you were friends with the women on campus who were like "Hey, come out and support us." Then they came out. The majority of the Black fraternities marched with them, but as far as just the male population (non-members), no, not really. (Wakanda)

A lot of young black males or black males, were being harassed, brutalized, however you want to call it, by police officers. Just seeing the way black men were treated, just feels kind of like you're not thinking of, of course, just this country is rooted on racism. So, I think that seeing someone else that looks like you, being mistreated, it definitely creates a
feeling or desire to wanna cling those exact same people, those same people that you see out there in the streets or on the news, per say, who are getting shot at. Then, you look to side and you see like this same individual, of course not the same, but individual as in person. You see that same ideal, that same person right beside you. It, kind of, makes you want to protect that individual. It, kind of, makes you want to see how you two or you three or however many it is around you, how can you guys come together and really create positive change for yourselves? How can you be supportive? How can you just uplift each other in your community? I know, for me, just seeing all those things that are going on in the news created in me the feeling that just because I'm black, I'm at a greater risk of being harassed. I think just being able to have just a solid base back on campus, I think that it really helped to formulate this identity that at least we have a certain center where we felt safe, if we didn't feel safe outside of those walls. (Thomas)

Recent events such as the presidency, school shootings, all of the violence against black men [impact on sense of community] ... We've become more alert [Black males] and we've learned how to, regardless of what organization you belong to, we've learned to actually come together for the common good of our people. (Abraham)

My freshman year in college was the year that Obama won his second term. I think that played a huge part in it [sense of community]. Just the fact that we get to win the system our freshman year, that was the first year that we were old enough to go and vote so a lot of us went together to go and vote down at the town hall. So just things like that really brought us together in terms of just bringing us closer and everything like that. (Sampson Parks)
At Sister Mary University, the election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States of America had positive effects on the campus’ sense of community:

The mood on campus was very, very dry. And very, very hurtful, like we went to classes, my class at least, because we were artists, but even classes that were outside of my major, like humanities, actually, for example ... we got to that class and some people ... the professor couldn't even get to the subject because it was so heavy and the sense of people's reactions to that election. And we spent time either talking about it, professors wouldn't even move, and they didn't want to teach because it was just very palpable. But I remember specifically the day of elections, and as you know, it went over, at night, late as crap. And this was right around, I think, midterms. And we were in the lab and you know, just trying to work. I specifically was trying to work but I couldn't because I was glued to the TV, so I was in there trying to follow, track what was going on. And when we found out that Hillary didn't win, everyone just stopped working, they ... some people was like crying a little bit, got teary eyed. And it was my first time realizing like, yo, solidarity here is very, very strong, impactful. (Wakanda)

Conversely, on the same campus, the participant also recalled how the election of Donald Trump adversely, and different political ideologies, impacted the sense of community on campus:

We had people that argued. We had some people who got into heated, heated arguments, almost to like a physical altercation. But yeah, that's pretty much it. Because those students, and they were men they didn't vote, period. So, I ... my thing is, personally, me, is you did not vote, you have no way to really express certain concerns. Even if you voted
for Trump, then you can communicate with us because at least you did what we've been fighting for years, to get to vote. It's not about "Oh I don't stand for what Hillary stands for." Or "She does something that I don't trust." No, both of them, all in all, if it was better, my choice, I wouldn't have picked neither one of them, but out of the two, you've got to realize who's really going to lead this country in a good way, or in a better way, or to continue off with the past. Versus not voting because you not voting, you going to make it worse by someone else coming in to chair, like Trump. And your vote still counts, even though you didn't vote. But in this moment when people are grieving because they voted, and it didn't come out the way that they anticipated it to, then you right now would not help the situation, you would make it worse. And then people who were emotionally disparaged got heated, and then they got heated. Because "Why are you getting upset with me?" "Well, you didn't vote, so why are you speaking." So, it's like one of those type things. (Wakanda)

As long as proliferated awareness of acts of violence and hatred that victimize the Black community occurs, such as the coverage of Eric Garner’s death; a situation in which an unarmed Black man repeatedly screamed, “I can’t breathe”, while he was being choked to death by a New York police officer during his arrest, there will continuously be calls for solidarity by Black males on college campuses. How Black males respond to positive and negative societal events in oftentimes based on how they perceive and form perceptions of the information. This directly translated, in the study, to how the Black males formed opinions of Black fraternities on their college campuses.
5. Perceptions and Observations. One of the most profound findings from the study came from understanding how the participants, prior to joining the fraternities, as well as fellow peers, viewed other Black males who were a part of the fraternities. Despite juxtaposed perceptions of fraternities and images and actions displayed, interesting is these traits did not stop the participants in the study from joining the organizations. In fact, family-ties and positive interactions with members of the fraternities were attributed to members joining:

They were all the smart guys on campus, they were all smart, very cool, down to earth. They were admired by a lot of people, and they were respected by a lot of people as well. Besides the fact that, what they were doing on campus and their presence there, I grew up with my uncle around who was in Fraternity X. When I went to college, that was at the forefront of my mind, that he was a member. Once I did my research, I realized that all these great men, black men, who made a difference within the community were a part of this organization. So that kind of sold me on it. (Richard Allen)

You know, I heard from other people that they're the people's frat, they're the ones out of the stereotype, they're real cool, laid back people, easy to approach kind of people, the helpful type people. You know, I was looking for something ... Like I said, I wasn't involved in any other organizations at the time, and I really was like, "You know, I'm here. I might as well get involved with the campus." I saw them donating ... Not donating food, but yeah, serving the homeless. You know, my brother would invite me to events. We would give away food to the homeless. And they would have cookouts on the plot, give food away to other people on campus, always different events that will bring the
campus together. So, I felt like they were doing something positive on the campus, and I wanted to be a part of it. (Gee)

Well, I would say my fraternity, I thought they were a great group of guys. I look at them as student body leaders, the people who were active in organizations across the entire campus. They seemed as if they were individuals who were doing the most community events. I saw them going out into the local neighborhood, reading to kids, doing fundraisers and doing events across campus. There are just so many things. They were always the presidents of other campus organizations. That was the atmosphere they created for the fraternity. Someone from the fraternity had to be the leader in some organization. They looked at everything, kind of, like a business mindset, where they wanted the fraternity to have that reputation of being a group that, kind of, cares for the community and cares for the student body. Everything was, at least first perception, very image conscious. I think that, for me, that was something that really attracted me because I'm very business minded. I'm always wondering how can I get to the next level? How can I further my own advancement? Educationally, professionally, and personally. (Abraham)

I actually joined because when I first came to this school, everybody who's a part of this organization, they actually brought me in. They welcomed me. They were showing me around school. They were always helping me whenever I needed help. It was actually like I had big brothers on campus that were looking out for me. Just being around the frat in
general... they showed me how they interact with other fraternity members, and it helped me realize how much they wanted to actually help people. (Mike)

Some of them were friends of mine prior to me starting. Some of them I felt were arrogant, some of them I thought were abusing it ...But then I also felt that there were some that actually had the best interests of the student body, of the fraternity, and even myself, when I was expressing interest in the fraternity. There were some that actually were there for the right reasons and became mentors to me. It's still like that there were some guys, as it is probably in every fraternity, that they get their letters (membership) and they start trying to use it get women, or they try to use it to take advantage of certain things, or get certain things that they probably wouldn't otherwise be able to get [how members abused their positions within fraternities]. Just different things like that. Like using their letters to, I don't know, sometimes take advantage of people. Different things like that. People who they knew wanted to be in, and taking advantage of them, kind of selling these false hopes that if you do this, then maybe you can get this. Just different things like that. There were a few members of the organization that was like that. I think just kind of this sense of, you can't sit with us if you're not this person, kind of just this sense of, oh we're the shit and we know it. (Sampson Parks)

