

AGENTS OF CAPITAL: THE ROLE OF BGLFS

AGENTS OF CAPITAL: THE ROLE OF BLACK GREEK LETTER FRATERNITIES IN THE
EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MEN AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

By

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Abstract

According to the National Council for Educational Statistics (NCES), approximately 998,000 Black males were enrolled at American colleges and universities during the 2015 academic year. The 998,000 Black males that were enrolled was reflective of the percentage of the Black male population within the United States. Of that population only 21.5% graduated within four years. In that same year, 4.8 million White males were enrolled at a higher education institution. The four year graduation rate of that population was 41%. Essentially, Black men are graduating at a disproportionately low rate (Britt, 2014). McClure (2006) contends that institutional exclusion, perceived racism and a lack of resources that are identifiable to men of color play a negative role in their ability to successfully attain a bachelor's degree.

Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) find that Black students on predominantly white college campuses have been shown to demonstrate lower student involvement than White students. Lack of campus community engagement can affect the persistence and retention of students of color, more specifically Black males. Tinto (1993) argues that Black students have difficulty adjusting at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) because their [Black males] values and beliefs are incongruent with the systems and practices in higher education. Britt (2014) finds that, while race-centered clubs and organizations play a critical role in the inclusion of Black students, the historically Black fraternal organizations in particular, have been most successful in helping Black men to remain in college. Greek-lettered organization involvement provides them with the benefits of social connections and leadership skills, which have been shown to increase their overall academic performance (Patton, Bridges & Flowers, 2011). The guidance and support obtained through membership of fraternal organizations helps counter the low persistence and retention of Black males.

AGENTS OF CAPITAL: THE ROLE OF BGLFS

This study is being completed to understand how membership in Black Greek letter fraternities (BGLFs) impacts the experiences of Black men at predominantly White Institutions using theories capital. Previous research acknowledges how involvement in BGLFs can contribute to a Black males persistence and retention however, there isn't much about what forms of capital are gained and transferred to members of BGLFs. The goal of this study is to examine how capital is obtained and/or exchanged through Black Greek letter fraternal membership and how it relates to their persistence and retention at a predominantly White institution.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Black men attending predominantly White institutions are graduating at a disproportionately lower percentage than their White counterparts (Britt, 2014). Black men experience little to no involvement/connection to the campus or with different campus communities which in fact, can affect their decision to remain at the institution until graduation (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). Tinto (1993) argues that Black students have difficulty adjusting at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) because their [Black males] values and beliefs are incongruent with the systems and practices in higher education. Black Greek letter fraternities (BGLFs) provide Black males with the benefits of social connections, values, and leadership skills, which have been shown to increase their overall academic performance (Patton, Bridges & Flowers, as cited in Britt, 2014). Members of Black fraternities attribute the social connections and leadership skills instilled in them through their BGLFs as necessary tools for success at the PWIs they attend. As Astin writes, “Membership in a fraternity or sorority has a substantial positive effect on persistence, overall satisfaction with college, and satisfaction with instruction and social life.” (1977, p. 222).

Purpose of Study

As a member of a Black Greek Letter Fraternity (BGLF), my life experience has made me fascinated with the role BGLFs play in the lives of Black males at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Understanding how pivotal BGLF membership was in my upbringing, I often wondered if other Black males felt or shared similar experiences. This study is being completed to understand how membership in Black Greek letter fraternities impacts the

experiences of Black men at predominantly White Institutions. My interest in this topic stems from my personal experiences as an undergraduate student at a PWI. As a Black male entering college identifying as an underrepresented student with a low socioeconomic status (SES), I struggled with the fear of not being prepared for college. In my second year of college, I was introduced to a fraternal organization, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc. Initially, I had no idea what a fraternity was or its purpose, but the members (brothers) of this organization quickly changed that. The brotherhood and mentorship obtained through my fraternal membership, literally helped redirect and guide me in a new direction that would ultimately, place me where I am today.

Fraternal organizations allow a person to build a network with others who share similar interests. Lifelong friendships and relationships were established through my membership in Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. Realizing the impact my fraternal organization had in my life, it made me wonder if other Black men felt strongly about their fraternal organization and the opportunities they brought forth. Following discussions in my doctoral courses, I began to think about the word “capital” and what it meant to other Black male students who identify as underrepresented and low socioeconomic status enrolled at PWIs. Previous research acknowledges how involvement in BGLFs can contribute to a Black males persistence and retention however, there isn’t much about what forms of capital are gained and transferred to members of BGLFs. My goal is to examine how capital is obtained and/or exchanged through BGLF membership and how it relates to their persistence and retention at a PWI.

Problem Statement

According to the National Council for Educational Statistics (NCES), approximately 998,000 Black males were enrolled at American colleges and universities during the 2015 academic year. The 998,000 Black males that were enrolled was reflective of the percentage of the Black male population within the United States. Of that population only 21.5% graduated within four years. In that same year, 4.8 million White males were enrolled at a higher education institution. The four year graduation rate of that population was 41%. Essentially, Black men are graduating at a disproportionately low rate (Britt, 2014). McClure (2006) contends that institutional exclusion, perceived racism and a lack of resources that are identifiable to men of color play a negative role in their ability to successfully attain a bachelor's degree.

Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) find that Black students on predominantly white college campuses have been shown to demonstrate lower student involvement than White students. Lack of campus community engagement can affect the persistence and retention of students of color, more specifically Black males. The guidance and mentorship obtained through membership of fraternal organizations helps counter the low persistence and retention of Black males. Britt (2014) finds that, while race-centered clubs and organizations play a critical role in the inclusion of Black students, the historically Black fraternal organizations and male mentoring programs in particular, have been most successful in helping Black men to remain in college. Greek-lettered organization involvement provides them with the benefits of social connections and leadership skills, which have been shown to increase their overall academic performance (Patton, Bridges & Flowers, as cited in Britt, 2014). BGLFs give their members the tools they need to not only become successful students, but to also become great leaders. "If leadership experiences provide college students with the tools they need to succeed in school and life, then

those organizations with the ability to harness leadership should not be summarily dismissed” (Kimbrough & Hutchenson, 1998, p. 97).

Formed by individuals who shared common interests or goals, fraternal organizations have existed over hundreds of years. Although both White Fraternal organizations and Black Fraternal organizations were established as social networks for their members (Wesley, 1948), they are fundamentally different. Black Greeks are more service-oriented and establish social structure for most Blacks on campuses, whether they are members or not. Whereas White Greeks only “...provide social activities for their own members, guests, and members of other White Greek organizations” (Whipple et. al, 1991, p. 141). As McKee (1987) points out, “Predominantly black Greek organizations have played, and continue to play, significant roles as sources of racial pride and as an important group for black students (members and independents alike) on predominantly white campuses” (p. 29).

Universities throughout the U.S. have long quarreled about the relevance of Greek organizations. Those opposed view them as a means for college students to partake in drinking, drugs, hazing, elitism, etc. Those in support appreciate Greek organizations for their contributions to the communities in which they serve and the networks they establish on both the undergraduate and alumni level (De Donato & Thomas, 2017). BGLFs were founded to support Black men socially and academically at PWIs through the principles of scholarship, fellowship, good character, and human advancement (Dancy & Hotchkins, 2015). These principles are the foundation of BGLFs and the keys to helping Black men persist at PWIs.

Research Questions

1. How does membership in a Black Greek Letter Fraternity shape the experiences of Black men (social, academic, professional, etc.) while enrolled at a predominantly white institution?
2. How does membership in a BGLF aid or hinder their members' persistence and graduation from their undergraduate institution?
3. What types of capital, if any are gained and transferred to Black males through membership of Black Greek letter fraternities?

Limitations

For my research study six participants were used to give a personal account of their fraternal experience. Considering the study was only be conducted with six students, it cannot be used as a definitive correlation to the experiences of all Black males that are members of BGLFs in the United States. All of the participants for my study are students enrolled at the same PWI, which means the data will only reflect the Black male fraternal experience from one campus. Additionally, the study examines this phenomenon solely from the perspective of Black men who are members of historically Black Greek letter fraternities; it does not highlight those who are members of other Greek letter organizations. Further research on the Black male experience at a predominantly White institution should focus on the perspectives of Black men who are members of non-traditional Greek letter organizations—multicultural, service, professional, etc.—at a PWI.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Although colleges/universities have become more accessible to Black males, Black males still have difficulty persisting on the campuses of predominantly White institutions. Reasons such as financial hardship, lack of supportive resources, or Black males not feeling connected to their campus' have contributed to the low retention of Black males at PWIs (McClure, 2006). This literature review will consist of five sections. The first section will cover the *experiences of Black males in education*. This section will review the difficulties Black males face in education prior to their collegiate experience. In the *history of Black male students at predominantly White institutions* section, previous literature surrounding the social challenges of Black men enrolled in PWIs will be discussed. A brief detailed account about the early beginnings of Greeks will be provided in the *history of Greek letter organizations*. *Black Fraternities as Retention Initiatives and "Persistence Agents"*, will examine the role that Black Greek-Letter Fraternities play in the experiences of Black men. The final section will explore the theory of fictive kinship and how it relates to Black males.

Black Male Experience in Education

The plight of the Black man in regard to education has often centered around underachievement and underrepresentation (Scott, 2012). This centering takes place early in their educational journey. Before entering higher education, Black men are subjected to racism and discrimination which hinders them from advancing academically (Hale, 2001). Black males who are considered to be of low socioeconomic status (SES), are often enrolled in a K-12 public school systems that consist of teachers who are unqualified or culturally insensitive (Ladson-Billings, 1998). "Teachers" lacking the ability or desire to connect to the students within these

school systems, can lead to Black male students disproportionately placed in special education classes or provided instruction that does not prepare them for post-secondary education (Bailey & Moore, 2004). Black male students enrolled in inferior school systems maintains the oppression of Blacks by White America because in these settings, they are bombarded with the stereotypical labeling of being incompetent or lazy (Hale, 2001; Irving & Hudley, 2008). Black male students internalize these labels and sometimes respond by acting-out or disassociating themselves from school as a means of coping, which can impinge on the way they view education culturally (Tatum, 2006).

Oppositional cultures were formed in Black communities from the historical oppression and discrimination Blacks have experienced in America (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Although many Black male students demonstrate a desire for education, they are sometimes faced with the ridicule of “acting White” by their community (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This particular oppositional culture, “...provokes Blacks to persuade their same-race peers to devalue academic success because of its association with “acting White”...” (Palmer et. al., 2009, p. 430). The fear of “acting White” along with the lack of Black male representation in gifted education programs or advanced courses, causes Black males to develop a “cool pose” (Palmer et. al., 2009, p. 430). According to Majors & Billison (1992) the “cool pose” motivates Black males to become indifferent toward education. This indifference along with other factors such as financial support and cultural disconnection, can be catalyst in the perpetuation of inequality at higher education institutions.

The completion and enrollment rates of Black men in higher education are dreary in comparison to other groups, more specifically Whites (Jackson & Moore, 2006). Schools fail to meet the developmental and social needs of Black males (Davis, 2004). In doing so, Black

males are thwarted from having the same academic and social success as their White counterparts. So for Black males enrolled in higher education institutions, having Black male role models inside and out of the classroom—like those found in Black Greek letter fraternities—can be essential to their persistence and retention.

Black Males at Predominantly White Institutions

Black students represent 12 percent of college students in the United States (Strayhorn, 2014). Of that 12 percent, 85 percent attend predominantly White institutions (Hoston et al, 2010). The retention and graduation of Black men at PWIs can be very taxing due to some of the adversities they are faced with as students. According to Whites & Cones (1999), there are four major psychological and social challenges that Black males experience while enrolled at predominantly White institutions; constructing an identity and defining themselves, developing and maintaining close relationships, coping with racism, and discovering adaptive possibilities within the Black way of being. These challenges can contribute to Black males having difficult experiences while attending predominantly White institutions. Black males are often ostracized at PWIs and struggle with the sense of belonging due to the social climate of the institutions they attend. The feeling of isolation prevents Black male students from performing well academically because they are uncertain what resources are available at the institution they attend if they are having trouble with their studies. This can lead to a student failing or dropping out of college. The more support these males have, the more comfortable they feel navigating the college environment. Support from peers can also impact a student's behavior and attitude in a way that can be directly related to increased competencies thus, increasing academic achievement (Britt, 2014). Fleming (1983) posits if students develop interpersonal relationships at PWIs through

Black student groups such as fraternities it will increase not only their motivation, but their performance as well.

Each Black Greek lettered fraternity has a unique set of founding ideals or principles yet, they all abide by two main principles: scholarship and brotherhood (Jenkins, 2010). These ideals help the members develop common interests, work habits, and attitudes which are geared to promote positive academic performance (Willingham, 1962).

History of Greek Lettered Organizations in Higher Education

Originating from freemasonry and academic secret societies in the mid-1700s, white male fraternities evolved during the 19th century becoming organizations with principles that active¹ members proudly promoted publicly (Voorhees, 1945). Members of Greek letter organizations are expected to uphold the principles of their organization. The adaption of these principles by the members can change the way they view the world, using the lens of their respective organizations. Principles of Greek letter organization helps encourage members to live their lives through the principles of the organization and attempt to impose those beliefs on others (Parks, 2008). In addition, these principles help form relationships between the members of the organization that are built upon trustworthiness and obligations to both its members and the organization itself. Coleman (1988) contends that within these relationships, resources and information as well as behavioral norms are shared amongst the individuals forming social capital.

¹ Active: A person who has been initiated into a lifelong membership in a Fraternal organization.

Phi Beta Kappa was the first fraternal organization in the United States, founded at the College of William and Mary on December 5, 1776. Phi Beta Kappa established the precedent for naming American college societies after Greek letters (Voorhees, 1945). The Greek initials “ΦBK”, for the organization's motto stood for, “Love of learning is the guide of life” (Voorhees, 1945). The fraternity was originally developed as a student society with the sole concern of the scholarly affairs of its members. The organization was devoted to the pursuit of liberal education and intellectual fellowship. The inception of later Greek letter fraternal organizations catered to the social needs of collegiate underclassmen (Voorhees, 1945).

Within 50 years of Phi Beta Kappa’s founding, the Kappa Alpha Society was founded on November 26, 1825 at Union College in Schenectady, New York—its primary purpose being fellowship or the development of friendship and brotherhood. Over the ensuing century, college men formed nearly 30 similar organizations. Their lineage boasted a host of men who joined to participate in the legacy of brotherhood. However, brotherhood was not accessible nor offered to any and every male in the 19th century. Fraternal life in the 19th century excluded the participation of Blacks and members of many other minority groups (Clawson, 1989). By the late 19th century fraternities were considered a commodity, in which membership could be beneficial and profitable. Fraternities were able to offer “...their prospective members a ready made sociability, the promise of financial protection, and, through standardized rituals, a form of entertainment that anticipated aspects of twentieth-century mass culture” (Clawson, 1989, p. 213). Fraternal members were able to grow in their professions and expand their business ventures through participation. Unfortunately, exclusionary practices made these offerings unattainable to Black males.

During the late 19th century, the number of men in fraternities increased significantly. Simultaneously, the number of Black students, albeit small, increased at the end of the 19th century as a result of the Post-Enslavement/Reconstruction Period. A select few Blacks had the means to attend colleges/universities—the “Talented Tenth” as coined by W.E.B. Du Bois. The *Talented Tenth* described the likelihood of one in 10 black men becoming leaders in the world through classical education and social engagement (Anderson, 1988). Those Blacks who were able to attend college dealt with isolation and lack of support fueled by racism and oppression that was taking place throughout the country. Fraternal membership could have assisted the Black males that were enrolled in colleges and universities during this period tremendously but, the existing organizations’ membership criteria prohibited Black men from joining any of the houses across the country. Blacks were continuously being marginalized and discriminated against on college campuses. Brown et al., (2005) states as a result of these exclusionary practices, Black fraternities were founded beginning in 1904.

Black Fraternities as Retention Initiatives and “Persistence Agents”

Over a century after the formation of the first black fraternities on white campuses, lack of support and isolation continues to be some of the most serious issues Black men face while attending predominantly White institutions (Allen, 1992). Guiffrida (2003) states racially-centered student organization involvement positively affects the retention and graduation of Black students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in the following ways: 1) it allows them to establish relationships with the Black faculty who were involved with the organizations; 2) the programming (i.e., cultural fairs, panel discussions, etc.) allow the students to interact with other Black students on campus and “facilitated meaningful connections with other African

Americans”, specifically for those who feel like they are the “only Black person” in their classes or residence halls and 3) it allows them to connect with peers who they perceive are like them, or understand their experiences at the institution. Black Greek letter fraternities have provided Black students with a “space” to feel safe. Flemming (1983) states Black males are socially ostracized at predominantly White institutions. Membership in BGLF’s help Black males foster social and cultural networks which alleviates the exclusion from the majority population at PWIs (Harper & Harris, 2006). Allen (1992, p. 4) states, “Black students often find it necessary to create their own social and cultural networks in order to remedy their exclusion from the wider, White-oriented university community”. These social and cultural networks attempt to diminish the feeling of isolation for Black students at the institution they attend.

A national study previously completed by the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL) concluded that Greek membership can have a negative effect on students’ cognitive development. Contrary to the NSSL findings, a study conducted by Pike (2000) indicated higher gains in the cognitive development of Greeks than non-Greeks, which was largely associated with the Greek (fraternity member) social involvement. The social involvement or integration developed in a community is considered a “network”. Networks allow Black students to share common interest and information which could possibly benefit another person within that network. Networks can also serve as “safe” spaces where Black students can come together to freely discuss some of the micro/macroaggressions they may have endured while on the PWI college campus they attend. Grier-Reed & Wilson (2015) describes a network as “...a sanctuary for coping with racial macroaggressions i.e., the subtle everyday racism experienced by people of color particular in predominantly White settings.” (Grier-Reed & Wilson, 2015, p. 376). In these spaces strong connections are established between the members which fosters additional

support to the Black males at PWIs. Smith (2018) states student involvement promotes a sense of connectedness or belonging for Black students. “Black student groups can serve as counter spaces that offer students a “‘respite’ from the White world...” where they can be free to be themselves without fear of being judged or stereotyped” (Grier-Reed & Wilson, 2015, p. 377). The relationships and support Black males receive from membership in Black Greek letter fraternities assist in their persistence at PWIs. Membership in BGLFs, “...contributes to positive self-identity and development, and helps eliminate the students’ feelings of isolation.” (Britt, 2014. P. 20).

Fictive Kinship

The ritualized means of fraternal organizations allowed members to define one another as brothers (Clawson, 1989). Although biologically unrelated, the intimate brotherly bonding facilitated by fraternities is used to cultivate shared ideologies, practices, and skills such as leadership with its members. The intimate bonding can also be defined as fictive kinship. Fictive kinship is “...the relationship by which extended family and community relationships can grant an individual social capital beyond those granted by socioeconomic status.” (Whitney, 2016, p. 30.). Fictive kinship as explained by Whitney (2016), serves as social capital for Black students who lack the proper resources and support that can encourage academic and career achievement.

The fictive kinship one obtains evolves into a brotherhood for the members within a fraternal organization. This brotherhood contributes to the social interaction and outlets of its members from the rigors of their academics while enrolled at a PWI. Some of the success of Black males at PWIs can be attributed to the brotherhood gained through their fraternal organization because “Membership in a fraternity or sorority has a substantial positive effect on

persistence, overall satisfaction with college, and satisfaction with instruction and social life.”

(Astin, 1977, p. 222). Fictive kinship can allow a person to obtain or accumulate assets or goods from a relationship, which can also be considered capital.

Black Greek letter fraternities were built upon mutual commitments to developing scholarship, building brotherhood (ties of fictive kinship), and racial uplift (Parks, 2008) all of which are connected to capital formation. There are multiple theories of capital that are relevant to academic success in higher ed. Theories such as cultural, social, and human capital.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted interviewing three members of a BGLF at a predominantly White institution to obtain a deeper understanding about the social and professional benefits of BGLF membership. The interviews took place in a secluded office because it was a convenient and private meeting place for the participants. These three gentlemen were members of three different BGLFs that were active on the campus of a PWI. Two of the participants were registered for their third year at the university, while the third participant was in his second. Although all three were from different ethnicities within the Black diaspora, they all identified as first generation Black males.

During the interviews, the three participants shared their ethnic identity and personal reflections about their Black Greek letter fraternity. The first participant was a Haitian male who was attracted to his organization because of their presence on campus. The participant discussed his ‘sense of belonging’ and how membership in his fraternal organization helped him gain confidence. There was emphasis on how attending his PWI was a ‘culture shock’ for him. He attended elementary and high school in an urban school district where all the students were of

color. He shared that being on the campus of a PWI was the first time he felt like a minority, which made him feel very uncomfortable.

The second and third participant attributed their academic success to membership in their fraternal organization. The second participant was an African American male who was concluding his second year at the institution. The third participant was a Jamaican male who admitted that he had no sense of direction. The responses from the participants centered around 'mentorship and accountability'. They spoke of the role older fraternity members played in their life in reference to guidance and support. That guidance and support helped them figure out their purpose while enrolled in college. The relationship between them and older fraternity members led to mentorship. The mentorship resulted in the participants becoming members of the same fraternal organization of the older fraternity members, strengthening their bond/relationship.

The interviews allowed specific and in-depth questions to be asked relating to the personal experience, beliefs, involvement, and motivations the participants had as members of their fraternity while on the campus of a PWI (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). In addition, the interviews provided personal accounts about the climate of the institution they attended and what it meant to be a Black male on that campus.

Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of qualitative research is to study the research problems that inquire into the meaning individuals or groups that ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2007). Research problems that involve assumptions, human thought and/or lived experiences cannot be quantified or shared through quantitative research. A qualitative research designed was used for this study to contribute to the understanding and importance of roles Black Greek letter fraternities play in the experiences of Black men at predominantly White institutions. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research is conducted when a complex detailed understanding of an issue is needed. To complete this research, individual interviews and a focus group was conducted. The interviews and focus group allowed me to interact directly with my participants to establish a detailed understanding of how the theory of capital intersects with Black Greek letter fraternities. The location of the individual interviews was a private office located in a secured access building. The focus group took place in a conference room, which was used for educational meetings and research.

Participants

Attending Greek council meetings and other campus community Greek events, Black males were asked to volunteer and participate in this research study. An explanation of the study as well as requirements for participation was provided using a script to recruit participants [Appendix A]. Students were required to be enrolled as undergraduate students and members of a historically Black Greek lettered fraternity on the campus selected as the research site. The sample size for my research was six students; one sophomore, two juniors, and three seniors. The participants were male and identified as Black, African American or as a member of an

ethnic group within the African Diaspora (Jamaican, Haitian, Guyanese, etc.). Each participant gave a first-hand account of their personal experience as an undergraduate member of a Black Greek letter fraternity while enrolled at a predominantly White institution.

Purposeful sampling was used for this study because it allowed me to have “in-depth evaluation in a quality assurance manner” (Patton, 2002, p. 385). Purposeful sampling is the selection of information-rich cases that will illuminate the questions under study (Patton, 2002). This sampling strategy allowed me to select specific participants and a specific site for the study because it invoked a better understanding of my research questions (Creswell, 2007).

Site Selection

The study was conducted at Tau University (a pseudonym for the research site), which is a predominantly White, public institution. This institution has been chosen due to its large student population and active Black Greek letter fraternity population. The current undergraduate academic enrollment for the institution is over 40,000. 42 percent of the students enrolled are White and 7 percent are Black. There are more than 85 fraternal organizations chapters² at the institution. The chapters are categorized into four groups: The Interfraternity Council (IFC), the Multicultural Greek Council (MGC), the Panhellenic Association (PH), and the Professional Fraternity Association (PFA). The historically Black Greek letter fraternities of this institution fall under the umbrella of Multicultural Greek Council. Of the 85 organizations, five of them are historically Black Greek letter fraternities. As of Spring 2018, the graduation rate for active BGLFs at the institution is 100 percent (“Greek Life Tau University”, 2018).

² Chapter: A term used to refer to undergraduate fraternity or sorority students in a particular Fraternal organization. This term is also used nationally to distinguish one group of students on a particular campus from those on another campus. Many national groups give their chapters names such as a Greek letter, or a combination of letters, or a Greek letter and a state.

Data Collection

Interviews, both individual and grouped, were used to “...explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters...” (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008, p. 292). All Black males do not share the same experiences when enrolled on the campuses of predominantly White institutions. Previous studies reported racial discrimination and alienation as a huge cause for the high attrition rate of Black males at predominantly White institutions (Stovall, 2005). Interviewing the Black males allowed me to obtain full details as to what their experience has been being a member of a Black Greek letter fraternity at a predominantly White institution. The interviews addressed several subjects, including the students’ experience attending a PWI before joining a fraternity, as well as their social experiences as members within their fraternity. The interviews helped me understand the climate of the institution they attend and what it means to be a Black male at the institution.

Individual interviews were completed to receive first-hand accounts from the participants about how their BGLFs are considered agents of capital. The interviews provided detailed answers to questions surrounding theories of capital. A focus group was completed to see how the participants would respond to questions with other BGLF members present. The focus group gave the participants a chance to hear the responses of one another and make additional comments beyond their original responses (Patton, 2002). It also allowed me as the researcher, to see how responses from members of different BGLFs intersect.

To gather information about the participants’ experiences in their fraternity, a semi-structured, open-ended interview was completed with the six students. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interviews addressed several subjects, including their lives as students attending a PWI before joining a fraternity, as well as their social experiences as

members within their fraternity. The interviews were used to increase the validity of the data and to gain a better understanding of the role Black Greek letter fraternities play in the lives of Black males at predominantly White institutions.

Field notes were produced during the interviews to convey the emotions, behaviors, actions, conversations, and activities that took place during my observation. The field notes allowed me as an observer to "...not only remember and envision a scene; he also presents the scene from a selected angle that highlights some of its features more than others." (Emerson et al, 1995, p. 94).

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through direct interpretation (a single instance review "...that draws meaning from it without looking at multiple instances") and naturalistic generalizations ("...lessons that can be learned from the case itself...or can be applied to a population of cases"(Creswell, 2007, p. 163). Each interview was transcribed following each recording session. The transcription process enabled me to present the oral language of my interviews into written form (Bird, 2005). The different/similar experiences of the participants was analyzed in relation to how their membership contributed to their persistence at the PWI. Coding "is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of languages-based or visual data." (Saldana, 2016). A code book was developed using descriptive words and/or phrases [Appendix C] to help me identify themes or relatable information that the interviews provided so that I could understand the phenomena from each participant's perspective.

Researcher's Positionality/Validity

As a member of a Black Greek letter fraternity, I believed the participants would share experiences similar to mine. I am a Black male from an urban community who attended a public, northeastern high school and also graduated from a predominantly White institution. As a first-year student, I was not actively involved on my college campus. I became a member of a historically Black Greek letter fraternity during my sophomore year. Prior to my fraternal affiliation, I had no idea what to expect or what I would gain from attending college. This was due to lack of direction or proper guidance as to what the college experience would be like from family or peers. My membership in the fraternity played a critical role in my social experiences as a student, as well as in my connection to the university. During my experiences in both high school and college, resources and mentorship—or lack thereof—became vital in my educational experience. It was in college following membership in my fraternity, that I truly began to understand my racial, social, cultural and educational identities and also how they intertwined. While the participants and I had different upbringings, our membership in a Black Greek letter fraternity established major similarities in our collegiate experiences. However, I am also aware that each fraternal experience is uniquely different when considering a person's identity. The unique identities of the participants provided an exclusive account of their Black male experience while enrolled at predominantly White institutions. The pilot study reinforced my view of BGLFs and how membership can be beneficial to Black men enrolled at PWIs, fostering brotherhood and creating safe spaces. However, the study also altered my personal perspective of Black fraternities. I was under the impression that all members felt empowered and uplifted through membership when on the contrary, there are those who would dispute that ideation.

Theoretical Framework

Capital

Capital refers to accumulated assets acquired by an individual for a particular purpose such as wealth or resources (Bourdieu, 1986). In the case of Black men enrolled at PWIs, capital can be used to help them succeed academically as well as give them tools necessary to alter their current socioeconomic status. For this study, three types of capital will be discussed when referring to the BGLFs—cultural, social, and human. The accumulation of these types of capital for Black men, can be attributed to membership in Black Greek letter fraternities.

Cultural Capital

For many Black males, little is known about college or what it means to be a college student prior to their first day on campus. A great number of Black males that enroll in college are considered first generation and/or come from a low socioeconomic status. First generation is defined as students who are the first in their family to attend college; including students who may come from families that migrated to the United States (Strayhorn, 2009). Identifying as first generation means that these Black males lack the cultural capital to equip them with the knowledge or tools for college. Cultural capital is defined as, "...the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged (Yosso, 2005, p. 69). Cultural capital is provided to an individual through family, as well as in their community which consists of other social relationships (Schuller, 2001; Coleman, 1988).