Being a first-generation college student, I was un-knowledgeable about a lot of Black fraternities and what they stood for. Of course, I could read about them, and I did a little bit of it, but what more so impacted me was what I was able to feel and see. And when I stepped on Sister Mary University’s campus, you know, every campus has their different experience with fraternities, the ones that stood out the most, and my favorite were
Fraternity Y. They were always around, they did the most activities on campus, they won five years consecutively the Best Fraternity of the Year award, because they are always doing something. When it came to Fraternity Y and people's reaction to hearing me express interest in becoming a member, they’d say, “Oh, they're good brothers. They're actually really sweet." Though I was a first-generation college student, my mom is a part of a secret society. ... and some of her fellow members are graduates of college. So, when I told them I wanted to attend Sister Mary University, they actually helped me gain admission. Then my mom told them "Hey, he's interested in a fraternity." But my mom didn't know which fraternity, she just knew the colors associated with it. They were ... they were just excited, they were excited that I wanted to join a Black fraternity because they were members of Black sororities. So, I joined my fraternity because of its family-oriented characteristics I observed. (Wakanda)

At Ruthie Mae College, members of Fraternity Y were noticed exhibited practices of social exclusion and selective engagement as well as a negative perception of fraternity members by non-members:

The language of some of my frat brothers was off putting. They’d tell me, “You know, we talked to this guy, he's trying to get down (join).” I’d ask, “What is he trying to get down to? Is he trying to join or is he trying to get down in some other thing that you know people don't want to hear or know about?” I'm more so of talk to me as a human and just say what they're trying to do, because we shouldn’t go out and single-handedly try to find people to join instead of putting on events and programs that drive interest and membership. Our peers perceived us based on previous members... the perception was
that we didn't graduate, we just went to school and didn’t cross a stage. That was pretty much what they were known for then. (Abraham)

6. Membership Benefits. An assessment and evaluation of the studies Black fraternities, in the words of participants, revealed how one’s membership in a Black fraternity leads to the betterment of the individual, the fraternity, and society (both on-and-off college campuses). One common theme found amongst the participants is that almost all of them held leadership positions within campus organizations, prior to joining fraternities, and, astonishingly, all of them took on leadership roles within the fraternity, contributing to building a sense of community through selfless service:

I was president of the honor society, president of the student ministry fellowship ... I was a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. I was a member of the genealogy club, I was vice president of that, and I was a member of the president's leadership council. We were accountable for one another [members of the fraternity], we stayed on one another, and we pushed each other forward. I would like to think over time we grew closer because of the bonds that we started to create. Within my fraternity, I oversaw the chapter’s clergy operations. My involvement in my fraternity led to me becoming the youngest Fraternity X member to be inducted into our fraternity’s state hall of fame. (Richard Allen)

I was heavily involved with the TV station on campus and the radio station on campus [campus involvement prior to joining a fraternity]. Since I'm a communications major, that's what I invested a lot of time into. When I joined, I was the treasurer for one year
and I was the community service coordinator until I graduated. Joining a fraternity, it gave me a different outlook on things that I normally wouldn't have necessarily. If I was to have never joined, I would never have had older brothers and mentors that I have now that keep my guided on the right path in life, I guess you would say. I have older brothers that only want the best for me, and if I'm doing something wrong they're quick to let me know that I'm doing something wrong, or "Fraternity Y members wouldn't act this way," or "You know you're a role model on campus so you should do this, that and the third." It really gave me an extra push that I didn't have before I joined the fraternity as well that really motivated me to be this example for others. (Grant)

I was part of the acapella choir, I was a part of the Quiz Bowl team, I was a part of the Black College Quiz Bowl team, so two separate quiz bowl teams. Gosh, I was a part of so many things. The Student Government Association. Yeah, I am blanking out on a lot but there were so many organizations that I joined, just in my time while being there. Well, after joining my fraternity, I became the vice president of my chapter. So, with that, obviously, only the president was above me. I kind of had a say so and what community events that we decided to bring about, and how we decided to present ourselves to the campus. I would say the biggest benefit of joining was having a sense of brotherhood, having individuals who, kind of, made my time there (on campus) more enjoyable. I became very close with guys that I probably wouldn't have been close with otherwise. Of course, that's not just saying that people don't get to know each other, however that may happen, but some of these random losers, I probably wouldn't have been talking to or whatever. I guess that is the power of brotherhood. I had individuals who were able to
motivate me, inspire me, and people to hang out with and, kind of, make my college experience, really much more enjoyable than what it may have been otherwise. Having the opportunity to be a part of an organization that put on different events that exposed me to other things, that gave me the opportunity to go out into the community and do different fundraisers, to do different socially conscious events. I think that was just such a great experience. (Thomas)

Oh man, I was sophomore class president, I was my campus’ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People president, I was involved in the school band, and I was involved in choir. So, those are like the main organizations I was involved with prior to joining my fraternity. Yeah, so my first two years in the organization, in the fraternity, I was a, acting secretary. My first year I was secretary, second year I was treasurer. My senior year, I was not involved in the leadership role, I was still active of course on campus and within the organization, but I didn't hold a leadership role because when we are seniors we try to, like groom the younger members so they can take over instead of having us in, seeing as how we're going to be leaving in a few months. And so, my senior year I wasn't as involved in the leadership role, but I was still involved on campus. Whenever we had social events, community service events, anything like that, I was still there. Just kind of giving me a family away from home, I think that was my biggest thing, with me being the age that I was when I first joined the organization, I think that's what I needed most [benefits of joining] ... having that sort of a sense of family while I was away from home. Especially since I was there most of the year. I was home three months and was there the remaining nine. So, that was definitely one of the biggest benefits.
Another, I think, is just the networking that it has provided me throughout my career post-grad school, and what it has been able to do for me within my career. When I moved from the city where I attended grad school I moved to another city, and after about three and a half weeks of being here, I was contacted by one of my fraternity brothers about setting me up for an interview at a major cable network. I secured the interview, and I got hired there. About three weeks later, I got a call from another fraternity brother who was working at another major television network, and he set me up with an interview there, and I left the first network to work for the other. That was definitely a case where having those guys as my fraternity brothers paid off. They were thinking of me when I first relocated, and they looked out for me and make sure I was good and had work lined up.

(Sampson Parks)

Freshman year, I was working full time, and, for me, I was just basically working and going to school. I was really just focused on trying to graduate. Eventually, on campus, I became a student ambassador and I was, at that time, the junior class president. As an ambassador, whenever important people from the city came to campus I would show them around and basically be their assistant on campus whenever they needed to do something or whenever prospective students needed a tour on campus, I showed them around, gave them a brief overview how it is to be a student. As class president, I pretty much focused on getting the social interactions on campus back. Campus was really boring, there was really nothing to do, I implemented a couple of things to get that livelihood back up. After joining Fraternity Y, I, at different points in time, was the
chapter’s president, the vice president, the secretary, and the treasurer. Pretty much everything fell on after I joined. (Abraham)

I ran for my dorm presidency, I joined a few orgs that helped me reach out to a lot of other guys. And I was also very active with a music fraternity and I was always actively doing stuff with them. Resume preparation, and placed in a career field of choice, along with brotherhood, have been benefits to me. Along with the opportunity to do community service or to have ideas that have the full support of brothers standing behind you to support them. (Wakanda)

7. Strengths and Opportunities. Black fraternities, because of their lifelong membership tenure and service missions, yield long-standing benefits to both members and non-members. In the study, a common theme that emerged from participant responses was fraternities’ strengths and opportunities regarding their structures (composition and membership criteria), operations (types of programs, capacity, and social capital) and visual language (imagery, interactions, expanded resources) as items that have and can influence perceptions of sense of community on college campuses. For example, several participants referenced fraternity size as a strength that can be leveraged to enhance sense of community:

They [Black fraternities] have to align numbers. Numbers can do anything you want them to do. You can have, for example ... you can look at Black Panther the movie for instance. It was something that people wanted, and they were excited about it. It was common good, it was common cause, and look what it did. If we can just ... and there were certain people that you probably typically wouldn't associate yourself to or with, but again there was a movie that just came out and people were excited. If we can align our
numbers and again drop our little, whatever we have against one another, and come together for a common cause we can change lives. (Abraham)

In addition to strength in numbers, many participants reference social capital as strengths of fraternities as well as opportunities for fraternities to shape sense of community through programming:

I feel like they're [fraternity members] on the right track. They just need some guidance every now and again, but that's what we're here for as alumni, to make sure they're on the right track. (Grant)

I think we can have events, or we can have discussions, or we can have something that is relative to the time of today. It's nice to have business etiquette 101, how to dress for success and all that - that's fine, that's needed, but there's more issues greater than how do you dress for an interview. It goes, what do I do after I land the job? What is the business etiquette of doing business while I'm at work? I think we push men to the edge and we want them to fly, but we're not giving them the feathers to actually fly. If you could tell someone how to write an appropriate email to their boss, then they'd get that. If you could tell somebody how to invest money for themselves, then yes. If you could tell someone this is how you work on your credit score, then yes. I think there is more life tools that organizations can teach other men up to better lives. (Abraham)

I think collectively, there could have been so many more opportunities where we [fraternity members] could have taken a larger scale approach and maybe come up with more activities to really unify the campus, things outside of just the voter registration
programs and outside of just tying a tie seminar and things of that nature. Maybe more ways we could have reached out to our student body for ideas and really encourage more collaboration and growth because, of course, we weren't perfect. (Thomas)

Fraternity X is home to a lot of civil rights leaders, a lot of sports leaders, a lot of people who are leaders in their fields. I just feel like we have the ability to use those prominent members that we have to push a national agenda of solidarity on the college campuses, off the college campuses, and in the community and the world as a whole. (Richard Allen)

Another common, important theme that emerged as an opportunity for growth for the fraternities in the study is being able to use membership criteria to shape non-member engagement and sustain fraternity operations:

By only allowing certain people to be a member, you kind of weed out the people who don't necessarily want to join for certain reasons. Maybe their head isn't on straight all the way, or maybe it's just the kind of person you want to represent your fraternity. It kind of helps you remain a brand, if that makes sense. It kind of helps you keep the luster of the fraternity. Especially with the grade point average being a certain thing, it kind of helps you keep away from the knuckleheads, I would say. (Grant)

As time has been going on, I believe the guys [fraternity] have started to become more, maybe I want to say selective, but they’ve been more particular with the kind of guys they initiate into the organization. I think that because they started to bring in a different
caliber of guys, it has opened the opportunity for them to be more active in ways that maybe wasn't present to the student body years prior. I would say that these guys, when you look at them, I think you can kind of see, oh, okay, these are guys that seem more about their academics and things because, in the past, there were situations where, hey, the fraternity implemented crazy rules where the fraternity, because of personal reasons, let in guys who didn’t meet all the standards to be a part of your organization. That kind of portrayed a certain, negative reflection of the organization to non-members and the student body. Now, looking and seeing the type of guys who are being initiated and how they're carrying themselves and how their representing the organization and the different things that they are trying to do, I've actually been very impressed. (Thomas)

While each participant in the study experienced a positive sense of community with other Black males at different junctions in their lives, it was profound to see how events and interactions shaped the perceptions of sense of community for Black males in both relational and territorial realms. Essentially, the themes that emerged shows that Black the sense of community experienced by the Black males are boundless. The next section will discuss findings from the summative content analysis.

**Summative Content Assessment**

The summative content analysis of artifacts generated two realistic themes. Artifacts were collected from four primary sources: the four Historically Black Colleges and Universities within the study. The purpose of the assessment was to observe what, if any cues, are subtly or overtly inferred by the organizations that may contribute to the sense of community of college students on campus (members and non-members). The following questions guided the assessment:
1. What sense of community artifacts are present?

2. What cues, if any, does the artifact convey to students and prospective students?

3. What can these cues infer about the institution's commitment to sense of community?

The artifacts collected from the universities is comprised of campus mission and vision statements as well as institutional and student affairs homepages. Collectively, these artifacts help identify, if any, cues that may suggest, to the researcher, any sense of community practices.

Table 4.2 displays the types of artifacts used within the summative content analysis as well as the observed themes, and their descriptions, that were produced from analysis.

Table 4.2 *Realistic themes from summative content analysis of artifacts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Observed Theme</th>
<th>Description of Cue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mission Statements</td>
<td>1. Identity Ordering</td>
<td>Identity ordering was found as a common practice amongst the universities in the study: 3 out of 4 institutions. The implications are that the institutions are not creating a sense of community for Black males because they are not leading with, among other qualities, their identities of being HBCUs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Vision Statements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Observation of Websites (e.g., homepages, student activities pages, admissions pages, language used, types of images, etc.)</td>
<td>2. Inconsistent Use of Imagery</td>
<td>The HBCUs in the study had varying amounts of sense of community represented on their websites. Consistently missing, from the websites, were images depicting Blacks males engaged in social and academic environment. Thus, these images may present cues of lowered sense of communities for Black male’s students who may view the websites.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Realistic Themes

1. Identity Ordering. To better understand societal cues, if any, portrayed by the colleges within the study, an assessment of the colleges constructed identities was performed. A review of college homepages, student affairs and activity pages, mission and vision statements, and historical biographies, yielded astonishing information on how the colleges are identifying themselves and ordering those identities with respect to other social constructs. For example, only one out of the four institutions in the study, Derf College, when ordering and self-describing labels, leads with the affiliation of being a Historically Black College. Meanwhile, the other institutions, when referencing their HBCU affiliations, did not lead with the affiliation within their mission, vision, or historical statements.

An analysis of Sister Mary University’s mission and vision statement showed the university used other labels, three to be exact, pertaining to academic programs, before even mentioning its identity as a Historically Black College. The same types of submerged ordering were also found at Aus University and Ruthie Mae College, where the institutions presented, via mission statements, that listed identities pertaining to their abilities to attract students from various geographical areas, its academic offerings, and supportive services, before mentioning or identifying as Historically Black Colleges. A deeper dive into Ruthie Mae College’s archived websites revealed at that the university, within the last five years, did not overtly identity as a HBCU in its mission or vision statements, or on its websites “About Us” section. In addition to identity ordering and submerging, the colleges and universities within the study showed, via artifacts (homepages, admissions pages, and student activities pages), varying degrees of sense of community societal cues for Black males.
2. Inconsistent Use of Imagery. At Derf College, the homepage of the university conveys a welcoming sense of community to Black males. Pictures of Black males as both students and faculty members are found, as well as images of campus facilities and organizations. A similar message is not found on the colleges’ admissions site, where the only images portrayed are that of university personnel. There are no images on the admissions site that suggested an environment that has a heightened sense of community amongst student’s staff. Instead, a brief inclusion statement, welcoming a diverse student applicant pool is found on the site accompanied by an exhaustive list of links to internal and external resources and sites.

Similarly, Derf College’s student activities website did not convey a sense of community, featuring a departmental purpose statement and a link to a list of services provided. Aside from the homepage at Derf College, very little societal cues are exhibited by university administration, suggesting the presence of a strong sense of community.

An analysis of Aus University’s homepage, admissions page and student activities page revealed institutional cues that portray a heightened sense of community. For example, the homepage of the university featured a calendar of student events, a welcome message for new students, site visitors and prospective students, as well as images of social and academic occurrences on campus. Additional analysis of the university’s undergraduate admissions website showed further evidence of a sense of community; on the site, an image of students working together within a classroom is displayed, along with language of community inclusive. Also, found on the “visitors” section of the admissions website, contained an image of students from different races socializing within a community space. When viewing the “student activities” section of the website, language highlighting various campus organizations, specifically fraternities and sororities was found, as well as an image of students in an outdoor
space was found. Overall, the analysis of the university cues pertaining to sense of community infer the administration at Aus University is dedicated and conscious of imagery conveying an enhanced sense of community.

Like Aus University, Sister Mary University’s sense of community analysis revealed an image conscious college administration. While the images and language on the website conveyed the presence of strong sense of community, the images contained the same individuals; it is uncertain if the models were matriculants of Sister Mary University. Nonetheless, the homepage of the university conveys a sense of community via an academic and social calendar, a banner of campus achievements (faculty and student), and images of students. At a glance, the homepage portrays an institution committed to a sense of community. Further investigation and analysis of the admissions webpage didn’t reveal the same commitment. The admission’s website at Sister Mary’s University lacked student images and, instead, used images of celebrity alumni and graduation speakers. While admissions sites are commonly used to spark prospective students interest, Sister Mary University website does little to invoke a sense of community to achieve the goal. A continuation of the lack of sense of community cues if found on the universities “student activities” page. From the universities homepage, the “student activities” page is hard to find; it took about three mouse clicks to find. Once found, the page contained a one-sentence statement about the role of the department, accompanied by one image of students and a long list of links connecting site visitors to campus organizations and resources - clear delineation from the perceived sense of community found on the “model-heavy” image conscious homepage. Overall, the analysis revealed a university where the sense of community manifested on the homepage does not extend to the rest of the website.
Probably the most diverse depiction of sense of community is revealed through an analysis of artifacts at Ruthie Mae College. An investigation of the university’s homepage revealed cues positing a strong sense of community; the university used lots of images showing groups of diverse students in multiple academic settings (lecture halls, classrooms, and labs). The university did not use images of students in social environments and did not use language on the homepage conveying a sense of community. Also, from just viewing the homepage, there were no cues (language or imagery) of artifacts that would infer the institution is a HBCU. An investigation of the admissions website showed the same theme: multiracial images of students minus language of inclusiveness. Consistent with the themes found on the homepage and admissions website, the student activities page lacked images of student and language of inclusiveness. Instead of proliferating messages of a sense of community, the university, site-wide, uses multicultural imagery and reference academic offerings to draw potential students. The inference of a sense of community, particularly amongst Black males is almost non-existent on Ruthie Mae College’s website.

While each institution in the study participated in practices of identity ordering and submerging, the levels of sense of community cues portrayed (consciously and unconsciously) varied widely. Interestingly, the artifact found across all institutions that yielded the highest sense of community was the homepages of the institutions. Whether or not the societal cues portrayed from the artifacts matches the reality of the student experience, post matriculation, leaves much to be examined. Additionally, the lack of campus sense of community cues portray may help explain how community involvement, family structures, and exposure to diverse cultures (pre-college), are better drivers of student matriculation of Black males than their perceptions of institutional sense of community.
Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter outlined the themes derived from participants interviews, authenticating them via the voice of the participants: (a) upbringing and college selection, (b) enablement and prevention, (c) lack of campus programming, (d) societal impacts, (e) perceptions and observations, (f) membership benefits, (g) strengths and opportunities. Also, this chapter outlined themes derived from the researcher's observation of institutional artifacts: (a) identity ordering and, (b) inconsistent use of imagery. The next chapter will focus on delving into the themes and discuss their implications to both theory and practice.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this instrumental multi-site case study was to reveal the extent to which the sense of community component of Black fraternities could be used to enhance undergraduate black males’ persistence to graduation, as well as their sense of belonging, purpose and support. This chapter discusses major findings from the study as related to the four components of McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) Sense of Community Framework (membership, influence, integration and reinforcement of needs, and shared emotional connection), as well as other relevant bodies of literature, and what implications may be useful to undergraduate members of fraternities and administrator’s at HBCUs. Additionally, this chapter includes a discussion on the studies relation to Black male engagement. Finally, this chapter discusses the study’s limitations, areas for subsequent research, and a brief conclusion.

This chapter incorporated discourse and future, potential research options to help answer the following questions:

1. **How can undergraduate members of Black fraternities, who are currently attending Historically Black Colleges, encourage more active engagement by other Black male students on campus who are not within fraternities to promote group solidarity?**

2. **How did you use your membership within your fraternity to encourage more active engagement by other Black male students on campus who were not within fraternities to promote group solidarity?**

According to the study, factors impacting Black male’s decisions to attend college, their perceptions of their campus’ sense of community, and their ability to influence group solidarity was multifaceted and contained in seven themes: (a) upbringing and college selection, (b) enablement and prevention, (c) lack of campus programming, (d) societal impacts,
(e) perceptions and observations, (f) membership benefits, (g) strengths and opportunities. Each factor was important because it pulled from participants’ experiences with sense of community at different junctions in their lives (before, during, and post-college matriculation). All themes contributed to environments where sense of community for Black males was influenced.

This study revealed that organizational (college and university) missions, visions statements, and websites produced sense of community cues that may form or alter Black male perceptions of sense of community and was contained in two themes: (a) identity ordering and, (b) inconsistent use of imagery. Collectively, each factor contributed directly and indirectly to the college environments where, and the sources by which Black males experience solidarity and sense of community. The themes for the summative content analysis, since they were based on researcher observations, are discussed with regard to implications for practice. The next section examines the conclusions derived from the deductive themes.

**Interpretation of Themes**

**Upbringing as an Influencer on College Selection**

This study’s conclusion that factors associated with Black male’s upbringing (socioeconomic statuses, relationships formed, interactions with others, etc.) helped shape their desires to attend college agreed with historical information on post-secondary matriculation patterns for Black males (Hilton & Bonner, 2017; Morgan, Gelbgiser & Weeden, 2013; Wood & Harris, 2015). For most participants, negative experiences with individuals from different races generated a demand for Black male bonding in post-secondary settings. For others, being raised in low-income households with scarce resources allowed them to develop a sense of community
within their own families and in societies, through community programs and organizations. Such was the case with Sampson Parks, graduate of Derf College, who shared:

I grew up in a very knitted household, I had six siblings, it was a total of seven of us, seven kids. So, we had a very big family, very supportive.”

Wilkins (2014) concluded positive and negative experiences encountered by Black males during their upbringings served as impetus to their development of self-advocacy skills, and, ultimately, Black males use these skills to accumulate and apply social capital. All participants used involvement in extracurricular or community-based activities as positive enhancers to their self-advocacy skills and associated those experiences with feelings to solidarity. Richard Allen, graduate of Derf College, shared:

“Growing up in the church especially, a lot of times there were men's ministry and men's retreats, where we would just see black men come together, support each other, talk about family, talk about children”

In this study, while there was no difference in the ability of negative or positive experiences to generate or alter perceptions of sense of community, there understated presence was manifested regarding college selection. Many participants in the study expressed a want to be around other students who looked like themselves in college because they believed being in such environments would enhance their self-advocacy skills. Thus, they enrolled in HBCUs.

Enablement and Prevention and Relationships

While all participants expressed the importance of building relationships regarding accumulating social capital and feelings of solidarity, participants referenced shared interests with others as characteristics that both assisted and prevented its formation. The experiences of the participants evaluating their own identifies, while observing how their peers-built
relationships amongst each other, aligned with existing literature that posits individuals socially categorize their peers before they identity and compare themselves, which ultimately shapes their decisions to engage with them (Tajfel, 1979). In the study, the participants witnessed their peers build relationships based on interests. Sampson Parks, graduate of Derf College, shared:

The stoners, they all come together, all of the gay guys are usually together, all the basketball players are usually together, so I learned that it [relationship building] was usually based on interests, like those things that you have in common with others.