Bourdieu (1986) states cultural capital can exist in three forms: embodied state, objectified state, and institutionalized state. Embodied state, also referred to as habitus, are

assets that are acquired over time and transmitted through exposure from early childhood. This can include teachings and values such as language, manners, gendered behaviors, or place in social hierarchy. Cultural capital explains why some Black males are unable to manage being students at a predominantly White institution. These males are unfamiliar with the norms of a collegiate institution, so the feeling of isolation can be overwhelming. In addition, unfamiliarity's with the cultural dynamics of an institution can result in Black male students being ostracized. Tinto (1993) believed Black males face a challenge integrating into PWIs because their norms and values differ than the White majority at PWIs. Without supportive communities Black males, "...often experience feelings of discomfort, social isolation, and stress which can lead to student attrition" (Guiffrida, 2003, p. 305).

BGLF membership benefits Black males because they assist in bridging the cultural gap between their home communities and PWIs. Members of BGLFs share similar backgrounds allowing those who are veteran members or *prophytes*, to transmit the cultural capital necessary for Black males to feel more comfortable exploring and integrating in to the larger campus community. Prophyte is a term used to describe an older member or brother of a fraternal organization that has inducted new members. The cultural capital transferred to new fraternal members can be used to explain how some Black males manage to use "...education to move from non-elite positions into elite postilions" (Schuller, 2001, p. 4). With the induction of new members or *neophytes*, fictive kinship is established potentially building the foundation for Black males to develop social capital.

Social Capital

According to Bourdieu (1986) social capital is a resource that is affiliated with group membership and social networks. “The volume of social capital possessed by a given agent...depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249). For most Whites students, social capital is established by their parents from which they inherit (Coleman, 1988). However, the parent(s) of many Black male students may not have attended college or have the social status that would best benefit their children, depriving them of social capital. This made places such as predominantly White institutions spaces of hegemonic power (Gusa, 2010). Coleman states, “The social capital that has value for a young person’s development does not reside solely within the family. It can be found outside as well in the community consisting of social relationships...” (1988, p. S113).

Black fraternities are voluntary associations that are formally mobilized and named groups whose members are not financially compensated for their participation. Instead members are linked to “...the university, to the larger Black community, and to society in general, serving to connect them to a group and lower their perception of isolation” (McClure, 2006. p. 1041). For Black males enrolled at PWIs that are not members of BGLFs, establishing these connections can be tumultuous. While trying to establish a sense of belonging, Black males suffer academically and socially. Davis (1991) found that participation in minority student organization such as Black fraternities, have a significant positive impact on the grade point averages of Black males at PWIs. Black fraternities are a network of men who promote and encourage academic achievement and community service amongst its members (Harper & Harris, 2006; Kimbrough, 1995). The social capital transmitted to Black males through fraternal

membership gives them access to broader and reliable information, as well as resources that can increase their retention at PWIs.

Putnam (2000) suggests there are three dimensions along which social capital can be measured: vertical vs horizontal; strong vs weak ties; and bridging vs bonding. Bridging ties brings together "...heterogeneous members, whereas bonding ties link more or less homogeneous members" (Schuller, 2001, p.8). These ties or networks, provide access to resources and information for Black males in an unstructured way. One can argue that structurally, social capital is transferred through familial ties that has been created from cultural capital held within a family. Unfortunately for some Black males that is not the case. Relationships and trust are cultivated amongst BGLF members that come from different social status' and upbringings. Trust is needed when role expectations and familiar relationships are no longer reliable. The brotherhood produced by the fictive kinship of fraternal membership, permits Black males the opportunity to create Social capital. Social capital refers to features of social organizations like fraternities, such as networks, norms, and trust that promote action and cooperation for mutual benefit or goals (Putnam, 1993). Mutual benefits or goals can also be considered the ideals of fraternal organizations. The ideals of BGLFs can produce changes in a persons "...skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways." (Coleman, 1988, p. S100), thus creating human capital.

Human Capital

Black males enroll in college with the intentions of receiving an education and developing human capital, which can improve their social status. Human capital refers to skills and knowledge acquired by an individual to increase productivity and wealth (Schuller, 2001).

The production of human capital can be attributed to education and schooling. As previously stated, the ostracization of Black males and sense of not belonging, creates barriers hindering the possibility of human capital. Membership in a Black Greek letter fraternities help eliminate the isolation of Black males on the campuses of PWIs, empowering them with the chance to build capital. Coleman (1988) states those who invest the time and resources in building up human capital, "...reaps its benefits in the form of a higher-paying job, more satisfying or higher-status work, or even the pleasure of greater understanding of the surrounding world..." (p. 116).

Critical Race Theory

Using a Critical Race Theory lens, my research will discuss how Black Greek letter fraternities impact the lives and experiences of Black men as they navigate the oppressive practices of predominantly Whites institutions. Crenshaw states "Critical Race Theory seeks, above all, to counter the oppressive and subordinating features of the texts of America's dominant legal, social, and cultural strata." (Crenshaw, 1996, p. 1364). In a study of enablers of college student retention, Berger and Milem (1999) indicated that being Black was the third largest negative predictor of persistence. The campuses of PWIs are uncommon and unfamiliar to Black males who enroll from low socioeconomic communities. Black males need supportive resources to achieve high levels of satisfaction with their college experience (Strayhorn, 2008a). The notion of equal opportunity was associated with the idea that students of color should have access to the same school opportunities as White students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). However, the historical structures of predominantly White institutions obstructs the attainment of that can assist in improving a person's socioeconomic status. Without supportive resources such as

BGLFs, it is likely that Black males will not graduate within six years of their matriculation.

Chapter IV

Findings

The purpose of this study is to understand how membership in Black Greek letter fraternities impacts the experiences of Black men at predominantly White institutions. Using theories of capital—cultural, social, and human—the goal is to understand how BGLFs are agents of capital, transferring these forms of capital to its members. The research will share accounts of Black men enrolled at a PWI, who are all members of historically Black Greek letter fraternities. Their personal reflections will shed light on the experiences of Black male students attending PWIs and how fraternal membership contributes to the promotion or hinderance of their collegiate journey. The institution the participants attend, prides itself on diversity. However, the participants from this research do not believe the “intent” of the institution matches the environment of the actual campus.

Taylor & Howard-Hamilton stated, “To be welcomed, accepted, appreciated, and affiliated within a larger community is important to the development of a student’s racial/ethnic identity.” (1995, p. 330). Black students at PWIs often deal with high levels of social isolation, alienation, forms of oppression, and the pressure to conform to the White ideal (McClure, 2006). The participants all came from high schools where majority of their student body were students of color. In high school they felt connected to their school due to the similarities between them and their peers. Being Black men at Tau University was a totally different experience. At Tau, the Black men were no longer affiliated with the majority and felt a sense of loneliness because of it. While there are differences between the participants ethnically and culturally, they soon realized that to the demographic majority enrolled at Tau, they had more in common than they thought.

Those who join historically Black Greek letter fraternities consider their membership as a “new beginning”. There is a rites of passage that you endure to become a member. Part of that passage is “breaking” down the old version of oneself and being “rebuilt”, using the ideals of the BGLF an individual becomes affiliated with. In conversation with participants of this study, majority of them shared very similar experiences. The only differences being activities they took part in during their membership intake. Ironically, although I am much older than them in regard to BGLF experience, I too shared many of the same traditions.

While on campus, members wear their fraternal letters on their shirts, jackets, pins, etc. to show they are representatives of their Greek organization. While wearing these letters, members complete service projects across the campus and throughout the community. All of the participants shared how they organized monthly programs or events that took place throughout the fall and spring semesters. These programs/events range from bringing social awareness to students regarding things on campus and in society, fighting for social justice issues, step shows, or even parties. Some members hold offices or positions in other organizations established on campus. Members of BGLFs participate in the hosting of these events while maintaining the required grade point average requirement of both their fraternity and institution. Black Greek letter fraternity culture is rich, consisting of numerous customs and traditions (Kimbrough, 2003). These customs and traditions help shape the experiences of the men who become members.

In the following chapter, I will provide the feelings and emotions of the participants in relation the theories of capital. While looking at whether Black Greek Letter fraternities confer three forms of capital—cultural, social, and human—I found that these forms of capital are not easily separated and are closely linked in the development of the fraternal members. Although

questions were asked in correlation to specific theories of capital, they actually produced responses that demonstrated how intertwined these forms of capital are. As a result, themes emerged that coincided with the theories of capital being discussed. In congruence with cultural capital, two themes became apparent when speaking with the participants. The first theme, “Social Identity”, focused on the how the participants personally identified themselves and their positionality on the campus of their PWI. The second theme to arise “Forms of Cultural Capital”, will share accounts of the characteristics or behaviors the participants developed through fraternal membership in reference to the six types of cultural capital described by Yosso (2005). This theme includes details of how the participants felt on campus prior to joining their Black Greek letter fraternity. It will also provide stories about their interactions with the campus community. With the new identity of ‘fraternity member’, the participants will discuss how they feel in regard to their current identity as a Black male student attending a predominantly White institution.

Some of the questions asked in reference to cultural capital, generated responses that related to social capital. The theory of social capital was brought about without the questions I developed, when the participants began to discuss the network of relationships and the facilitation of cooperation between the participants and other members of their respective BGLF. Multiple themes became emerged while discussing social capital, “Tau University versus BGLFs”, “Brotherhood”, “Network/Connections” and “Mentorship”. Tau University versus BGLFs, involved conversation surrounding the culture of Tau and how the university makes it difficult for BGLFs to prosper and provide the necessary resources to its members. Brotherhood was defined as the strong bond established between the participants and their fellow fraternity brothers. This fictive kinship of brotherhood established trust, love, and support amongst the

members of the fraternities, thus creating a network. The network/connections cultivated through fraternal membership assists the participants in many ways, such as contributing to their connection with the university. Mentorship is provided by members of their fraternal organizations or *prophytes*³. The participants referenced how their prophytes helped influence their decision to join a BGLF whether it was literally or subconsciously. These members were people whose values and opinions guided the participants as well as, provided an aspiring structure to follow.

Human capital is closely associated with social capital, referring to such things as assets, knowledge, or skills, learned/gained through fraternal membership that are relevant to societal and economic activity (Schuller, 2001). While posing questions in reference to human capital, the participants provided information, but many of their responses catered to the previous forms of capital. However in the midst of conversation surrounding human capital, the topic of how their BGLF affected the members academically came to light. Participants spoke of how membership in a BGLF has impacted their studies while enrolled at a PWI.

³ Prophyte: A term used to describe an older member of a National Pan-Hellenic Council organization that has inducted new members.

Cultural

A recurring theme that has been attached to education since the civil rights era is this notion of “equal opportunity”. Equal opportunity is this idea of providing all students of color access to the same school opportunities as White students. Opportunities being funding, instruction, curriculum, etc. (Ladson-Billings, 1998). For the Black men participating in this study, “equal” is the opposite of how they felt while attending Tau University. Although considered Black, the participants identified different ethnically and culturally. Ethnically, they were proud about who they were within the Black diaspora. Culturally, they expressed different upbringings which played a factor in how they connected to the institution. The cultural upbringings or norms of Black students differ from their White counterparts at PWIs which can impede on their opportunity to persist. Guiffrida & Douthit (2010) assert, to bridge the gap between the home environment of Black students and the environments at the predominately White institutions they attend, they must have feelings of ethnic identity. The feelings of ethnic identity is closely related to the social integration of Black men at PWIs. Black men who are socially integrated with the campus of a PWI are more likely to have academic success (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). According to Tinto (1993), the social integration of Black students at predominantly White institutions is largely through formal associations with racial/ethnic organizations such as Black Greek letter fraternities.

Social Identity

Social identity is a method used by people to classify themselves and others in society. (Anderson et. el. as cited in Hughey et. el., 2011). The interaction one has with a specific social group can form or re-form how an individual view himself in the world. When beginning this

research, I thought it was important for the participants to identify who they are in society today. The six participants represented different ethnicities across the Black diaspora. They were asked, “Who are you? How do you identify yourself? What year in school are you in and what is your fraternal organization?”:

Terrance: I am Caribbean. My mom is Guyanese and my father is Jamaican. I was born in America so, Caribbean American. I am a sophomore and a proud member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

Denzel: I am an African American male of Nigerian descent, a junior and a member of Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc.

Travis: I am Travis. African American male, Guyanese American a senior and a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

Ivan: I am an African American male, born and raised in Philadelphia. I am a senior and I am an Alpha (Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.)

Quinton: My name is Quinton. I am Jamaican and Haitian. I was born in New York, raised in New Jersey and I’m a Christian. I am a senior and also in Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

Jason: I am a first generation student. I am a Black and Puerto Rican male, a junior and a member of Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc.

Three of the participants identified as Caribbean, African, and African American. All of the participants were proud of their ethnicities and culture. Some of the participants attributed their culture to who they are as an individual:

Quinton: I do come from a family of immigrants. My grandfather, my great grandfather came from Haiti, uh, brought all my family over, um, paid for everyone. So there's definitely the idea that I think there's a lot of, uh, it's the idea of just making sure that you're working hard, make sure that I'm doing what I need to do in school. Um, that's really important. Um, family's really important to me. Hard work, working a lot. Um, man, I think, I think, I feel like I have a lot more similarities than I do differences in a lot of people that are African-American. Like I said, we're all kind of instilled with that. Um, in one way or another.

But when speaking about their experiences at Tau, some realized they were all just Black in eye of their institution:

Travis: I feel like there's a lot more similarities than there are differences for sure to be honest. Cause I mean though, like say for instance, I may be Guyanese American and Ivan is like American American, like that, that doesn't mean that like, uh, the teaching that we grew up with are a lot different. Realistically, the only thing that's really different

is just our culture. Like, and when I say culture, I mean like, like ethnic, our ethnic backgrounds. But I mean other than that, like he had the same kind of upbringings, same lessons that were taught in our homes. Um, our parents want us to strive. So like realistically being, there's no difference here. Like we're all Black in a PWI. We're not having any different, different experiences. Cause at the end of the day, we're seen as Black men doesn't, they don't care about, you know, if, Oh, he's American hope he has Guyanese parents like, no they don't. They just see a Black face.

With the understanding that the institution did not care much about their ethnical differences, came the realization that the same things that made them different, made them close.

Denzel: Uh, I guess like for me, like my experience was they still like made you embrace, like your differences, but they just, it unified it for you to like, so like they, they made you like, you, you were different in your own right. Like we acknowledge that we're different people at us stuff, but at the same time like when we're together, we're all Black. There's no difference with the color of our skin we're all Black, all that culture, all that stuff. Like it's, it's out the window at the end of the day. Like cause we got the same skin color we come from, we, we've been through the same struggles for me. So it's like we identify on like a different level than the whole culture and ethnicity.

Being Black men on the campus of a PWI has been a bit traumatic for the participants because they were unable to connect to or with the university. Most of the participants explained how their ethnicity was not significant in high school because most of the faces looked like them.

Enrolling at Tau, made their ethnical differences more profound in the attempt to connect with campus community. The participants realized there was a scarce amount of Black men on campus and even less of those that shared their ethnic identity. There was a strong desire to fit in at the institution, but it was difficult to do so because they did not feel supported. Strayhorn (2008), asserts that although Black men are unlikely to find supportive relationships outside of their same-race peer groups at PWIs, those relationships are needed for Black men to achieve high levels of satisfaction. When asked about their experience on the campus of Tau University prior to their fraternal membership, participants responded:

Terrance: I want to say it was a little harder fitting in. Um, definitely when I first came to Tau, it was a culture shock, um, going to a predominantly Black school, uh, in East Orange and then transferring into, I mean, I wasn't around White people all the time. Um, but it was definitely a way of adapting. I wanna say, um, you sorta have to, it seemed like I had to become somebody else, um, to fit in I guess. Uh, it was, it was a lot of me finding myself in an environment that I wasn't comfortable in.

Quinton: It's tough being a Black student. Especially cause it's like, you know, you don't necessarily feel like you belong here. It was definitely a culture shock for me. The school is very much bigger. Um, I feel as though I was like misplaced a little bit. Um, I didn't always feel comfortable especially because sometimes I'm walking into some of these classrooms, you know, there's a lot of White faces. Uh, and it, it was just a little bit overwhelming for me. Like this is, this is a real PWI. Like for real, I go in the classroom and there's mad White people. So it's just like, it was an adjustment for me just like

trying to find the resources that are available, trying to find, you know, cause they [Tau University] didn't tell me nothing and I didn't know.

These responses supported Harper (2009) when he stated, "...their individual and collective belongingness at PWIs is threatened by the constant reinforcement of racist stereotypes that stigmatize them as dumb jocks, Black male criminals from the local community who do not belong on campus...underprepared 'at-risk' student who all emerged from low-income families and urban ghettos" (p. 700). Travis felt differently when speaking about his experience on campus prior to his fraternal membership. When asked how he felt about attending a PWI and how that affected his social integration, Travis replied:

Um, I mean I didn't have a problem with it, like why would I, but it's just like I've never been exposed to that many people that don't look like me and it wasn't an issue. It's just like weird and I mean, they [White students] didn't give me like hell or nothing like that. Everybody was mad, cool, mad, chill. Like there was never really any issues there. Like never any like weird moments or like, oh damn, like he's being racist or something.

Unlike the other participants in this study, Travis was fortunate be connected to the Educational Opportunity Fund Program (EOF) at Tau University. The EOF program was established in 1968 by the New Jersey State Legislature. It is a state funded program that provides assistance and support services to students from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds with desire to attend higher education institutions. The EOF program has grown to serve over 50 higher education institutions in New Jersey, including Tau

University (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, n.d.). EOF allowed Travis to not only become connected with other students of color at Tau, but also connected with the campus resources. The other participants however, had a strong desire to be connected with the Black community on campus but did not know how to go about doing so. When asked about his experience on campus prior to his BGLF membership, Ivan responded:

Um, so prior to joining it was somewhat lonely or hard to find the Black community. Um, so I did a lot of things on my own, like went to go play basketball a lot and I just go by myself cause I didn't know, no one who played. Um, I honestly really didn't start to make friends until I went to my first interest meeting for Alpha.

The participants were used to having school peers of similar ethnic and social characteristics as them. The values and norms were relatable because many of the students were raised in the same low socioeconomic communities. In these communities, there are cultural norms instilled in them that are considered inferior, deviant and self-destructive by the White majority of higher education (Rendon et al, 2000). Bourdieu (1986) refers to cultural capital as cultural codes and practices that are transmitted to children from their parents. The majority of my participants are considered first generation college students, meaning there was not much their parents could provide them in regard to higher education making them “inferior” to their White counterparts.

Forms of Cultural Capital

For individuals who identify with the same cultural group or community, culture shapes their behavior, attitude, and perception of the world (Adler, 2001). Cultural things such as customs, values, or beliefs are passed from one generation to the next (Parillo, 2003). The behaviors and perceptions of that group, more specifically communities of color, are with the students when they enroll at predominantly White institutions. There are at least six forms of cultural capital that are generated in communities of color—familial, aspirational, social, resistance, navigational, and linguistic (Yosso, 2005). Each form builds upon one another to create a community of cultural wealth. The idea behind cultivating cultural wealth is to transform education and empower “...People of color to utilize assets already abundant in their communities.” (Yosso, 2005, p. 82). The cultural capital within the communities of BGLFs are a means of establishing cultural wealth. Cultural wealth is used by Black Greek letter fraternities as a resource to produce social mobility. During my research, four of the six forms of cultural capital presented by Yosso appeared while interviewing my participants. It was evident that familial, aspirational, social, and resistance capital was transferred to the participants by their Black Greek letter fraternity.

Two of the participants admitted to having very little knowledge about Black Greek letter fraternities before entering college. They were aware of people in their lives that were members of these prestigious organizations but not enough for them to make serious inquiries or know how exactly membership could affect their lives.

Me: What knowledge did you have about BGLFs prior to membership?

Jason: Coming to college, I had no fraternity education knowledge about anything, right. I didn't even know why these guys were wearing the same colored hoodies. I'm like, that's kinda corny (laughs). You know, everybody's wearing the same colors, like what's going on?

Denzel: So I had zero knowledge. Uh, I actually crazy cause um, one of my friends I went to school with in high school, uh, he actually came to Tau and I was walking to the bus stop. I remember this, this was like before, uh, our founders day. It was like during our founders week, um, 20 it was fall 2015 walk to the bus stop, my friend was at the bus stop, ran into him, said what's up chopped it up a little bit, and he handed me the flyer and stuff like that. And I asked him like what is this? And he told me about it and like how was sort of like gave him a lot of connections and how like he was able to meet a lot of people and sort of elevate himself career-wise. And that's something that I've always been like sorta like drawn to.

Familial Capital

Other participants were very knowledgeable about BGLFs prior to college due to members of their family who had BGLF affiliations. Familial capital refers to cultural knowledge "...nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition." (Yosso, 2005, p 79). In the case of BGLFs, this knowledge is transferred to members so they understand the importance of creating and maintaining healthy connections to a community and its resources:

Quinton: I have Greeks that are in my family. Um, I have an uncle that's an Alpha and I have an uncle that is a Sigma. Um, I don't talk to that uncle that's Alpha. He's on the other side of the so family when we talk like that, you know, but I have my uncle, that's the Sigma. Um, so it was more so of, I appreciate the fact that he crossed down with 20, maybe 21 years now and he still talks to his line brothers⁴, still talks to the chapter, is still involved with his chapter. I thought that shit was dope. I thought that it was cool that you could still be a part of something and even after college then it's like, you know, you still passionate about something like that. I mean, you know sometimes if the people that are in an org, of course it plays a part, you know. Because you know, it's more so, well, I think it is a bond that you build. Like I feel that there's another bond when I with my uncle not only being his nephew, but his fraternity brothers. That played a part in my decision.

Travis: Like I didn't know shit about like D9 organizations. I just knew my aunt was in a sorority, that was it. Um, so when I came here, her influence wasn't like the influence is this is what influenced me to choose the organization that I'm in now. But it did play a big part in me saying, okay, this is the realm in which I need to be.

Quinton and Travis both were able to have Greek exposure before entering college. In many cases that can be major contributor to why a person may choose the fraternal organization they are a member of. This is an example of funds of knowledge being within a household. However,

⁴ Line Brother: the men that you go through the process of pledging with, are referred to as your Line Brothers, or LB

there are also individuals who may be just as important in an individual's life and their decision to choose an organization but may not be family. Moll et. al., states, "When funds of knowledge are not readily available within households, relationships with individuals outside the households are activated to meet either household or individual needs." (1992, p. 134).

Ivan: So, um, I feel like it doesn't necessarily have to be family. Like I'm the first person in my family to go to college. So obviously there's no one who's Greek. So I would say definitely not. It don't necessarily have to be a family member, but if you have someone in your life that has a positive impact and then you find out like, "Oh, you're a Greek" and like they shed light on their Greek experience, then I feel like that's gonna uh, encourage you to also maybe not necessarily join that same org but at least look into other orgs. I didn't know anything about Greek life till I got to high school. I was in a band, my band director was an Alpha, um, I still talk to him to this day. I'm very close with his son. His son's now an Alpha at Tuskegee. Um, talked to him very often. Um, but it was just the type of character that he displayed and like, I just wanted to be like him. Like he was just a clear cut role model and he always repped out, fully talked about it his fraternity, heavy.

Terrance: I didn't have like anybody in my family that was, uh, Greek life, but I had like people growing up with me, um, like mentors in my life that were Greek. Uh, so that like, I mean, coming to college I want to say I really didn't care about Greek life. Like it wasn't something I really wanted to do. Uh, but like I want to say like getting into like my

second day I met one of the brothers of my chapter on the yard⁵ and they um, basically like took me under his wing and like showed me, you know, like what Black Tau is. He kinda liked, you know, showed me all the Black events, like where to find Black people actually. Um, and like he kinda like took me under his wing and like just, you know, made me, made me feel safe on campus. I want to say he showed me somewhere, I can go to be myself.

Denzel: So like, just coming in, I ain't know nothing. I didn't know nothing about Greek life. Like, um, I came to college, no knowledge, no interest, nothing like that. And so like one of my friends that I went to school with, he sort of told me a little bit about it and like the stuff that he did for him and stuff like that. And I was interested, I started hanging around them more. He was telling me more about it. I started to learn more. He introduced me to other people and just like the way that they carried themselves and spoken how like they just to views on certain aspects like drew me in. And like for me I saw this as like an opportunity, as like a stepping stone to sort of further myself. The only thing I had in mind when joining this frat was, "How else can I elevate myself?" Like, "What connections can I make to sort of, uh, get to a better position than I am now?"

Travis: my Dean was actually the first Alpha that I met here at Tau and like he's the reason why I even like started hanging around like more Black people here at Tau. Cause I didn't know nobody, I didn't like know where to go and where all the Black people was

⁵ Yard: A term used by NPHC groups to indicate the campus. Used in phrases such as which groups are on the yard, meaning which groups are on the campus

out until he introduced me to all of that. And then like coming into the fraternity, like I didn't chase it for like the people, like I wondered what I'd be getting out of it? Like I just seen success.

Quinton shared how his uncle was a Sigma and thanks to him, he was introduced to the Sigma Beta Club of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. The Sigma Beta Club is the first fraternal youth auxiliary group established with the interest of fostering the development of youth into effective leaders (Sigma Beta Club, 2015). The Sigma Beta Club gave Quinton exposure to fraternities and allowed him to establish relationships with members of the organization:

The Sigma Beta Club gave me an opportunity to really bond with the bros and really see like, you know, we, we, we would talk about different things and I will always pick their brains and I could always tell they were very intellectual people and we could have intellectual conversation. And it also made me feel a bond with the other Sigma Beta Club members that were there. Um, because, you know, we're actually doing legit things that you would do in a chapter, although we didn't know it. Um, you know, and we went out and it was a balance that also came with, you know, we'd go out and party with them, but at the same time we also go out and we make sure we're doing the community service, make sure we're doing the programs. And stuff like that. Um, it really just brought a sense of this is where I want to be at, you know, if this is, this is what they are about, this is where I want to be, this is how, you know, they think, you know, this is where I want to be at. Like that, that, that the mindset, I appreciated it. So it was like more so a definitely built a connectedness towards, uh, for me.

Fraternal youth auxiliary groups like the Sigma Beta Club enables fraternal members to exemplify values, leadership skills, educational attainment, social and cultural awareness to male youth (Ross, 2000). Affiliations with fraternal youth auxiliary groups help those preparing for college understand the trouble that may lie ahead depending on whether they enroll at an Historically Black College or University (HBCU) or a predominantly White institution.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital refers to "...the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers..." (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). The real and perceived barriers for Black men at PWIs are the oppressive structures of the institutions, so there is a strong urge to become connected with others who understand the Black man's plight while attempting to obtain an education. A theme that arose during our conversation which was completely unexpected, was accountability. As the participants conversed about the questions that were posed to them in reference to their BGLFs, without actually saying the word they shared how the brothers within their fraternity held them accountable. Accountable for not only their academics, but also their actions. Peer accountability is reinforced through BGLFs because the fraternal members are expected to uphold the ideals and values of their organization (Ray & Rosow, 2012). As prophytes become more knowledge and experienced it is the expectation of BGLFs that they pass this information to the neophytes, holding them accountable to the standards of their fraternal organization:

Ivan: I feel like I know that I'm going to get to where I need to go because you know, people that have had the same story that I've had going into Tau who was there 20 years ago or was there 30 years ago, they had the same story that I had and were still able to get to where they needed to go. Um, I think, I think their approach has really encouraged me to chase whatever dream that I want to chase. I think that they definitely keep me accountable so I get where I need to go and where I want to be.

Terrance: I agree, because I appreciate if you see that the people that are ahead of you [prophytes], they give you the advice on where they messed up, where you could go wrong, where you could go right. And you kind of take that in into your next step. So it was more so looking at some of the stuff that they were doing and trying to make sure that I can elevate myself, but also make sure that I give back the same to the bros that are underneath me [neophytes].

Denzel: they [BGLF] made sure that I was on my P's and Q's. If you was lacking they'll get at you for that. But they'll also help you. Like we had people for everything there was someone to check papers, those someone to help you write papers. It was someone that would tutor you in math, science. We had people in different subjects that you can go to help better yourself. So you had that resource to always keep your grades in top shape. And if your grades were like lacking, like they would exclude us from certain activities. So it wasn't like "aw you're good? Like come, come chill with us", like nah, like you, you have to get right, you got to study. They will force people into a library like "Yo,

come to the library with me, let's get this work done” stuff like that. So it was always like, always made sure you were on your toes, getting work done and shit like that.

Travis: yea like the encouragement they put on me or the advice. Like they pushed me as well. “What are you doing now? How's this going? What happened with this? Why you fold on that?” Like even today they keep me in line to a point to where it's like, if I fail this is really because I don't give a fuck.

Quinton: For real, you have someone there to talk to or confide in if, if really need be, um, someone there to give you advice. Um, and not just to someone there to help you get ahead but someone that is going to help me in aid me in my future because they want to see me succeed, um, and uplift me.

The participants praised their BGLFs for helping them foster things within themselves they had not noticed. Referring to the attributes the participants feel they acquired or learned from the prophytes within their BGLF. Their BGLF has either strengthened skills they previously had or facilitated in the growth of new skills. While interviewing the participants, the words confidence & leadership were constantly spoken of as attributes they gained from their fraternal organizations. Some of the participants stated that prior to joining their BGLF they would have never considered themselves a leader. Their BGLF affiliation assisted in the development of leadership skills that has now become a part of their daily lives and routines. Being a Greek can increase a students’ motivation, performance, and leadership development.