Like those they observed, participants in the study also built relationships based on shared interests with others. This was important because relationship building was used as a gauge by participants to determine perceptions of sense of community on their campuses, prior to joining their fraternities. Additionally, it may be inferred that students who did not identify shared interests with others may not form relationships and had a negative perception of sense of community on the campus. This was supported by Thomas, graduate of Derf College, who stated, “People can kind of get the thought process of, hey, I have nothing in common with this person. Hey, I don't belong in this crowd.” However, personnel at HBCUs may have opportunities to facilitate engagement amongst Black males.

**Lack of Campus Programming Hindered Solidarity**

Programs administered by Historically Black Colleges and Universities provide opportunities for Black males to come together and form solidarity. In this study, a consistent theme that emerged was that the participants believed that the colleges and universities in the study were not providing sufficient opportunities for Black males to come together. Previous research indicated that campus administered programs not only help students engage with each other but elevates levels of engagement in classrooms (Kim & Lundberg, 2016).
Wakanda, graduate of Sister Mary University, highlighted how the University’s homecoming celebration, campus housing government structure, and campus organizations provided opportunities for him to engage with other students. He shared:

I ran for Mr. Freshman, I ran for my dorm presidency, I joined a few orgs that helped me reach out to a lot of other guys.

In this study, the participants, regardless of the source, wanted opportunities to associate with others. This was important because it aligned with the rationale for selecting HBCUs for their supportive environments. In some instances where the HBCUs failed to provide enough opportunities or those wanted by the students to foster Black male engagement, Black fraternities filled the void. Grant, graduate of Aus University, shared:

I know some people, if the school has a program, it's like, "That's whack. That's school event. I'm not going to it." But a fraternity event, it might have a different outcomes, like "Oh, it's a fraternity throwing an event. I want to go see what it's about." So, I just feel like, as a fraternity, we were able to bring out a different audience than the school necessarily would attract.

Fraternities choosing to fill voids left by the institutions provided examples of how perceptions of sense of community for Black males in the study were positively influenced.

**Societal Event Influenced Male Bonding**

This study’s conclusion highlights the important role events in society played in fostering Black male solidarity, as well as how it deterred interactions between Black males. Specifically, this study implied that sexual violence against Black women and police brutality aimed at unarmed Black males served as motivators for Black males to come together.
By contrast, the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump both united and divided Black males. This is supported by historical literature where the social imagery of Blacks, portrayed by the media, pitted non-violent Black victims against, in most instances, non-Black aggressors (Hall, 2005; Fleming & Morris, 2015). Mike, graduate of Aus University, emphasized how Black males came together to protest police brutality. He shared:

Something had happened like drastically, in the news. It might have had to do with police brutality, but my school had shut down one of the highways. The students were like protesting. That was like a really big deal.

While there were instances of societal events on and off the HBCU campuses, many participants in the study witnessed Black males coming together and demonstrating a sense of community. This is important because whether Black males assimilated into specified groups, they were still able to acknowledge and react to issues affecting their overarching, ascribed commonalities, being Black and males.

**Perceptions and Observations about Fraternities Drive Levels of Interaction**

When recalling how they felt about the stereotypes and images portrayed by and ascribed to Black fraternities and their members on their college campuses prior to joining their fraternities, the participants consistently, across all interviews, had positive perceptions. This inference was consistent with research that concludes the perceptions, attitudes, and interactions between and across groups are driven by the perceptions of group member’s positions in society and their perceived power (Hurtado et al., 1998). This helped explain why the participants in the study continued their interactions with the fraternities’ members. This was evidenced by Mike’s, graduate of Aus University, interview where he described continuous positive interactions with the fraternity he joined. Mike stated:
Everybody who's a part of this organization, they welcomed me [to college]. They were showing me around school. They were always helping me whenever I needed help. It was actually like I had big brothers on campus that were looking out for me.

This example demonstrated how Black fraternities used positive interactions to engage non-members and enhanced their perceptions of sense of community. Additionally, this inference was in congruence with conclusions derived from historical research from Tajfel (1979), indicating positive perceptions around social categorizations enable subsequent interactions and later, social identification and differentiations; which was demonstrated by each of the participants in this study.

**Membership within Fraternities Provide Engagement Opportunities**

This study’s conclusion that membership within fraternities provided opportunities of engagement for its members, was consistent with historical literature that need fulfillment, within groups, is achieved through the identification and matching of members shared values: needs, priorities, and goals (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Many engagement opportunities experienced by the participants were a result of matching their own passions to the structures of the fraternities. Abraham, graduate of Ruthie Mae College, was able to use his membership as a member of Fraternity Y to get involved on campus. He shared, “When I joined it, I coordinated all the planning, all of the membership classes (fraternity offered courses taken by prospective members), and fundraisers.” Additionally, as stated by Grant, his fraternity was able to engage non-members by filling voids left by lack of campus-administered programs that provided opportunities for Black male engagement.
Fraternity Capacity and Social Capital are Levers of Engagement

A consistent theme that emerged from this study was the capacity of fraternities and the social capital obtained by members after becoming a member. Regarding capacity, the study’s participants suggested that there was power in numbers. Essentially, the participants believed that larger fraternities could produce more activities used as levers of engagement. They also believed that larger fraternities had access to more social capital than those that were smaller.

One fascinating characteristic of Black fraternities is they are lifelong commitments and undergraduate members, post-undergraduate studies are propelled to graduate chapters (Jenkins, 2012).

Additionally, there are avenues for members to directly join graduate chapters of Black fraternities. Because of large membership numbers, Black fraternities are home to significant social capital. These conclusions were consistent with existing research around the levels of on-campus involvement and leadership competencies of Black males in fraternities (Harris III & Harper, 2014; Kimbrough, 1995).

Wakanda, graduate of Sister Mary University, shared how he was able to reference well-known members of his fraternity to non-members to spark their interests within the fraternity. Wakanda shared:

A lot of distinguished men are members of distinguished fraternities. They were about solidarity and acts of right. So, us [undergraduate fraternity members] knowing that we can use that information to enlighten those who aren't members.

This example showed how the size of fraternities could serve as a reference to undergraduate chapters. Additionally, as stated in the study by participants, because of their structures, Black
fraternities can utilize resources from graduate chapters and assist undergraduate chapters with programs that may help promote Black male solidarity on their campuses.

**Implications for Theory and Research**

Chapter 2 included descriptions of research that relates to the development, oppression and assimilation of Black males. The research discussed in Chapter 2 included McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) sense of community, Tajfel’s (1979) social identity theory, critical race theory, Tinto’s (1988) student persistence model. How the inferences from this research fits into these models are discussed in the following sections.

**McMillan and Chavis’ Sense of Community**

McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) Sense of Community includes the suggestion that the dynamics of membership, influence, integration and reinforcement of needs, and shared emotional connection work in conjunction and determine how one perceives a sense of community. The results of this study aligned to each tenet of the sense of community framework.

In this study, membership within a fraternity and its established boundaries provided Black males with a sense of belonging and a heightened sense of community amongst each other. Conversely, Black males who were left out of the organizations, due to membership requirements, may have experienced negative perceptions of sense of community. In this study, influence (ability of members to influence other groups or its members) was present. The Black males in the study referenced incidents of being able to become involved within their own organizations and influence decision-making, as well as providing programs to non-members and getting them involved, thus, impacting perceptions of sense of community for both fraternity members and non-members. Integration and fulfillment of needs, while discussed in this study,
were aligned to the rationale of the Black males joining fraternities. Although this equipped the
Black males in the fraternities with a sense of community, this tenet of the theoretical framework
did not appear to have much influence on the sense of community for non-members. Like the last
tenet, shared and emotion connection, appeared to be an influencer on sense of community
reserved for the Black males within the fraternities. The sense of community framework suggests
that when communities are formed, and boundaries are established, the perceptions of sense of
community experienced by its members are positive, and members are likely to remain engaged.