When I asked, “How has membership in a BGLF contributed to you as a Black male?” some of the participants responded:

Ivan: Definitely more confident, more outspoken. Mmm I also don't know what type of man a person I would be today without it [fraternity] as well, because I could say I was always, I guess somewhat fairly confident. Um, but now like I'm just super confident, like I can go in any room and talk to anybody, no fear, no hesitation. Like I don't get butterflies or anything like that. Like I'm confident in who I am as a person and as a man and I have to attribute some of that to alpha.

Terrance: I feel like I would have, I would have not maybe known as much about myself that I do now. Um, I learned a lot about myself after joining this fraternity. Uh, as in I'm stronger than I ever thought it was. I'm smarter than I ever thought I was. Um, and I, you know, I just got, I gained a lot more confidence in myself and I feel like I learned a lot by myself more in the time that I would, in that time of joining my frat then I would in the four years a lot of, to me with the college, if that makes sense. Uh, the fraternity really allowed me to like gain, some confidence on my Black culture. Uh, and I, it's, it's just a confidence thing with me, um, to walk around a PWI as a Black man.

Denzel: I had confidence, but it wasn't this personified, like my confidence is very high.

Jason: Uh, the fraternity really allowed me to get like gain, some confidence on my Black culture. Uh, and I, it's, it's just a confidence thing with me, um, to walk around a

PWI as a Black man. Um, it's kind of iffy sometimes, but I mean the fraternity really allowed me to become who I am today.

As a result of their BGLF affiliation, most members have been exposed to various leadership roles within their collegiate environment (Patton et al., (2011). In comparison to their same race, those who are affiliated in BGLFs are more likely to hold more campus leadership positions in comparison to their non-Greek peers. BGLFs were created to provide leadership for the African American race while also incorporating aspects of cultural heritage and racial identification (McClure, 2006). Through the BGLF experience, "...students learn how to lead by following the excellent role models found within their chapters..." (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998, p. 97). Like some of the participants in this study, BGLF members are recruited by older members who recognize their potential leadership capabilities. In return, they later pursue and accept various leadership positions to "...repay their debt to those who had earlier encouraged them to devote their time to positive experiences and become good citizens in the campus communities." (Harper, 2005, p. 10). Like most organizations, undergraduate fraternities consist of executive boards and executive board positions—President, Vice-President, Secretary, & Treasurer. These positions are held by active undergraduate members. While other racially centered organizations exist on the campuses of PWIs, the affiliation with BGLFs tends to be the most popular source to inspire Black students to become leaders (Patton et. al., 2011). The confidence earned through BGLFs allows members to step out of their 'comfort zone' and attempt to place themselves in positions they previously may not have. Ivan stated:

Ivan: Mmm I feel like, I don't know if I've always been a leader per se, like in high school or before. I feel like I may have been unconsciously, but I feel like alpha has made me conscious of the fact that I am a leader.

Black men having leadership positions are considered assets at predominantly White institutions. Their leadership roles gives them a platform and a voice on campus. With this platform they are able to address the issues that plague Black students at PWIs (Harper, 2005). In a study conducted by Sutton & Terrell (1997), they found that Black men who are leaders in their fraternities also perceive themselves as leaders among the Black student population of their institution. This can foster contact and sometimes relationships with administrators and college/university officials. If Black male students perceive that their leadership is valued by the larger campus community, "...many will choose to participate as leaders outside their traditional ethnic organizations." (Sutton & Terrell, 1997, p. 62).

Terrance: My fraternity has made me aware of a lot more things. Um, like before I want to say politics didn't interest me as much. I don't want to say I didn't care about the election, but I wouldn't like sit there and watch the news or wonder who's doing good in the polls. But with the fraternity and, um, a whole bunch of different people, have different interests and they share those interests, uh, which you sometimes adopt, and their interests become your interests. So I guess, I guess as a Black man, I'm learning a lot about our culture and the more I learn, the more I want to fight for it.

According to Schuh and Lavery (1983), BGLFs prepare its members for the realities of civil, political, and social life following graduation. It can also plant the seeds of future political

participation, setting children on a path toward social connectedness and civic involvement rather than isolation and disengagement (Putnam, 1993).

Although there was a major emphasis on confidence and leadership, some of the participants did share other things they attributed to their fraternal membership:

Quinton: The first thing that comes to my brain is, is accountability. Just really holding me to a standard of the man that always wanted to be the man. Now I'm trying to make an impact on younger members using the same tools that developed who I am.

Jason: Biggest thing I would say is speaking, articulating myself and also um, just having a clear picture and knowing the bigger picture as to what's going on? Why you're doing what you're? And what you're doing it for? Cause it can get lost.

Travis: I feel like it definitely prepared me for real life and knowing that I have to keep myself to a certain standard allows me to like keep up with the White people (laughs). To be honest. I gotta uphold myself to a certain standard and carry myself a certain way. It's just like these things that gets drilled into your head in a sense. So I feel like being, being a member definitely like prepared me for like real life experience for real.

The attributes obtained through fraternal membership can vary depending on the member. Some may pick up skills that are necessary to their academic advancement, whereas others may receive characteristics that are conducive to their growth as a man. Both are important to the collegiate experience of Black men enrolled at predominantly White institutions. Black men's involvement

in Black Greek letter fraternities can be closely related to their persistence, degree attainment, and the formation of lasting networks. (Simmons, 2013).

Social Capital

At many predominantly White institutions, Black Greek letter fraternities are the only connection between Black students and the institution. McClure states, “As a voluntary association, the fraternity not only connects its members to the campus and to Black history, but also functions in the creation and maintenance of social networks that connect members to each other and to society.” (2006, p. 1041). The responses of my participants corroborate McClure’s findings. In the words of Ivan:

You can say that Black Greeks are ultimately responsible for the Black culture at Tau University.

Black students enter the doors of predominantly White institutions trying to ‘find their way’. They attempt to understand who they are in a new space and who they are as an individual. Black students quickly feel disassociated from the new environment, trying to figure out how to navigate a new and unfamiliar space with the cultural capital they bring from home (Harper, 2009). BGLFs function as intermediate associations with the intent of connecting Black students to a group that can help diminish the feelings of isolation, by linking their members to the university, the Black community and the greater society (McClure, 2006). While asking questions about their experience as Black males on the campus of a PWI, there was a constant theme surrounding Blackness that emerged. The participants discussed how the additional layer of becoming a member of a BGLF illuminated their identity as a Black man:

Ivan: It's like almost sort of like having a, a triple consciousness. You know, how Black people, we have a double consciousness. Like I'm here, I'm a person, but I'm also Black. But now it's like, but I'm also an alpha as well. It's like an extension. Like I, I unconsciously know it and I unconsciously make decisions based upon that. Um, I feel like it's inspired me.

Travis: ...it's just like being in my org helped me like blend into America. Like it didn't make me blend into like what American society “wants” me to be or how I “should” be or like that kind of image of how I “should” paint yourself. Like, it helped me realize I can be Guyanese, but like I'm also an American.

Quinton: I've been able to understand my own Blackness and also understand other people, other people's ideas and revelations of like who they are as well. And I'm done. It's made me more woke and aware of the world that I live in. Like I can't just live in a world where my eyes are just closed.

Some of the participants admitted to not having a connection to any other ethnicity affiliated with the Black diaspora other than their own. In high school, there was no need to ever address their ethnicity because all of their peers shared the same culture. While enrolled at a PWI, they begin to realize the ethnical differences between themselves and others, but also how irrelevant those differences were at Tau University. Denzel stated:

Denzel: I grew up in like a Nigerian household. So I mean it's sad to say, but Nigerians. A lot Africans, like to sort of like separate themselves from the idea of Black people or the idea that America has about Black people. So I wasn't really like on that side much [African Americans], but joining this fraternity. I got to see that side, I got to really appreciate that side and realize that we're not, that there's no difference. Like we're all the same people when it comes to like the certain values and things. How we look after each other. Um, our history, uh, leaving Africa coming on the ships. Like we still, we still the same people. It's sad to say but it sort of pushed me away from White people I guess. Like cause they did some crazy shit. Um, and jail and just like seeing how they're constantly trying to break down a Black community. It definitely like strengthens your values and just how like you are around other people of your color. Like back then like if I saw like, uh, some persons do some ghetto, shit I'd be like, wow, look at that shit. Like, but like now I'm less judgmental, more like, damn, how can I help this person? I'm like, how can I strengthen this person? How can I strengthen my community in a way?

Resistant Capital

Black men who join Black Greek letter fraternities develop a greater sense of their racial identity (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995). It is also notable that BGLFs retain "...traditions of the African American community and serve as an oppositional space of resistance against oppressive social systems, such as those imposed by race, class, and gender." (Patton et. al., 2011, p. 116). BGLFs are shielding their members from the oppressive behaviors of predominantly White institutions, while giving them the tools to uplift their community and expanding their cultural capital:

Quinton: I'm really big on trying to keep unity in the Black community because I feel like at any day, like if we're not fighting for each other, no one else is, you know?

Terrance: I feel like, when I first got the Tau, I felt like I had to change my identity to fit in with the predominantly White, uh, community. But now I feel, I feel like it's just, you take it as, as I am, you know, like I, I am who I am and I will continue to be who I am. I don't have to put on like a fake appearance around you to, to make you happy or make you comfortable. Instead, you should adapt to who I am and accept me for who I am at. That makes sense.

Black Greek letter fraternities strengthen the knowledge Black men regarding Black history. Empowering its members to become advocates for the Black community and increasing their self-esteem. Terrance stated:

Terrance: I feel like I would have, I would have not maybe know as much about myself that I do now. Um, I learned a lot about myself after joining this fraternity. Uh, as in I'm stronger than I ever thought it was. I'm smarter than I ever thought I was. Um, and I, you know, I just got, I gained a lot more confidence in myself and I feel like I learned a lot by myself more in the time that I would, in that time of joining my frat then I would in the four years a lot of, to me with the college, if that makes sense.

Conversation about the oppressive practices at participants' institution led to us discussing what the Greek life was like currently on their campus. Black Greek letter fraternities are having a difficulty remaining on the campuses of predominantly White institutions. Greek letter organizations are required to have a certain amount of active members for the organization to remain in good standing on campus (Ross, 2000). Barriers created by the institution are preventing BGLFs from hosting programs and event which can potentially recruit new members. The participants provided their thoughts on the matter expressing how the exclusive practices of the university are actually promoting camaraderie amongst the BGLFs on campus.

Travis: I came, I came to realize that there's already a fight that's already being put on you and it's, is the system is set up for you to be fighting each other. You know what I'm saying?

Denzel: Yea, I just feel like Tau, is trying to get rid of Black Greeks.

Travis: Like literally trying to get rid of the Black Greek life.

Terrance: I feel like because of that though, it's bringing us all together more.

Denzel: they're really systematically breaking down Black fraternities and by making sure the events are less and less. Like there's so many restrictions when it comes to even trying to get an event going any it can, it doesn't even have to be like a party. It can be like an educational event. Like you have to like go through so many hoops and hurdles.

Like I feel like because of that because like there's this entity that's trying to take us down. So yea like we have all gotten closer [BGLFs].

Ivan: Definitely the lack of events, which is not necessarily our fault. It's their fault. The university fault. When you're not throwing events, fun events, social events, academic, whatever then you can't do shit. Cause no matter how you look at it you can't deny the fraternities decide how the campus is going to be in terms of a littness for lack of a better word. You know? And if we can't do anything then you get this.

Denzel: I also feel like the other problem is the suspensions. I think all of our orgs are on some type of suspension right now, which is crazy. Uh, why are the only three D9 orgs on suspension? Like for what? So, but because of that suspension, like, um, you know, from the door you can't throw events every once in a while, you can't throw events for the AR [Annual Report] and shit. You can't do the AR. So you get on another suspension. We finally just hit the last suspension and we're meeting all requirements. So hopefully next semester for the first time in three years we won't bon on suspension and to tell me it took three years because of some bullshit.

Quinton: And the emails, yo, like the memo is basically saying "Get the fuck out". But it's like they say it nicely like, and I feel that, you know, it's like you have that love for your chapter. You want your chapter to still stay alive and you and you want, you know, the lessons that you was taught, you want someone else to get those lessons too, you

know? And it definitely makes you want to come together to save what you work so hard for, you know?

The responses by the participants emphasizes how BGLFs try to establish spaces for Black men to develop connections, solidarity and increase their sense of belonging on the campus of a PWI (Guiffida, 2003). One of the notable topics brought forth by the participants was not feeling connected to the university they attend prior to their fraternal membership and how that affected their social integration and academic performance. Cultural capital is considered "...external wealth converted into integral part of the person, into habitus..." (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 4). Habitus is intended to shape an individual's way of thinking about the social world. The vast cultural capital inherited by members of BGLFs contributes to their connection to PWIs, not only improving their academic ability, but also altering how they view themselves at the institution.

Social

This section focuses on whether and how Black Greek letter fraternity membership contributed to the social capital of the participants. Each of the participants provided specific details on how their organization contributed to their social capital. As the participants delved into the theory of social capital, I noticed there were three overarching themes, brotherhood, network/connections and mentorship. These themes seemed to be three of the greatest benefits to joining a BGLF according to the participants.

Some of the participants joined their organization knowing they would be obtaining fraternal brothers, but they did not truly understand what was meant by brotherhood. Participants spoke about how gracious they were to have obtained this newfound brotherhood through their fraternal fictive kinship. Others like Jason however, had his reservation about the idea of brotherhood and what it should be versus what it actually was from his perspective.

The network/connections the participants received from their BGLF was a major tool for their success. Participants voiced the benefits of now having an expansive network due to their fraternal membership. This network created professional and personal opportunities the participants would have never been able to experience without their association with a BGLF.

All of the participants expressed how mentorship was something that they least expected but truly appreciated. This section examines how previously established relationships naturally evolved into mentoring. Their organization not only provided them mentors but prepared them to become mentors themselves. As the participants became more engulfed in their fraternal organizations, they began to realize the importance of mentorship and how pivotal it is to their growth and wellbeing.

Tau University versus BGLFs

The participants in my study spoke about wanting to feel as though they belonged to Tau University and no longer wanting to be isolated, so seeking membership in a BGLF seemed like a great decision. BGLFs are considered a mechanism for social integration. McClure states “BGO membership functions as an intermediate association linking its members to the university, to the larger Black community, and to society in general, serving to connect them to a

group and lower their perception of isolation”. (2006, p. 1041). It was very interesting to hear how as much praise the participants gave BGLFs for helping them connect with the campus community, they all expressed how Tau is not supportive of these organizations. There were statements made that would suggest Tau would prefer for BGLFs not to exist on campus. The culture of Tau made it difficult for BGLFs to prosper and provide the necessary resources for the members of BGLFs. The participants alluded to Tau working against the organizations that were crucial to Black males succeeding academically on campus. When asked about the culture of Tau in relation to BGLFs participants responded:

Ivan: Uh, so I mean I feel like it's almost like being a politician. Like you gotta have everyone, like you, you can never do anything wrong. I mean, you have a lot of pressure on your shoulders. Everything you do is scrutinized. People [Tau administration] are looking down to see you mess up.

Denzel: Tau needs to stop playing and trying to get fraternities off the campus. I think that they're really, really, really doing the best to eradicate Black fraternities at the campus. It would just kind of ridiculous to me because a lot of the White fraternities on the campus people actually died. Um, they do a lot of crazy shit, less for the community....why would you, I don't understand. Why would you try to get rid of a group of people that was actually like actively working, doing the events that benefit the community, not just the Black community, but like other communities as well. Like not

like all these D9 [Divine Nine]⁶ fraternities, the ones that are on this campus, they do financial events, events on how to, uh, set up, uh, your resume, your financial aid, uh, events on important topics going on within the Black community. There's so many beneficial things going on with this. I wouldn't really see why...it's, it's like they literally hunting us.

Unlike White fraternities, BGLFs are faced with institutional obstacles that jeopardize there's existence on campus. PWIs challenge BGLFs to have specific chapter size requirements, unrealistic campus obligations, grade point average requirements for membership, all of which can lead to the suspension of fraternity chapters (Ray & Rosow, 2010). White fraternities have the benefit of having campus housing which allows them to self-segregate and have programs without the surveillance of administration. BGLFs however, have to rely on university venues for programming keeping everything they do in public view. According to Ray & Rosow, "This leads to them coming in contact with administrators, being held accountable to university officials, and surveilled more than White fraternity men." (2012, p. 71).

Jason: At Tau I just feel like the administration don't want us here. You know, there's always like a, there's always like a, there's always like obstacles that have to be overcome for some reason.

⁶ Divine Nine: or D9 The sororities and fraternities that compose the National Pan-Hellenic Council:

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity,

Quinton: I feel like the culture of Tau is very like stringent on you I guess, they want, they want you to be controlled. I feel like, you know, um, I just feel like in terms of when you, when I look at it from maybe like, you know, a Black fraternity versus maybe like a White fraternity and the leeway they have versus us is not the same. Um, and you could just, you could just feel it sometimes when they send those emails, like how they write to you, like the certain key words they use. Like it just feels as though they don't want you necessarily to be here.

Given the accounts of the participants, it was obvious they felt the institution they attend does not support BGLFs. It can also be said that their PWI would much rather not have BGLFs on campus considering the obstacles the participants have to endure to remain existent.

Brotherhood

Most members of fraternal organizations would agree that brotherhood is one of the essential pillars of fraternity life. Brotherhood is what binds the members of the organization together and allows them to strive toward greater goals (Ross, 2000). When becoming members of their organization there is an understanding that the members are bound by the ideals⁷ of their respective fraternal organization, creating a brotherhood that can never be broken, hence the term 'frat brother'⁸ (Harper & Harris, 2006). Although this brotherhood may not be biological, it is upheld to those same standards if not more due to the ideals. The participants provided details during their interviews that correlate to previous research surrounding BGLFs and brotherhood.

⁷ Ideals: Standard or principles of fraternity.

⁸ Frat Brother: A term of camaraderie used to identify the brother-like relationship between college males who have become members of the same fraternity

When asked, “What are the ideals and purpose of your fraternal organization?”, the participants responded:

Denzel/Jason: Building a tradition, not resting upon one; the development and perpetuation of scholarship, leadership, citizenship, fidelity, and brotherhood among men.

Quinton/Terrance: Culture for service and service for humanity; promoting brotherhood, scholarship and service.

Ivan/Travis: Manly deeds, scholarship, and love for all mankind; promoting brotherhood and academic excellence, while providing service and advocacy for our communities

After the participants shared the ideals of their BGLFs, I noticed that although each of these BGLFs are different in their own way, there was one recurring theme. I followed up with the question, “What is the one thing it seems all of your organizations have in common?” and the reply I received was:

All Participants: Brotherhood!

The brotherhood amongst fraternity members is rooted in fictive kinship. Fictive kinship as defined by Harris & Marsh is a, “...connection between a group of people within a given society, not related by blood or marriage but who maintain a sense of peoplehood or collective social identity resulting from their similar social, political, and economic status” (2010, p. 1244). For Ivan, joining their BGLF was the first time he actually experienced brotherhood. This idea

of brotherhood was new in the sense that he have never had men in his life that catered to him in this capacity and to him that relationship was most beneficial. When asked, “What do you attribute most to your BGLF?” Ivan replied:

Ivan: I feel like as cliché or basic as its answer is just brotherhood. Um, I’m an only child. Uh, I have two half-sisters, but we are not close at all. Um, also I’m the youngest cousin. All my cousins were older. I felt like I was alone a lot so really just the brotherhood. I mean, I really have people who like, I really have a friend group, not even family, well family you could say, but that I could just call at any point at any time of any day and they will answer it and they will help. Mmm. Personally, that means a lot to me and I do the same vice versa. Um, and also people that care about you, you know, they check up on you when they haven’t heard from you in a while. Uh, make sure you’re doing well in school, don’t miss happy birthday. Like just the basic things that I feel like every human wants, you know?

Other participants embraced this newfound brotherhood because they knew it would come with the fraternal membership. The brotherhood was something that they wanted and expected:

Quinton: Um, when I chose my organization, they made me feel like a bro from the minute that I even was talking to them. Like even just casual, like it wasn’t even like anything that was made up or fostered, like it was something. Whereas, you know, we casually know hanging out, playing ball and that’s all you really want. And I felt like a guidance of them really being like on like my big brother because it was like, it felt like,

you know, they were looking out for me, they were asking questions like what do you want? Where do you see yourself? You know? And it was like, well, we can have casual conversation and kind of just vibe, you know? I appreciated that. Like there has been days where I've been hungry, I haven't had no food. And then somebody came and grabbed me and used their swipe in the dining hall or something like that. Even something that small, just making sure that I'm good, that someone was looking out for me. So, you know, in my decision it was really more so how I'm treated and how I felt like, how I felt like I would fit in.

Denzel: Like I knew this is what it was like, so I knew this was the place for me. Like the brotherhood, values, how they sort of like uplifted each other, held the standards for everything. The brotherhood is something I could've never imagined. It has opened up so many doors for me.

Terrance: Um, the brotherhood was important to me. There was a lot of motivation. Uh, when I first got here and just talked to the brothers about like me having culture shock. There was a lot of them taking me under their wing, uh, showing me around Tau, making me feel comfortable. It made me happy to be here, knowing that there's a community for me, um, a community that will accept me for who I truly am and not putting on like a facade. Uh, I'm able to go to bros and ask for help if I ever need it. We do like study sessions now, um, where we all pick a day out of the week and we sit down and we study together, knock out homework together to make sure everybody's, uh, up to task. So, I mean, it's just been a community that just promotes and keeps each other in check and I

know if I ever wanted to talk to somebody, they're always a brother available to talk and to give advice.

The support, motivation, encouragement, and love some of the participants felt from the brothers within their fraternities, contributed to their well-being on campus:

Ivan: I feel like even though we are leaders in our own, in our own way, like when we together [fraternity brothers], it's like one entity. We think alike and we might act the same.

Quinton: Like you just said, it's like that saying of likeminded men you feel me? Like yeah we're all different individuals at the end of the day but we're all together, we're all coming together based off the same foundation so we're going to do the same shit. We're going to act the same way. And that's probably like one of the greatest things about being in a fraternity.

This fictive kinship facilitates a bond with other Black men to ensure their well-being, improve their connection with the community, and assist with the enhancement of knowledge (Patton, 2011). Knowledge in the case of Black Greek letter fraternities can also be considered capital. Brotherhood enables the development of capital through support, guidance and a form of survival for members of BGLFs. Through the brotherhood of fraternal organizations, people can, "...define who they are, accepting or rejecting the social labels that groups or society places

on them.” (Anderson et. al., as cited in Hughey et. al., 2011, p. 113). For many, membership through this fictive kinship of brotherhood can affirm or re-affirm their social identity.

There are many stigmas amongst BGLFs. One of the most common being homosexuality and how it does not fit into the norms and traditions of BGLFs. Being labeled gay is opposed by the heterosexual norms of BGLFs. “The homophobia exhibited in the African American communities is replicated and intensified inside Black fraternal organization since these institutions are reshaped and recreated by members who embody and live the cultural values and norms of the community in which they exist.” (Anderson et. al., as cited in Hughey et. al., 2011, p. 117). During my study some of the participants shared the same positive thoughts about brotherhood. However, there was evidence that supported the findings in previous research about the hypermasculine traditions of BGLFs. While speaking about brotherhood, Jason shared:

Although fraternities were created to promote social uplift and brotherhood, there are many within the community who do not feel included due to their sexual orientation. There are members within BGLFs that are of the LGBTQ community and they thought joining a fraternity would allow them to be their “true selves”. However, joining their fraternity made them feel even more ostracized. There are members of my fraternity who are no longer active or participating in campus engaged projects because other members of our frat made them feel like they didn’t belong.

Kimbrough (2003) speaks about the strong heterosexual structure of the Black Greek system, and how it along with the homophobia of Black America creates a very negative

dynamic in the Black Greek community. Historically, fraternities have upheld a Eurocentric notion of manhood and the endorsement of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity promotes homophobia, devaluing femininity, increasing masculine bravado, and claiming masculine space within spaces deemed feminine or feminized (Dancy II, 2011). Members of the LGBTQ community are reluctant to be themselves and expose their sexual orientation out of fear.

Travis' interpretation of brotherhood in relation to his fraternity was not congruent with the definition of the word. He expressed how his initial thought of what the brotherhood would be like, was opposite of the what he received. He expected a full embracement by a group that would take people as they are and that is not what he was subjected to.

Travis: It's like there were, was supposed to be fraternal brothers, but we're not, you know, like they, they fake the part, they act apart, but they don't mean it. That's, that's what I'm trying to say. Okay. That like you say where we're brothers, but you don't mean that like you just, you say it because it's what you think you're supposed to say. Like, I don't know, energy is just weird.

Me: What exactly do you mean by the energy being "weird energy"?

Travis: It's like we're brothers but we're not really brothers, you know what I mean? Like, okay. Like, cause when I say like I'm your brother, like I mean that in every sense of the word. Like we may not be blood, but like, you know, if this is supposed to be a fraternity, like the way everybody is making it seem, then I got you. You feel me? Like

you know your family. Like you can stay with me if you need somewhere to stay or if you really need some. I got you. You know, like that kind of energy. I'm supposed to be your frat bro, but if you really want to know, you would take time to get to know me.

Black males join fraternal organizations with the intention of having a place of refuge, a place where they can be unapologetically proud of who they are. However, for some the norms of BGLFs can be overbearing, amplifying the disconnection an individual may feel from the world. The pressures of this disconnection can cause Black males to "...pivot between identities, thus rearranging personal identity markers to accommodate the situation." (Anderson et. al., as cited in Hughey et. al., 2011, p. 113).

For some Black males, it is a constant fight trying to manage the microaggressions of a predominantly White institution as well as internal quarrels surrounding identity. Contrary to the views of Jason and Travis, brotherhood from a Black Greek letter fraternity can help an individual cope with these obstacles and support them in the process. According to Harris & Molock (2000), 42% of Black men in college have reported ideations of suicide. 8% of that population has made an attempt within 12 months of their report. The brotherhood associated with BGLFs can provide assistance diminishing those feelings with intimate interactions with members who are competent and accepting. Quinton spoke of a moment where he understood what it meant to be a brother to another in his time of need:

Quinton: I had a bro that was suicidal. Um, and you know, we don't, we don't talk about this in the Black community and, you know, depression is real. And it was like, it was that same brotherhood that someone had given me that I felt like I had to give somebody

else, you know, and it's about just passing that down. It's like, and I was in the hospital with him every day, I remember the day. You know, it was tough, but I felt like I had to be there. The same way that I've been built up, I feel as though I should build somebody up to.

The excerpts from the participants gives validity to the theory that brotherhood established through Black Greek letter fraternal membership, allows its members to accumulate social capital. Social capital is developed through the relationships that are forged with others who share similar values, experiences, and perspectives however, the data provided by my participants also confirms, that these interactions can either help a Black student persist at a predominantly White institution or become a deterrent.

Network/Connections

BGLFs give members access to an elite social group that contribute to the change of their current socioeconomic status. Participants spoke of how being a member of a BGLF has giving them opportunities that they may not have ever had; opportunities such as internships, traveling to new places, or establishing beneficial relationships with individuals. These opportunities became available due to relationships they established with other members of their BGLFs. Some participants shared stories of receiving employment opportunities by Greeks who were not affiliated with their specific BGLF. The five historically Black Greek letter fraternities—Alpha, Kappa, Omega, Sigma, and Iota—all have memberships of over 200,000 individuals throughout the United States and other countries. BGLF members are associated with various agencies and professions, which can heighten potential earning and employment opportunities for collegiate

members. The professional connections gained through BGLF membership, “facilitate job opportunities and supply increased social capital to members, capital that may be particularly important to members from lower socioeconomic backgrounds”. (McClure, 2006, p 1051). I asked the question, “What comes to mind when you think of the word network in association with your Black Greek letter fraternity?”

Jason: When I hear the word network I think putting yourself in a position to receive whatever you would want out of that situation, right? Whether that may be like, let's just say anyone that looking for a job, right? You know, I say I've have this experience, I've done X, Y, and Z to make me prepared to do whatever role is available. Um, so I think networking is attaching like, you know, different attributes and different skill sets that you learned from other people, whether it may be getting you through that door, like oh “I know Rob from, you know, my college organization and he worked here and said there were openings”. Right. Um, so I think the networking piece is being able to say, “Hey, I can do X, Y, and Z because of X, Y, and Z because I know X, Y, and Z person”.

Denzel: Uh, like its connecting with the right people. For example Uh, through these connections I was able to work my way into, getting like working with Tau University, uh, staff and just doing recordings and taking photos of events and stuff like that. So like, it just made me like, it connected me very well with the right people.

Quinton: Like professionally there's been opportunities that have been presented to me to whereas like when I graduate I'm gonna be able to contact other bros that are in my

field to help me out and see what kind of things should I be looking out for, what company should I be looking at for organizational fit.

The network within Black Greek letter fraternities is not limited to the specific organization an individual is a member of. In other words, as long as a person is affiliated with an organization that is within the divine nine fraternities/sororities, the individual potentially has network that is associated with every organization.