**Tajfel’s Social Identity Theory**

Social identity theory helps explain how individuals evaluate themselves about who they
are with regard to group affiliation, and who they aspire to be (Tajfel, 1979). It had, perhaps, the
largest presence in this study, since each participant identified with self-subscribed social
identities of being in fraternities. In this study, the Black males used the observed behaviors,
interactions, and imagery portrayed by the fraternities prior to enrolling. When accessing the
findings from the study, it may be implied that when members of the fraternities interacted with
the participants at times before they were members, those positive interactions ultimately led to
continuous interactions and, eventually, the participants joining their fraternities.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory helps explain how traditionally oppressed groups internalize and
continue oppressive behaviors (Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). In this study, critical race theory,
appeared to be most prominent when the participants observed how individuals on their
respective college campuses formed friendships. Individuals, including the Black males in the
study, formed friendships based on interests. By contrast, individuals also avoided interactions
with others based on lack of, or different, interests.
In this study, this behavior continued once the Black males joined their fraternities, which contained established membership requirements (boundaries) that prevented others from joining. Although these boundaries equipped the Black males in the study with affiliations in supportive environments where sense of community was positive, in some cases they may have excluded others from achieving the same perceptions of sense of community.

**Tinto’s Student Persistence Model**

The student persistence model is important to this study because it essentially is based on the premise that when students assimilate socially on college campuses they are more likely to persist. In this study, each participant referenced the supportive and accountable environments they experienced by being members of Black fraternities. Also, each male in the study escaped attrition patterns impacting many students and graduated with a bachelor’s degree. This is relevant to discussions around student persistence, because Black fraternities, coupled with Black institutions, in this study equated to academic success.

**Implications for Practice**

This study attempted to reveal the extent to which the sense of community component of Black fraternities could be used to enhance undergraduate black males’ persistence to graduation, as well as their sense of belonging, purpose and support. Through semi-structured interviews and a summative content analysis of relevant artifacts, two areas for implications for practice became noticeable. The first was for Black male undergraduate members of fraternities at HBCUs, and the second, was for decision-making personnel at HBCUs. These implications supplied the entities with opportunities to create a positive sense of community for Black males attending HBCUs who were not within fraternities.
Hsieh and Shannon (2005) provided a guide for understanding how implications from deductive and summative themes are generated; given the primary research questions are explanatory, any implied descriptive questions, describing relevant variables should first be answered. In this study, two descriptive questions derived from the primary research question that could be answered were:

1. *What engagement activities do the fraternities in the study undertake?*
2. *Which solidarity building activities do undergraduate, Black male, non-members of fraternities consume?*

These descriptive questions set parameters and provided a path to recommended implications for practice. By recalling the experiences of the participants with regard to these questions, two possible implications from practice emerged that addressed both the research questions and purpose of the study. The two implications of practice, illustrated in Table 5.1, that emerged from the study were:

1. Black fraternities may implement cross-collaborative programming with non-members
2. Black fraternities may reform recruitment criteria to engage new members

Table 5.1 outlines implications of practice for Black fraternities at HBCUs that derived from the study. The table is organized into three sections. The first section, audience, shows the audience the implications are intended to inform. The second section, implications for practice, outline strategies that may be adopted by the audience. The last section, inference on sense of community, explains possible connections to the sense of community experienced by Black males who are non-members of fraternities.
Table 5.1 *Implications of Practice for Black Fraternities at HBCUs.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Implications for Practice</th>
<th>Inference on Sense of Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Members of Black fraternities at the HBCUs in the study</td>
<td>Implement cross-collaborative programs with non-members</td>
<td>Possible increase in engagement for non-members who are Black males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reform recruitment criteria to attract, engage new members</td>
<td>Possible increase in engagement for non-members who are Black males</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By implementing cross-collaborative programming with non-members, Black fraternities may be able to engage non-members in programs, leaving the non-members with options to work alongside Black fraternities without having to join the organizations as members. This may be used to enhance perceptions of sense of community by non-members by creating opportunities for engagement and positive, continuous interactions without the presence of membership boundaries that may impede such opportunities. Cross-collaborative programming between campus administration staff who oversee fraternities could, perhaps, strengthen the sense of community on the campuses. While the focus of this research was fraternities, historical research has explained positive outcomes associated with Black male initiative programs, created by university-personnel, on Black male persistence (Brooms, 2018). Putting together programs where members of Black fraternities and campus administration staff come together to create programs could generate buy-in from all stakeholders that may be used to enhance perceptions of sense of community.

Second, the Black fraternities in the study typically attracted members who shared similar interests with the organizations, as well as members who were already engaged on campus in extra-curricular, leadership roles (e.g., members of other HBCU campus organizations, athletics,
student clubs, etc.). As noted in the study, after joining their fraternities, the Black males in the study took on active leadership roles within their organizations. Non-members who had different interests were less likely to feel a sense of community with the organizations. Therefore, creating cross-collaborative opportunities between members of the fraternities and members from other campus organizations, as well as non-members, may enhance ingroup/outgroup interactions. All stages of the cross-collaborative programs could be voluntary and open to all Black males. This strategy will ensure that Black males can be engaged at any point during the collaborative process, whether want to help plan activities or participate in activities. Adopting this strategy could potentially attract individuals to the collaborative opportunities that may not necessarily be interested in the fraternities. As a result, the initiated interaction, if positive, may lead to sustained interactions and an enhanced sense of community for non-members and members of other organizations. Another implication for practice could be for the Black fraternities in the study to modify recruitment practices and advertise available leadership opportunities and roles within the organization.

This implication would be a shift from current practices where recruitment may be largely based on shared interests between Black fraternities’ current member and non-members to one where engagement opportunities (roles, duties, and responsibilities) are advertised to attract non-members, regardless of their shared interests with current members. This implication may help provide non-members with opportunities to perhaps reap the benefits of a sense of community felt by fraternity members without having to join. It may also provide opportunities for fraternities to grow their capacities by engaging non-members who may not have, if not for the changes, engaged with and contributed to the missions of fraternities.
The summative content analysis of institutional artifacts in the study revealed the presence of institutional identity ordering and inconsistent use of imagery, illustrated in Table 5.2. 5.1 outlines implications of practice for decision-making personnel at HBCUs that derived from the study. The table is organized into three sections. The first section, audience, shows the audience the implications are intended to inform. The second section, implications for practice, outline strategies that may be adopted by the audience. The last section, inference on sense of community, explains possible connections to the sense of community experienced by Black males who undergraduate students at the HBCUs.

Table 5.2 *Implications of Practice for Decision-Making Personnel at HBCUs.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Implications for Practice</th>
<th>Inference on Sense of Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making personnel at HBCUs</td>
<td>Use language that conveys HBCU affiliation</td>
<td>Possible increase in engagement for students who are Black males</td>
</tr>
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<td>Incorporate more, consistent images on websites that show Black males engaged in academic and social environments</td>
<td>Possible increase in engagement for students who are Black males</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Both revelations, when coupled with the findings from the study where participants referenced lack of institutional programming, may contribute to negative perceptions of sense of community for Black males. The following are implications that may be used by decision-making personnel at the HBCUs:

1. Use language that proclaims HBCU affiliation.
2. Incorporating more, consistent images that depict Black males in academic and social environments on campus.
Collectively, these solutions may exude positive cues of sense of community for Black males. This was important because the study revealed instances in which Black males observed their positions on campus based on how they saw their peers interact with each other. One solution to this is can introduced by decision-makers at HBCUs. Perhaps, if decision-makers can purposely capture, and consistently display, on their websites positive interactions between Black male students, they may be able to shape perceptions of sense of community for prospective and current Black male students.