Ivan: When it comes to careers and things of that nature or just knowing, um, another member of another fraternity or sorority and they're in a field that I want to be in and I asked their assistance, I know that they aren't going to help me at least to the best of their ability. So I feel like the network is just, it's unlike any other network a young Black man can have. Um, cause one, other people and other fraternities, sororities are pretty dope. So it's cool that they also become a part of your network.

Terrance: Um, I felt like the networking is not only in my fraternity, but I can network with other fraternities as well in the D9 organization. Um, I'm a Sigma, but there's definitely been alphas that have offered me, um, you know, help with homework. If I need help with anything. Like they're right there to help me out. Um, it's like once you become Greek, it's like a whole new world opens up to you for, uh, resources and the network and comes with it.

The connections and network associated Greek organizations do not only have to be professionally related. There are instances where membership can assist in leisure or unconventional instances as well. While speaking about network, some of the participants shared random incidents where their BGLF affiliation worked in their favor:

Ivan: like just those random, those random stops you get, from Alphas and they say, Oh, Hey brother, like dah, dah, dah, dah. And then it's just an automatic 15 minute conversation and then you leave there with some knowledge on this person. You leave there with a connection just because of your affiliation with this organization. Like, just the brotherly love, the network that you get when you go out to other places is, um, it's just amazing. Um, and I feel like just people are more willing to help. Like, you [referring to researcher] for example, you're a Black man that's a part of the D9, so I feel like you're looking out for everyone who's Black. You gave me some advice that I would not have gotten if I wasn't an Alpha. Um, so just that ability to be able to run into anyone, whether their Alphas or just, uh, a bro in a historically Black Greek letter organization is just an automatic network.

Jason: networking wise, probably the biggest thing for me. Um, I can kind of always throw out that I'm a part of the, you know, a prestigious D9 organization and someone's going to be like, "okay, I've heard of your fraternity", "okay, I've heard of X, Y and Z". Like I can go to Delaware, go to Chicago, California and hit a group chat and call someone and say, "Hey man, I need a place to stay". You know, "Hey man, I need this,

this and that” and it'll really come out of love just for the fraternity and not really who I am. Um, that bond is crazy strong.

Travis: Um, there's been many times where I've used my leverage of being Greek and knowing certain people to help me get to certain places. Like I've used the fact that I know certain, like some of my prophytes that are in certain positions here at school. That's how I got my job now [laughs]. Um, it's just really pretty relevant in like almost anything that I really need. So like if I'm like, “Oh, I know who this is” and I had already established a relationship with them. I'm trying to negotiate with them to get closer to you. So now because you know who I know, we can get a little bit more acquainted so you'll be more inclined to look me out or let me off the hook for whatever I'm asking for. I love that.

Quinton: When I think of networking, I think more so of if I need this something done and I necessarily don't know how to do it, I can go find someone that can do it or I can find someone that can help me. I can find someone that could give me legal advice. I had some legal issues. Um, and you know, normally when you go and talk to a lawyer, even to talk to them for a few minutes and they charging you an obscene amount of money. But I have a lot of brothers who are lawyers so they looked me out. It's good to just, you know, if there's something that I don't know, I appreciate that I can go find the answer. That's what networking is to me. So it's not just professionalism.

Terrance: I met a lot more people that I have, you know, never thought I can. I can meet a lot more people that are my same skin tone, that are doing things that are pretty cool.

Black Greek letter fraternities play a huge role in the development of Black men, especially those looking to better their current socio-economic circumstance. For those members who are first-generation, coming from less-advantaged backgrounds, the connections and character traits adapted from BGLFs may provide them the map to upward social mobility.

Mentorship

As the conversation continued about social capital, it gradually transitioned into discussions about mentorship. Over the last decade, mentoring programs have been created at higher education institutions across the country. They have been used to encourage and provide social support for students enrolled at colleges and universities (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). According to Brown (2000, p. 480), “Social support is arguably the most important determinant of college success and satisfaction, particularly for Black students attending predominantly White institutions”. The affiliation with Black Greek letter fraternities facilitates a bond between its members—older and younger—thus producing the social support that can create a stronger connection to the campus as well as increase an individual knowledge (Patton et. al, (2011). Older members (*prophytes*) often become mentors to younger members (*neophytes*)⁹ because of their experience, similarities, or common interests. A mentor provides “...not only an added

⁹ Neophyte: A new member of a National Pan-Hellenic Council organization.

dimension to the learning experience with ‘real world’ perspectives, but also a starting point for students to identify their career and academic direction” (Carter, 1994, p. 52.). While sharing his experience of being in a BGLF, Quinton stated:

Quinton: What I appreciate most about the fraternity is there are people that are ahead of me that have lived the life that I lived. They know the next steps and can give that great advice of what's next. I think it has been like what I've gained the most. So like, you know, just someone being there, like that's what, that's what it really comes down to.

The mentoring aspect of BGLFs is not something that is forced or mandated, but almost a natural evolution of a mentor/mentee relationship established between members. Members often gather in unformal spaces where genuine conversation is held. In these spaces, members share their interests or experiences which can lead to the formation of mentor/mentee relationships. Neophytes typically rely on their prophytes to share information and resources as well as guide them through their collegiate journey. The insight and experience provided by a prophyte can help a neophyte make more informed choices academically, personally, and professionally. Ivan spoke of one of his mentors who he had a relationship with in high school. This individual was his band marching band director who also shared the identity along with Ivan, of being a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

Ivan: He took a liking to me. He also a real likable guy. Um, and he's a, he's a, a good mentor to all the kids in the program, but to me specifically, um, we just clicked very well. I was friends with his son who was a year younger than me. Um, and he just sorta, I

don't know, I looked at him and I was like, that's something that I would want to do for other people when I'm able to, you know, I want to be that type of man. Found out he was an alpha. He shared more information on it, told me how his undergraduate experience was with it. Um, he was still involved in the community as an alpha. Um, it's also a free Mason. Um, I just felt like he was a good role model, a good father figure. So when I got to college I just knew I wanted to be an alpha, like just because like I said, going back to my band director, like he just had that big influence in my life.

The relationship Ivan and his marching band director have is almost paternal. Ivan has a great deal of respect for the director, who happened to be affiliated with a Black Greek letter fraternity. Their bond influenced Ivan's decision to join the same BGLF as his director.

Mentoring can have an effect on an individual's academic and social involvement. The mentoring relationship can "...directly or indirectly influence a student's intentions and consequently, persistence/retention decisions." (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007, p. 73). Jason shared the mentoring relationship he had with his high school counselor. Similar to Ivan, Jason's counselor also played a huge role in his life and his fraternal decision. However, Jason not only joined the same fraternity as his mentor, he also joined the same chapter. Jason described how much the counselor was invested in his life. So much that his counselor shared his college experiences with Jason and informed him of his Black Greek letter fraternity affiliation.

Mentoring can have a positive effect on the mentee as well as the mentor. The mentor "...gains satisfaction from helping others, gains respect for his/her own competence as a professional and evaluates the past by participating in the student's early career." (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007, p. 71):

Jason: Yeah. Seeing that, you know, he was a person who like excelled and cared about my growth as a person and getting me into college and to make sure I was doing kind of the right things, quote unquote. And so then when I saw, you know, he was like, “Hey man, you know, this is what I’m a member of, this is kinda my organization. So you know, when you get on campus like, you know, take a look at them, holla at them see how they vibe, you know, just, just kind of just see what’s out there”. And um, once I did that, I kind of put two and two together as to why he even joined this organization. Why, um, you know, certain things that he talked about in college that he experienced. I can, I can put two and two together and kinda correlate and compare and contrast and um, you know, him being my mentor, you know, obviously I had a little bit of a bias as terms of his organization.

Mentorship can be very valuable and conducive in the life of Black male college students with aspirations of succeeding academically. Having a mentor or a role model can also be very crucial to a Black male students retention. Guiffrida & Douthit (2010) acknowledged that Black males who have connections with Black role models that have been successful in higher education, are likely to succeed academically and have an increase in self-efficacy. It is even more beneficial to have role model at the college or university that a Black student attends. With the lack of Black faculty and staff across the campus of a predominantly White institution like Tau, it can be very troublesome for a Black student to establish a positive identity on campus. In many instances PWIs can be so massive that a Black student may not even know how to locate any faculty or staff that “look” like them. BGLFs can assists Black males in identifying

individuals like themselves in positions of leadership across campus, thus possibly providing them a mentor and a more supportive environment.

Unexpected form of Capital

The role theories of capital play for members of Black Greek letter fraternities are cyclical. The more people you are associated with or are able to learn from, the more knowledge and skills you are able to obtain. In conjunction, the more attributes you have, the more you are able to use your network for possible opportunity. At the start of this research cultural, social and human capital were the primary focus when thinking about BGLFs as agents of capital. While conducting the research, I began to think about the theory of human capital and whether it correlates to the participants in this study. Social capital and human capital have complimentary roles. Social capital primarily focuses on the relationships and norms of a particular network. Human capital refers to the economic behavior of an individual and how the education, training, knowledge, skills and values they accumulate make them productive in society (Schuller, 2001). During the study however, the participants did not share many accounts of how membership in their BGLF contributed to an increase in human capital. There was no mention of any specific training that changed how they acted or performed in a manner that would bring about an economic return (Coleman, 1988).

Coleman (1988) asserts, that children are deeply affected by the human capital or lack thereof, possessed by their parents. Many Black males enrolled in higher education institutions, similar to the participants in this study, are considered first generation college students. So if human capital is measured by the parents education, students that share the identity of first generation are already at a deficit. Coleman (1988) goes on to imply that human capital can be provided by communities consisting of social relationships. Once becoming associated with a BGLF, members become affiliated with a substantial network that can promote human capital

and potentially upward social mobility. With this association, relationships or bonds are established between members. Some relationships being stronger than others. In many instances, these stronger bonds are established because of similar interests in things such as athletics, politics or academics amongst members (Smith, 2018).

Becker (1964) states, education and training are the most important investments of human capital. In the case of the participants for this study, the non-traditional access to information and ideas through BGLF membership can potentially grant them the human capital they can use to increase their productivity while attending a PWI. Although there was not much to support whether the theory of human capital should be ascribed to BGLF membership, there was evidence of academic capital. In higher education it is "...the assumption the minority students must separate from their cultural realities and take the responsibility to become incorporated into colleges' academic and social fabric in order to succeed..." (Renden et. al., 2000, p. 129). But with little or no concern by those in power at higher education institutions to address systemic problems within colleges and universities, cultural norms are the only things students feel comfortable relying on to help them navigate the world of higher education. It is a tradition for prophytes in Black Greek letter fraternities to invest their time in neophytes who share similar interest. The tools or knowledge deployed to members of BGLFs from older or existing members, assists with the level of academia a neophyte is able to achieve:

Terrance: I had a rough time in school. Academically I just wasn't doing well but there were older brothers on campus that really held me down. So I felt like academically my brothers were there, they pushed me without knowing and they also pushed me without me knowing. I just know they weren't about to let me just like fall behind forever.

Travis: So it [BGLF] just gave me another push, it gave me the drive back that I had lost, you know, to do well as best as I can, get the best grades that I can, because at the end of the day, I need to. I need to get my degree so I can not only put on for myself but put on for Alpha.

Previous research suggests the obligations of Greek organizations can divert attention from coursework and make the expectations of the organization primary. Contrary to the sentiments expressed by the two previous participants, the remaining participants expressed how affiliation with their Black Greek letter fraternity has negatively affected their academic performance. BGLF membership can be a significant distraction from schoolwork (DeDonato & Thomas, 2017). The data provided by almost half of the participants in this study, concur with preceding research.

Quinton: Like that semester after I crossed my GPA was worse than when I wasn't online¹⁰ partly because, I was definitely partying too much. But besides that I was expected to throw programs and head events. Like it's just, it was impossible to keep up. Um, I feel like if I wasn't in my org, my grades def would have been better. Like prior to joining I had a three six [3.6 GPA] um, I don't have that now. But, uh, um, like I feel like my GPA definitely would have been higher, but I also feel like I don't regret joining and I can deal with where my GPA is at now. Um, I actually felt like it was an unnecessary

¹⁰ On-line: Term commonly used in social fraternities with an "underground" intake process, where the pledges literally stand in a line together and are given numbers/roles.

period of time for me, but academically my grades definitely went down after joining.

But it was just so much to balance, especially as a Neo like cause you know like it's a business and you have to help run this business. Like there's no cushion or no filter after you cross.

Ivan: Like for me it was like for like earlier on, like, cause we haven't been able to do the programs that we used to do because I'm less active. But like when I first crossed man, we had programs like a motherfucker. And it was impossible for me to keep my grades up like impossible. Like I, I did all I could. I went to study hours. It was impossible like literally for me per se. Like I was just tired, exhausted. And looking back on it, I honestly feel like I gave too much to Alpha. I should've have gave less to it. I felt like I was doing too much. I have this presence on campus. "You got to run this org, you have to run this, this chapter". Like "You have to run this program, you have to do this, you have to be here" and it's just a lot to balance. If you don't want to balance that with plus work and school and stuff like that, then it's going to be hard. I put Alpha over school and then I like you know, I let that affect my grades.

The relationships established within Black Greek letter fraternities can shape the potential human capital of its members. Increasing human capital within a community can contribute to social and economic progress (Schuller, 2001). This is in accordance to the investment put forth by older members of BGLFs into the newer members. The greater the investment, the greater the return for both the individual and the collective. In addition to investment should come understanding. With so many members of BGLFs having difficulty trying to be productive in

both their academics and fraternal obligations, the role of the prophyte should also be to assist in the navigation of this process. Propytes who have endured an academic decline while being active members should share their experience to help neophytes learn how to balance their identity as student and BGLF member.

Chapter V

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand whether BGLFs are agents of capital through the experiences of Black men at a predominantly White institutions. I conducted this research because Black Greek letter fraternities have often been perceived as non-beneficial (Fouts, 2010) or a deterrent (Nelson, et. al., 2006) to the academic success of Black males in higher education. Drawing upon Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1998)—which was used to highlight how BGLFs can be a solution to combat the racism in higher education—and theories of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000), I have found that the experiences shared by these participants countered that narrative and provided some positive response in regard to the influence of Black Greek letter fraternities. The powerful interactions each of the participants had with Black Greek letter fraternities affected their worldview and how they now navigate society. Their stories revealed how capital was being transferred to them through their BGLFs in many ways, some of which they may not have previously noticed prior to this study. Some of the participants shared less favorable experiences than others, but none devalued the influence BGLFs played in their lives. The additional identity of “BGLF member” gave the participants an opportunity to obtain new forms of capital and greater understanding of who they are; transforming their views on what it means to be a Black man at a predominant White institution, as well as a Black man in America.