**Concluding Statements**

This section discusses the concluding statements that manifested from the study. From the study, there were several takeaways and concluding statements that informed the problem of practice. This information included:

- Imaging of HBCU fraternities serves as both an attractor and detractor of sense of community for undergraduates.
- HBCU fraternities helped fill the void of limited campus program to enhance sense of community for undergraduates because they offer programing & positive interactions.
- Intentional outreach to undergraduate freshman males by HBCU can help build sense of community.
- Intentional promotion of distinguished fraternity members and large-scale event planning can enhance sense of belonging for HBCU undergraduate freshman.
- The sense of community portrayed by the Universities may not be easily identified and may be manifested from clear-cut cues such as imagery of Black male solidarity on websites.
Of importance is the ability to understand how these takeaways as well as other findings from the research are informed by the sense of community theoretical framework. To recap, the Figure 5.1 depicts the four domains of the sense of community. Separately, each component manifested within the study.

Figure 5.1 The four domains in McMillan and Chavis’ Sense of Community Framework (1986).

The membership aspect of the theoretical framework, with relation to the study, was manifested most in this study through boundaries. The presence of boundaries was what separated the members of Black fraternities from non-members at the HBCUs. Additionally, the presence of fraternity boundaries may have created barriers to interaction between members of
the Black fraternities and non-members. Thus, it can be inferred that the boundaries may negatively impact the perceptions of sense of community experienced by non-members.

The influence domain of the theoretical framework was found within the findings of the study. Some participants referenced the ability to create programs and gain power through group cohesiveness. Because of the ability to program and cross-program, this aspect of the theoretical framework may be responsible for positive perceptions of sense of community for non-members.

The integration and fulfillment of needs domain of the sense of community framework in the study lends insight to the study because participants directly referenced the benefits gained from being in the fraternities (e.g., enhanced accountability, networking opportunities, and feelings of brotherhood). Due to these references, it was inferred that this domain of the theoretical framework positively contributed to the perceptions of sense of community experienced by undergraduate Black males.

The last domain of the sense of community framework, shared emotional connection, was present throughout the study. Some of the participants referenced the members of Black fraternities bonding with them prior to joining, creating links via contact frequency and positive interactions. Ultimately, for most participants in the study, positive interactions between them, while they were not members of fraternities, and the then members of the fraternities, led to the non-members joining. This aspect of the theoretical framework detailed how shared connections may lead to positive perceptions of sense of communities by Black male undergraduate students.

Each of the theoretical framework domains had a presence within the findings of this study. While three out of four domains contributed to positive experiences of sense of community, one domain, membership, was responsible for creating negative perceptions of sense of community. This may not come as a surprise, since membership was essentially the domain of
the framework that set the guidelines and premises for determining “in” and “out” groups. These boundaries, to non-members, may prevent opportunities for non-members and members to engage in opportunities to enact the remaining domains of the framework.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Multiple areas for future research could advance this study’s findings. A similar study that includes perceptions from members of the absent fraternities and HBCUs, could provide greater insight into the sense of community experienced by individuals in those organizations and on those campuses. A quantitative study, measuring the impacts of assimilation into Black fraternities at HBCUs, may be able to quantify the effectiveness of assimilation patterns for Black males. A longitudinal study using mix-methods to follow a cohort of HBCU freshman to identify their choices (academic, social) through 5 years into workforce, could explain tracked sense of community experiences and influencers over a longer period. A comparative case study exploring 3-4 fraternities in different types of college campus (Public, Private, Nonprofit, other HBCU), could inform what is going on at other HBCUs.

A multi-site case study exploring undergraduate black males who opted out of joining Black fraternities, to understand how they believe they can be engaged by fraternities could inform research and practice pertaining to how they believe fraternities could engage themselves. Additionally, studies which use other undergraduate, campus organizations that Black males assimilate into such as sports or student government, could be observed to understand their role in engaging Black males who are non-members. Switching the gender of the population could produce a study that observes sense of community at HBCUs and how Black sororities could engage non-members who are female undergraduates on their campuses. Building on the findings from this study, future research could involve a study that looks at how the presence of,
and exposure to, Black fraternities, off-campus, in communities at large and by non-members, may shape perceptions of sense of community for Black males prior to their enrollment at HBCUs and assimilation into fraternities.

Reflections as a Scholar-Practitioner

For the researcher, the journey to becoming a scholar-practitioner began with an inquiry to better understand interaction patterns of Black male undergraduates attending HBCUs. Specifically, Black males who were a part of groups and those who were not. Then, while at an airport waiting on a flight, the researcher came across an article referencing how a secondary school wanted to engage parents in their children’s learning by using tenets from the sense of community framework. Fascinated by this finding, the researcher coupled the framework with research questions, focusing on engagement of non-members by groups. The researcher, because of his own membership within one, decided to utilize Black fraternities as groups of observation.

Perhaps the largest challenge with the research came with the recruitment of participants. It was during this phase that the researcher realized his own network of peers did not include the population he wished to interview. This resulted in an extensive quest for participants. Additionally, it taught the researcher that having access to specific populations is critical to conducting research. Ultimately, the researcher believes his transition from practitioner to scholar came during the data analysis phase, where he was able to make sense of the data, generate themes, and connect those themes to historical literature, while holding the problem statement and study’s purpose as priorities.
Summary

This chapter demonstrated how inferences from the study supported historical research around Black male development, oppression and assimilation patterns. Additionally, this chapter showed how themes from the study and researcher’s summative content analysis produced implications for both theory and practice that addressed the problem statement and gap left in converging statements in literature from McMillan and Chavis (1986) and Cuyjet (2006), inferring membership in Black fraternities can be used to engage non-members via (a) cross-collaborative programming and, (b) reforms in recruitment practices. Moreover, the study inferred that HBCU leadership can overtly proclaim HBCU affiliation and display more, consistent images of Black males on campus to positively influence perceptions of sense of community for prospective and current Black male students.


Miller, K. B. (2012). Student engagement and character at council of christian college and university (CCCU) institutions.


Appendix A

Certificate of Completion: Protecting Human Research Participants
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Dimar Brown successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 06/12/2015
Certification Number: 1782004
Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Black fraternities and solidarity study

Be part of an important research study

- Are you a male between the age of 21 and 35 years of age?
- Do you self-identify with a racial identity of Black or African American?
- Have you recently graduated from an HBCU (no more than five years from interview date)?
- Were you a member of a National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc. (NPHC) recognized fraternity during undergraduate studies at a Historically Black College or University?

If you answer YES to these questions, you may qualify to participate in a dissertation research study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the contributing factors that enable solidarity within Black fraternities at Historically Black Colleges, from alumni perspectives, and how those factors can be extended to promote solidarity among undergraduate, non-fraternity Black males. There will be no remuneration for participation in this study.

This study is being conducted interview either face-to-face, via skype, WebEx, or google hangouts.

Please email Dimar Brown at brown.di@husky.neu.edu for more information, or if you are interested in taking part in this study.
Appendix C

Recruitment Email

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Dimar Brown Requests Your Participation in Research Study

Dear Name of Participant,

My name is Dimar Brown and I am a doctoral student in Northeastern University’s Doctor of Education program. I am seeking research participants for my doctoral thesis study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the contributing factors that enable solidarity within Black fraternities at Historically Black Colleges, from alumni perspectives, and how those factors can be extended to promote solidarity among undergraduate, non-fraternity Black males. As a researcher, my goal is to develop awareness around how membership within fraternities can be used to promote solidarity among Black males attending Historically Black Colleges.