There was evidence of shared experiences amongst the participants. All of the participants identified as Black, despite their ethnic differences. As youth, they were raised in less affluent communities and attended public high schools that were primarily populated by students of color. A crucial moment in some of their stories was the lack of preparation for

higher education due to their status as first-generation. Trying to find their placement in the community of a PWI was very difficult and affected them both psychologically and academically. The oppressive practices within higher education or PWIs, considers the dominant group's (White) experiences and culture as the norm (Gusa, 2010). The internalization of oppressive institutional practices and "not fitting in", contributed to the feeling of isolation that altered the way they viewed themselves as individuals. They found refuge in their Black Greek letter fraternities, giving them a sense of purpose and confidence about being a Black male student on the campus of a PWI.

Limitations

Race-centered organizations (particularly the historically Black-Greek lettered fraternities) must have active chapters on the respective campuses, in order to be effective (Patton et. al., 2011). One of the limitations of this project was although the PWI being used for this study does have charters for the five historically Black Greek lettered fraternities, they are not all active. Only three of the five historically Black Greek letter fraternities were represented during this study. This was due to the chapters being met with institutional obstacles that jeopardized their existence on campus—i.e. chapter size requirements, unrealistic campus obligations (because of their small numbers), GPA requirements for membership, the suspension of fraternity chapters, etc. The absence of the remaining two BGLFs prevents the participants from hearing the personal accounts of a representative from each organization.

Another critical limitation is the demographics of the participant group. All of the participants are enrolled at the same predominantly White institution—Tau University. Considering they all attended the same institution, the data collected only reflects the culture and

experiences of Black men from one campus. This study also only explores the experiences from the perspective of Black men who are members of historically Black Greek letter fraternities; it does not account for those who are members of other student organizations at predominantly White institutions.

Additionally, time played a huge factor in the collection of data. Although I was able to interview all six participants individually, only five were present for the focus group. There was difficulty trying to gather all the participants together at one time. Ironically, we were unable to do so due to the fraternal obligations of the participants. When attempting to meet, we were faced with the challenges of Greek organization events, mentoring/tutoring duties, and other social engagements that prohibited us from congregating. Not having all six participants for the focus group limited the participants opportunity to acknowledge the differences and/or similarities in their BGLF experience.

Implications

The participants shared their experiences as Black men in higher education, specifically at a predominantly White institution and as members of Black Greek letter fraternities. Much of the existing research studies complexities of Black men enrolled at higher education institutions and Black Greek letter fraternities from a deficit viewpoint. This research was conducted in an effort to challenge prior narratives about Black Greek letter fraternities, especially those on the campus' of predominantly White institutions. The participants in this study expressed how their affiliation to the vast network of BGLFs have benefited them in ways that were advantageous to their lives. Predominantly White institutions must allow Black Greek letter fraternities to prosper on their campuses because they positively contribute to the academic success of Black

male students. BGLFs supply Black males with the necessary tools to survive and flourish in a community that was designed to oppress those not of a certain social stature. PWIs need to be intentional about the thriving and protection of BGLFs. In doing so, PWIs can provide a context in which Black men will be afforded the opportunity to improve their current socio-economic status and become productive citizens. Racially based organizations contribute to stronger racial identity attitudes, which results in positive educational and social outcomes for Black males (Harper & Quaye, 2007). With this in mind, BGLFs need to holistically cater to the needs of their members to ensure their retention and graduation. In this chapter, I will share the implications of my findings for predominantly White institutions and Black Greek letter fraternities in reference to the betterment of Black male students.

Implications for Predominantly White Institutions

In both the individual interviews and focus group, the participants spoke about the (mis)treatment of Black Greek letter fraternities on the campus of their PWI. Majority of them referenced the notion that the PWI they attend, is trying to rid itself of BGLFs. They feel the institution is deterring BGLFs from remaining relevant on campus because of rules and regulations that are set in place. While members of BGLFs are working diligently to balance their studies and fraternal obligations, the PWI is creating barriers that are preventing them from serving a marginalized community on campus. One participant voiced that the rules were “killing off” Black Greek letter fraternities because they were unable to attract potential interest. Another participant claimed the institution did not see the value of BGLFs which is why they are not afforded the same privileges as their White Greek counterparts.

The responses of the participants places emphasis on an important dialogue that needs to be had about PWIs and the existence of BGLFs on their campuses. As previously stated, Black Greek letter fraternities are often the means for academic success for many Black men on the campuses of PWIs. Although BGLFs can be an entity to support the needs of Black men, mandatory requirements, such as chapter membership size by PWIs hinder this process. Some PWIs like Tau University, requires there be at least five or more active members in a BGLF for the organization to remain on campus. If one of those active members falls below the GPA requirement imposed by the PWI, the organization will not be able to host any events or programs for a semester. An annual report must be submitted each year but it must consist of the required events and/or programs established by the PWI. To maintain the active members, a BGLF must be able to host events and/or programs on campus because they are avenues to recruit potential prospects. This creates a constant challenge for BGLFs because without the active members programs cannot take place, and without the programs the annual report cannot be completed leading to the suspension of the chapter. PWIs should eliminate or have leniency with some of the mandatory obligations expected of BGLFs. If BGLFs are continuously trying to meet the programmatic needs of the institution, it will prevent them from fulfilling their mission providing the necessary support of Black male students on campus.

Secondly, many of the White fraternal organizations on campus consist of members who come from more affluent families. This enables White Greek letter fraternities (WGLFs) to provide resources to their collegiate members that BGLFs cannot. For example, WGLFs are able to afford a campus house where all of its members are able to reside, essentially placing all of the organizations resources under one roof. Black Greek letter fraternities are not able to have such a luxury because of the socio-economic circumstances of many of their members. Some

members of BGLFs are barely able to remain in school without federal financial assistance, so affording on campus housing is not something that is feasible. PWIs are not to blame for the socioeconomic status of their students however, if they are sincere about providing equity for all students, they should allocate financial resources to BGLFs that would grant them the same opportunities as White Greek letter fraternities.

Racism and oppressive ideology is embedded in the White cultural practices and traditions within higher education. Patton et. al. (2007) states predominantly White institutions, "...ultimately privilege the voices and perspectives of predominantly Western thinkers and practices and marginalize the voices and perspectives of those considered non-White" (p. 43). The denial of these practices by PWIs and their administrators, continues the harsh reality of discrimination and racial hostility. Predominantly White institutions need to cultivate learning environments that truly promote diversity and equity. This will assist in the dismantling of mainstream institutional culture, which can improve the experiences of Black males on the campuses of predominantly White institutions.

Implications for Black Greek letter Fraternities

This research surrounding the role BGLFs play in the experiences of Black men at predominantly White institutions, also has implications for Black Greek letter fraternities. The purpose of BGLFs was to provide a "safe space" for Black males while enrolled at a PWI. As membership in BGLFs grew, so did the expectations. Members of BGLFs are expected to maintain a required GPA for both the higher education institution they attend, as well as that of their national office. Some institutions and BGLF national office require the same GPA however, some differ by a few points. For example, a national office may require an active

collegiate member to maintain a 2.5 GPA, whereas the institution may only require a 2.0. If a member meets the institution GPA and not the national office GPA, that member is considered inactive. This would prevent the member from participating in any campus activities or obligations. Trying to balance academic responsibilities as well as fraternity and institutional obligations can possibly cause mental distress for a Black male student.

Often times members of BGLFs graduate and leave the chapter in the hands of the remaining collegiate members on campus. Although the active members are expected to complete the mandatory obligations, those tasks can sometime be daunting. One of the participants in this study shared how he wished his BGLF prepared or assisted brothers who may be experiencing mental distress. In addition to their fraternal and academic obligations, many of the Black men in BGLFs deal with familial issues. These issues can sometimes be overwhelming and affect them in unexpected ways, causing some BGLF members to drop out of school. Graduating members should remain active at least one year following graduation to act in a supportive role for those remaining on campus. If these members no longer have to deal with the obligation required by the institution, they should be more involved in the well-being of the members who are remain active on campus.

Suggestions for Further Research

This research addresses the experiences of Black men associated with Black Greek letter fraternities. It does not consider some of the other factors that hinder Black male retention at PWIs (e.g. funding, academic support, mental health, etc.). Several additional themes emerges while completing this study, including stereotype threat, mental health, and financial literacy. These issues, as discussed by the participants, were also factor in regards to retention.

Additional research surrounding the barriers and hardships Black men face while enrolled at predominantly White institutions is needed.

This research also does not reveal the experiences of Black men enrolled at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) that are members of BGLFs. Just like predominantly White institutions, HBCUs have practices interwoven in their culture. A study can be done to shed light on those cultural practices and expos how BGLFs have assisted Black men overcome those obstacles. Furthermore, research can also be conducted to explore the experiences of Black women on the campuses of predominantly White intuitions that are members of historically Black Greek letter sororities (BGLS). The plight of Black women enrolled at PWIs has been and can be just as difficult, if not more traumatizing as that of Black males.

Conclusion

Black Greek letter fraternities are not given much credit for the skills that they help Black men develop while in higher education institutions. Black people share their cultural capital with one another and develop their social capital (Black social capital) for survival and success in a segregated world bounded by the omnipresent forces of racism and discrimination. (Morris, 2004, p. 102). Membership in BGLFs contributes to social capital by providing Black men with a local and national support system that is race and gender-centered. Kimbrough (1995) found that two-thirds of the Black men he surveyed stated their leadership skills were increased through fraternity engagement. This skill and others are learned from members of their respective fraternal organization who become role models or mentors (Kimbrough & Hutchenson, 1998). Through fraternity involvement, Black males also become more confident, responsible and more involved in the community. They use the knowledge and resources they gain from

their fraternities to provide service to the communities that they are a part of, whether it is living community or a college/university. Through their active membership and involvement in the community, social connections are established. These connections can be very beneficial because they can also assist in academic and career gain for Black males (Britt, 2014). Earlier research conducted by Bohrnstedt (1969) has shown that fraternal membership can lead to the attainment of desirable employment or career upon completion of college.

This study was completed to focus specifically on the capital Black men receive through their Black Greek letter fraternal membership. The challenge for the participants lied in their inability to navigate the cultural environment of their predominantly White institution and establish a relationship with the Black community. Their experience is congruent with existing literature around Black men enrolled at PWIs. All of the participants felt ostracized and alone when they got to campus, which affected their academics and connection to the campus. Prior to joining Black Greek letter fraternity many Black men are deprived of the cultural and social capital necessary to succeed at a PWI. As members of Black Greek letter fraternities we should be accountable for pouring into our Black men on the campuses of PWIs and provide them with the necessary capital to persist and graduate.

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Appendix A*Letter for Recruitment*

Hello,

My name is Eric Weaver, and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University. I am conducting a research study examining The Role of Black Greek Letter Fraternities in the Experiences of Black Men at Predominantly White Institutions and you are invited to participate in the study. If you agree, you are invited to participate in the interview and focus group portion of the study.

The interview is anticipated to take no more than 45-60 minutes and focus group is anticipated to be no longer than 45-60 minutes. Each session will be audio recorded. The recording will be later transcribed for contribution to the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks while participating in this study. Your identity as a participant will remain anonymous and confidential during and after the study. For confidentiality purposes, you will be identified by a pseudonym during the study. All information obtained will be locked in a secured location.

If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me at (849) 932-2271 or via email eric.weaver@rutgers.edu.

Thank you for your participation,
Eric Weaver
Rutgers University
Graduate School of Education
Doctoral Student

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

I want to thank you for your participation and sitting with me while I ask you questions in relation to my research. First, let me provide you with a little information about my research. I am looking at Black Greek Letter Fraternities (BGLFs) and their role as persistence agents for Black males predominantly White institutions (PWIs). The questions are open ended but if for any reason you feel uncomfortable, please feel free to let me know if you rather not answer. However, I would like you to be as honest and straightforward answering the questions as possible. Let's begin with you introducing yourself. Please provide me with your name, the year you are currently enrolled in, and the name of the fraternal organization you are a member of:

Cultural Capital

1. Can you describe your thoughts or feelings as a Black male attending a predominantly White institution prior to being a member of a Black Greek letter fraternity?
2. What knowledge did you have about BGLFs prior to membership? What factors lead to your interest in your BGLF?
3. What were your initial thoughts about your BGLF? Did your thoughts of BGLFs change from when you first joined? If so, what were they and why?
4. What were your initial thoughts about your BGLF? Did your thoughts change from when you first joined? If so, what were they and why?
5. What do you think your collegiate experience would have been like had you not joined your BGLF? Would you consider those experiences positive or negative?
6. There are 4 other BGLFs at your PWI? Why did you not choose to be a member of either of them?
7. Were you a member of any auxiliary organization associated to you BGLFs?

Social Capital

1. What has joining a BGLF at a PWI done for you socially?
2. Can you give an example of how being a member of a BGLF has been advantageous for you?
3. What comes to mind when you hear the word "network" in relation to your BGLF?
4. What involvement, if any, do you have at your PWI other than your BGLF membership?
5. How does your BGLF membership play a role in your identity?
6. What changes have you noticed about yourself since joining a BGLF?

Human Capital

1. What has being a member of a BGLF at a PWI done for you academically?
2. Have you ever felt as though your BGLF has hindered you academically?
3. How has membership in a BGLF contributed to you as a Black male?
4. How do you see yourself involved with your BGLF following undergrad?

5. What do you attribute the most to your membership in your BGLF?
6. As a result of this research, what feeling or notion would you want me to take away from this interview about BGLFs?

Thank you again for participating and providing me with a detailed description about your experience as a member of a BGLF who attends a PWI. Your narrative will be a very positive and impactful contribution to my research.

Appendix C
Code Book

Code	Description	Notes
Identity	the distinguishing character or personality of an individual	Members attribute the BGLF to helping them form their sense of personal identity.
Safe Space	refers to places created for individuals who feel marginalized to come together to communicate regarding their experiences with marginalization, most commonly located on university campuses in the western world	Frequent gatherings are held in these places so the brothers are able to build community
Character	the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual.	
Network/Community	a usually informally interconnected group or association of persons (such as friends or professional colleagues)/a body of persons having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests	
Culture	the customary beliefs, values, goals, practices, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group <i>also</i> the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time	This can be in the form of history, traditional exercises/activities, or the way the BGLF members carry themselves on the college campus.
Academic	relating to performance in courses of study; based on formal study especially at an institution of higher learning	
Responsibility	liable to be called to account as the primary cause, motive, or agent	
Role Model	a person whose behavior in a particular role is imitated by others	

Stereotype	a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment	
Service	contribution to the welfare of others	
Mentorship	The guidance provided by a mentor, especially an experienced person or prophete in a educational institution.	
Brotherhood	an association, society, or community of people linked by a common interest, religion, or trade.	A sense of camaraderie and fictive kinship that is formed between the member of the BGLF