For this study, I am recruiting participants that meet the following criteria:

- Male between the age of 21-35
- Self-identified racial identity of Black or African American
- Recent graduate of an HBCU (no more than five years from interview date)
- Member National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc. (NPHC) recognized fraternity during undergraduate studies at a Historically Black College or University
If you choose to participate in this study, I will be interviewing you about your experience as a member of a Black fraternity and Black male solidarity on your college campus. I will work with you to schedule a 45-60-minute interview (either face-to-face, via skype, WebEx, or google hangouts). All in-person interviews will take place at a location of your choosing.

If you wish to volunteer, please respond to this email and complete the information in the chart below. In addition, should you decide to participate in the study, I will provide you with my institution’s Institutional Review Board information pertaining to the study. I may send a reminder email, but if you would like to take yourself off that list, please reply to this email with “opt-out” in the subject line.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Best wishes,

Dimar Brown

brown.di@husky.neu.edu

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<th>Name:</th>
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<td>Email:</td>
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<td>Phone Number:</td>
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<td>Preferred days, times, and meeting format (either face-to-face, via Skype, WebEx, or Google hangouts):</td>
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Recruitment (Follow-Up Email)

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Dimar Brown’s Research Study

Dear Name of Participant,

Approximately one week ago, you received an email containing information about my doctoral thesis research study.

If you are interested in taking part in the study, please reply to this email and complete the information provided below.

Thank you again for your kind and understanding consideration in this matter.

Name:

Email:

Phone number:

Preferred days, times, and meeting format (either face-to-face, via skype, WebEx, or
Sincerely,

Dimar Brown

Brown.di@husky.neu.edu

*Note: This email will be sent to participants one-week after not receiving a response from the initial recruitment email. Once the researcher has reached the required number of participants for the study, this email will not be sent to non-responders of the initial email.
Appendix E

Signed Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies

Doctor of Education Program

Title: Alumni Perspectives: Using Membership within Black Fraternities to Promote Black Male Solidarity at Historically Black Colleges

Principal Investigator (PI): Dr. Bryan Patterson, Northeastern University

Student Researcher: Dimar Brown, Northeastern University

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will verbally explain it to you first. You may ask the researcher any questions you may have. When you are ready to decide, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to take part in this research study because you meet the following criteria:

- Male between the ages 21-35
- Self-identified racial identity of Black or African American
Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to examine the contributing factors that enable solidarity within Black fraternities at Historically Black Colleges, from alumni perspectives, and how those factors can be extended to promote solidarity among undergraduate, non-fraternity Black males.

What will I be asked to do?

If you take part in this study, you will be asked a series of questions that will focus on recalling your experience as a Black male within a fraternity on a Historically Black College campus. Specifically, the first interview will serve as an introduction to the study and seek to explore your perception of fraternity membership and its relation to promoting campus solidarity amongst Black males on campus. Should the researcher require clarification or additional information based on what was divulged during the initial interview, a follow-up interview will be scheduled. The follow-up interview will be no longer than 30 minutes.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

- Recent graduate of an HBCU (no more than 5 years from interview date)
- Member National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc. (NPHC) recognized fraternity during undergraduate studies at a Historically Black College or University
You will be interviewed in-person at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will last 45-60 minutes. Should the researcher require additional information, a follow-up interview will be scheduled and will last no longer than 30 minutes.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**

I do not foresee any risks with participating in the study. However, some questions about your lived experiences may make you feel uncomfortable. To minimize risks, you can skip questions or stop the interview at any time.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to any participants taking part in this study. However, the researcher hopes that the information gathered through this study will raise awareness for what it is like to be a Black male, within a fraternity, at a Historically Black College where there is a lack of group solidarity between Black males who are in fraternities and those who are not. The findings from this study will be shared with faculty, staff, administrators, and any relative agencies associated with Historically Black Colleges with the intention of strengthening community building initiatives for Black male students.

**Who will see the information about me?**
Your part in this study will be confidential. At the beginning of the studying, you will select a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity. Only the researchers involved with this study will see the information you share during your interview(s). No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in anyway or any individual as being of this project.

Our interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. All physical documents or files related to this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic files will be stored in a password protected online file storage program and on an external data storage device. Only the researchers associated with the study will have access to these storage mechanisms. All data will be retained for three years and then destroyed.

In rare instances, authorized individuals may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

If I do not want to take part in the study/I want to quit the study, what choices do I have?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question asked during your interview(s). Even if you begin the study, you may choose to cease participation at any time.
Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dimar Brown at (773) 370-0337 or via email at brown.di@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Bryan Patterson at (857) 407-9652 or via email at b.patterson@northeastern.edu, the Principal Investigator.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

For face-to-face interviews you may incur costs associated with transportation (e.g., fuel, parking, taxi, tolls, etc.) to-and-from the interview site.

I agree to take part in this research.
Signature of person agreeing to take part

Date

Printed name of person above

Signature of person who explained the study to
the participant above and obtained consent

Date

Printed name of person above
Appendix F

Unsigned Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies

Doctor of Education Program

Title: Alumni Perspectives: Using Membership within Black Fraternities to Promote Black Male Solidarity at Historically Black Colleges

Principal Investigator (PI): Dr. Bryan Patterson, Northeastern University

Student Researcher: Dimar Brown, Northeastern University

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it verbally to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to decide, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to take part in this research study because you meet the following criteria:

- Male between the ages 21-35
- Self-identified racial identity of Black or African American
Recent graduate of an HBCU (no more than 5 years from interview date)

- Member National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc. (NPHC) recognized fraternity during undergraduate studies at a Historically Black College or University

**Why is this research study being done?**

The purpose of this study is to examine the contributing factors that enable solidarity within Black fraternities at Historically Black Colleges, from alumni perspectives, and how those factors can be extended to promote solidarity among undergraduate, non-fraternity Black males.

**What will I be asked to do?**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked a series of questions that will focus on your recalling your experience as a Black male within a fraternity on a Historically Black College campus.

Specifically, the first interview will serve as an introduction to the study and seek to explore how you perceive fraternity membership and its relation to promoting campus solidarity amongst Black males on campus. Should the researcher require clarification or additional information based on what was divulged during the initial interview, a follow-up interview will be scheduled. The follow-up interview will be no longer than 30 minutes.

**Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?**
You will be interviewed via an online video conference site (e.g., WebEx, Google Hangouts, Skype, etc.). The interview will last 45-60 minutes. Should the researcher require additional information, a follow-up interview that will last no longer than 30 minutes will be scheduled.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**

I do not foresee any risks with participating in the study. However, some questions about your lived experiences may make you feel uncomfortable. To minimize risks, you are completely able to skip questions or stop the interview at any time.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to any participants for taking part in this study. However, the researcher hopes that the information gathered through this study will raise awareness for what it is like to be a Black male, within a fraternity, at a Historically Black College where there is a lack of group solidarity between Black males who are in fraternities and those who are not. The findings from this study will be shared with faculty, staff, administrators, and any relative agencies associated with Historically Black Colleges with the intention of strengthening community building initiatives for Black male students.

**Who will see the information about me?**
Your part in this study will be completely confidential. At the beginning of the studying, you will select a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in anyway or any individual as being of this project.

Our interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. All physical documents or files related to this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic files will be stored in a password protected online file storage program and on an external data storage device. Only the researchers associated with the study will have access to these storage mechanisms. All data will be retained for three years and then destroyed.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

| If I do not want to take part in the study/I want to quit the study, what choices do I have? |

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time.
Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dimar Brown at (773) 370-0337 or via email at brown.di@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Bryan Patterson at (857) 407-9652 or via email at b.patterson@northeastern.edu, the Principal Investigator.

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Will I be paid for my participation?

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

No, there are no costs associated with your participation in this study.
You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Thank you.

Dimar Brown